

HOUSTON HEIGHTS HISTORIC DISTRICTS DESIGN GUIDELINES



City of Houston, Texas

Council Review Draft: July 2018

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



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NOTE

These design guidelines were prepared pursuant to the direction given by the City Council of the City of Houston by Ordinance No. 2016-848, and have been prepared in accordance with the authority granted to the City of Houston under the Constitution and laws of the State of Texas, to protect and promote the health, safety, and welfare of the public.

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CONTACT INFORMATION

Physical Address (with appointment):
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 City of Houston Planning & Development Department
 611 Walker Street, 6th Floor
 Houston, Texas 77002

Phone: 832-393-6556

Email: historicpreservation@houstontx.gov

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

This set of historic district design guidelines has been developed for Houston Heights Historic District East, Houston Heights Historic District West, and Houston Heights Historic District South. The design guidelines illustrate how the City of Houston's historic preservation ordinance (as amended in Fall 2015) applies to resources in these three historic districts. Although these three historic districts were designated independently of one another, they share a common history and patterns of community development and, therefore, can be covered by the same design guidelines.

Property owners and their design professionals (architects, builders, etc.) should consult these design guidelines as early as possible when planning a project that involves a change to the exterior of a building, including an addition, or the construction of a new building within these historic districts. The City's Historic Preservation staff in the Planning and Development Department and the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission (HAHC) will also use these design guidelines to determine whether to approve an application for a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) for a project that proposes to make changes to a building in these historic districts.

When all of the people who are involved in the COA process — property owners, design professionals, Planning staff, and members of the HAHC — are using the same reference material as provided in these design guidelines, the results should be more consistent and predictable.

This section explains where to find the information you need in this document, how and why these design guidelines were developed, and what the City of Houston's historic preservation ordinance means to you.

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- About the Design Guidelines 1-2**
- Finding the Information You Need..... 1-4**
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PLEASE NOTE:

These design guidelines can be downloaded as PDF files from the City of Houston Historic Preservation website at: http://www.houstontx.gov/planning/HistoricPres/hist_pres.html.

FOR ASSISTANCE:

Property owners should always consult with planners in the City's Historic Preservation Office for assistance before beginning design work, as well as during the planning and design of a project.

To reach the Planner of the Day, call the Historic Hotline at 832-393-6556 or send email to historicpreservation@houstontx.gov.

You can also visit in person (with an appointment):
City of Houston Historic Preservation Office
Planning & Development Department
611 Walker Street, 6th Floor
Houston, Texas 77002

ABOUT THE DESIGN GUIDELINES

Design guidelines are used in historic communities all over the United States. Upon adoption by City Council, they become requirements that must be used by the HAHC in addition to the standards in the historic preservation ordinance in making their decisions. **Like the historic preservation ordinance, design guidelines do not require property owners to make changes to their buildings.** Together, these tools regulate what changes can be made, and how, in order to preserve the overall character of a historic district.

Because the City contains many historic districts, which can be very different from one another, the historic preservation ordinance must be written broadly enough to apply to all of them. That broad language must then be interpreted by property owners, their design professionals, the Historic Preservation Office staff, and the HAHC as they prepare and consider Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) applications.

The City has developed these design guidelines to make the COA process easier and assist property owners in planning projects that are likely to be approved. They illustrate how to apply the ordinance criteria for the three historic districts located in the former city of Houston Heights: Houston Heights Historic District East, Houston Heights Historic District West, and Houston Heights Historic District South.

Types of Guidelines

This document contains both **measurable standards** and **qualitative guidelines**. The measurable standards apply to the construction of additions and new buildings; these requirements must be met in order to obtain a COA. Measurable standards refer to minimum or maximum dimensions (or a range) and explain how to take those measurements.

The qualitative guidelines encompass the more aesthetic elements of a design and are considered on its own merits, taking into account the circumstances of a particular property and the work that is being proposed.

The relative importance of particular guidelines and standards will depend on the proposed project. The design review process considers individual design elements, as well as how different design elements interact. **A project that might be appropriate for one property might not be appropriate for another.** Although this requires interpretation, these design guidelines help by providing structure and consistent reference points for that process.

Design guidelines also include useful information that is not regulatory, such as the history of the historic districts and what kind of buildings can be found there (Section 3), and other informational resources that are available to property owners (Section 8).

Organizational Structure

This set of design guidelines are made up of eight sections. Each section is available as a separate PDF file so that you can select the sections that you need for your particular project.

Format of the qualitative guidelines Developing the Design Guidelines

Legend

A Topic

Describes the design topic addressed by the Design Guidelines that follow.

B Purpose

Explains the desired outcome for the design topic and provides a basis for the design guidelines that follow. If a guideline does not address a specific design issue, the intent statement will be used to determine appropriateness.

C Desired Outcomes

Describes a desired performance-oriented design outcome.

D Additional Information

Provides a bulleted list of suggestions on how to meet the intent of the design guideline. These are not the only alterations that can be applied.

E Images

Clarify the intent of the design guideline by illustrating appropriate and inappropriate design solutions (see below):

✓ Appropriate

Images marked with a check illustrate appropriate design solutions.

✗ Inappropriate

Images marked with an X illustrate inappropriate design solutions.

Sample Qualitative Guidelines

A → **Historic Building Materials**

These design guidelines apply to all materials that are original to the building, including wood, stone, brick, metal, stucco, plaster, and concrete. Historic building materials should be preserved in place, as much as possible, and repaired when necessary. If the material is damaged beyond repair, only then should you consider replacing it. Only replace material that is damaged, and use replacement material that matches the original.

B →

If historic materials have been covered, consider removing the covering; do this carefully, so that the underlying original building material is not damaged, and repair the original material as needed, once it is exposed.

C →

4.5 Preserve historic building materials.

- Do not remove original material that is in good condition.
- Provide proper drainage away from historic materials to minimize damage to them. For example, provide storm drains, flashing, coping, gutters, etc.
- Do not cover or obscure historic building materials.
- Consider removing later covering materials that are inappropriate.

D →

E →

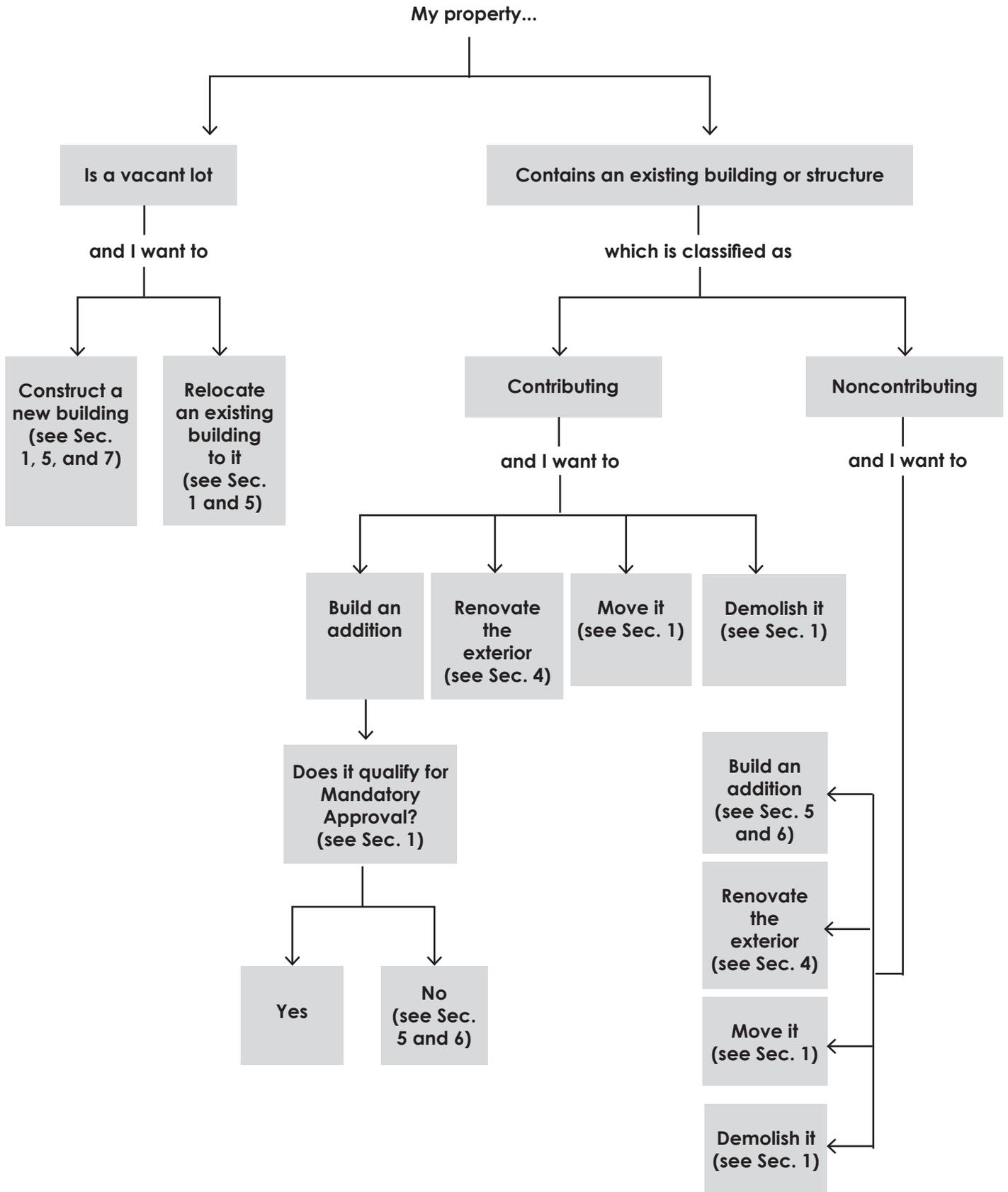


Before: A historic house with inappropriate synthetic siding



After: The same house, after the historic siding was uncovered

FINDING THE INFORMATION YOU NEED



This project began in Fall 2015, when the City of Houston adopted amendments to its historic preservation ordinance. Since 2010, all new historic districts have been required to have design guidelines. In 2015, the ordinance was amended to allow the creation of design guidelines for historic districts established before 2010.

Another 2015 amendment required design guidelines to be developed for the three Houston Heights Historic Districts. Property owners and building professionals in those historic districts had requested design guidelines that would make the COA process more predictable.

Design guidelines consultants Winter & Company conducted research and data analysis to learn about the historic districts and what property owners in those districts hoped to achieve. They analyzed data from the City's Geographic Information System (GIS), historic maps, and other existing documentation, and combined that with their own observations from several site visits during the project. In addition, Planning staff and the consultants met with people in the community on numerous occasions to gather their input and feedback as the project went along. At workshops, community members discussed issues and challenges, their priorities, and types of development that would be compatible in their district. Many people also expressed their opinions through a Compatible Design Survey that was mailed to every property owner.

Finally, these design guidelines include and promote best practices in historic preservation that have developed in communities over the past 50 years. The National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) was passed by the U.S. Congress in 1966. NHPA establishes a framework for historic preservation at the federal, state, and local levels. This includes city ordinances that protect historic properties and historic districts through oversight by a locally appointed commission. Cities throughout the United States have established more than 2,300 historic districts.

Design guidelines have been in use throughout the United States for decades, and this document takes advantage of the lessons learned and standards of practice that have become established during that time. This knowledge provides a foundation for developing workable solutions that allow historic districts to evolve, while still preserving and enhancing their unique character.



A community meeting for the design guidelines project included hands-on activities.



Participants work in groups during a community meeting for the design guidelines project.

HOUSTON'S HISTORIC PRESERVATION ORDINANCE

The City designates historic districts, and manages changes to properties within those districts, through its historic preservation ordinance (Ch. 33, Article 7 of the City of Houston Code of Ordinances). This ordinance is a local law that establishes the City's authority and responsibilities regarding historic landmarks and districts. It also establishes the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission (HAHC), a group of knowledgeable citizens and qualified professionals who are appointed by City Council to interpret and administer the historic preservation ordinance.

An inventory of buildings within each historic district was prepared when the district was designated. That inventory classifies each building as *contributing* to the historic character of the historic district or *noncontributing*.

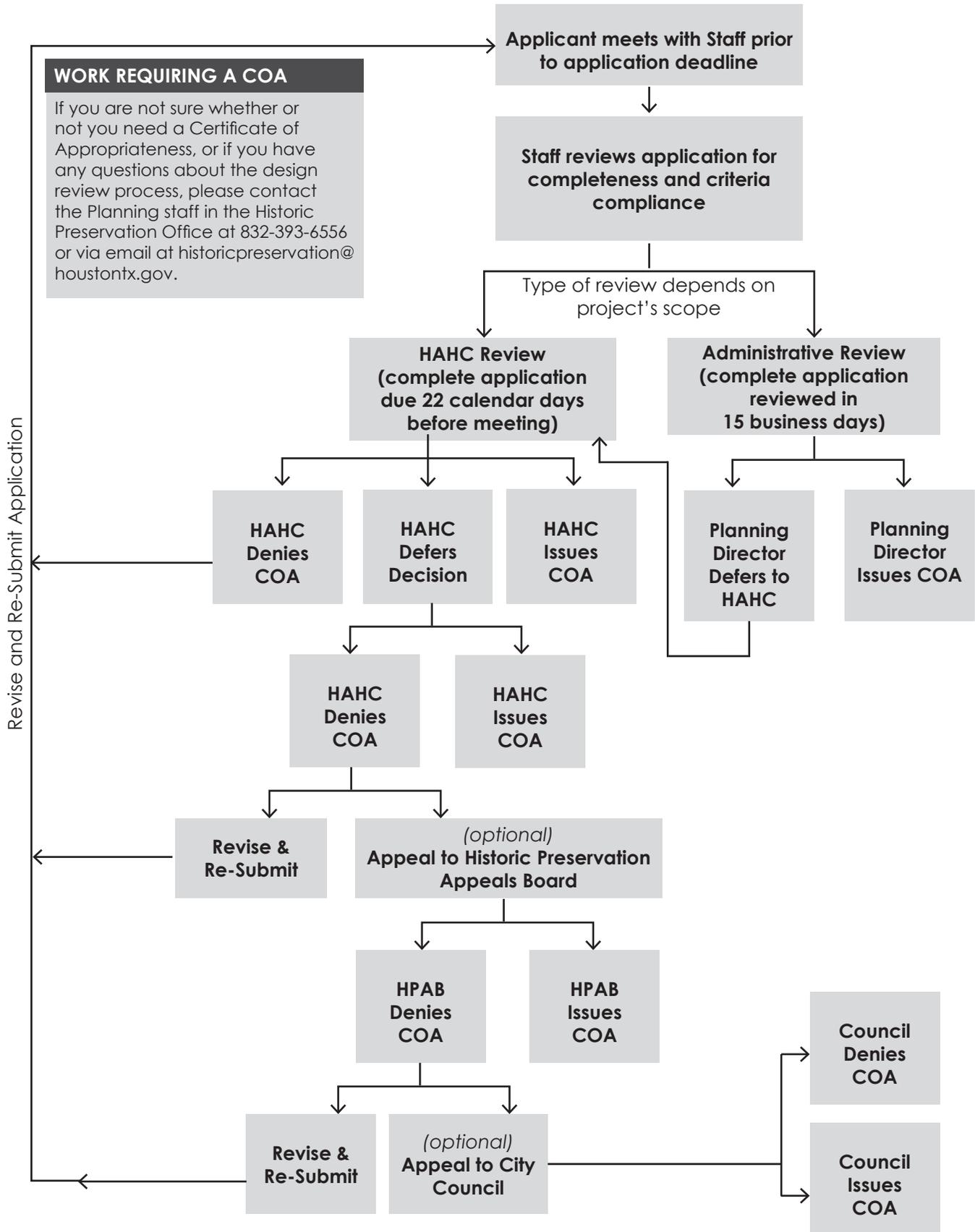
The ordinance requires property owners to receive approval from the City before making certain changes to buildings in a historic district. To get the City's approval to make any of these changes, a property owner must apply for a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA). The Planning staff in the Historic Preservation Office can help property owners with their application, which is processed through that office. **A property owner must obtain a COA before beginning any work that is regulated under the historic preservation ordinance.** Other City building permits also may be required.

Some changes, as well as ordinary maintenance and repair, are exempt from this requirement and do not require a COA. Other changes require a COA application but can be approved administratively by the Planning Director, without going before the HAHC. All other changes require a COA application to be considered in a public hearing, before the HAHC; this includes most alterations to the exterior of a building, additions, new construction, relocation of a building into or out of a historic district, and demolition.

Each month, the HAHC considers and makes decisions about COA applications at a public hearing. The Historic Preservation staff base their recommendations, and the HAHC members base their decisions, on the criteria for evaluating COA applications as listed in the ordinance. Those criteria are provided on the following pages, in plain English, for your reference.

The entire planned project should be presented in the Certificate of Appropriateness application. Applicants who hold back "future phases" of a project in order to gain approval for initial work may find that subsequent proposals will not be approved, if the cumulative effect of all of the changes is too great and, collectively, diminishes the integrity of the building.

CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS (COA) PROCESS



PLEASE NOTE:

Property owners may present additional information to supplement their COA application or to make a case for considering a different context area or adjusted measurable standards. HAHC will consider, but is not required to agree with or apply, such information.

CONTEXT AREA

When a property owner applies for a Certificate of Appropriateness, members of the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission (HAHC), with help from Planning staff in the Historic Preservation Office, must decide if the proposed changes are compatible with the surrounding historic district. Rather than compare the project to the entire district, the City of Houston's historic preservation ordinance establishes a smaller area, called the *context area*, for comparison purposes. This is especially important in large districts where the character of the district varies within the district.

The ordinance defines the context area as the blockface on which the proposed project is located and opposing blockface, as shown in the diagram below.



Context area for a subject property (shown in red)

The context area may be defined differently, if the HAHC and staff find that unusual and compelling circumstances exist or if it is described differently in design guidelines. The HAHC may decide to expand the context area for a particular project, if not many buildings within the context area are contributing structures, or if the proposed project is unusual for the area. For example, a new church building could be compared to existing historic church buildings, rather than to residential buildings in the same block.

Note: Only *typical, existing* contributing structures are used to determine compatibility of the proposed project.

Note: The information on this page is taken directly from the City's historic preservation ordinance and was accurate at the time of publication. Please check with the Historic Preservation Office staff to ensure that you are using the most current ordinance criteria.

This set of design guidelines does not include an alternate definition of context area for Houston Heights Historic District East, Houston Heights Historic District West, or Houston Heights Historic District South.

EXEMPTIONS (NO COA REQUIRED)

The following types of work **do not require a Certificate of Appropriateness**.

- *Ordinary maintenance and repair.* This generally means the least amount of work necessary to preserve the historic materials and features of a building, and in-kind repairs. *In-kind* means using the same material type, design, dimensions, texture, detailing, and exterior appearance.

Note: *Replacement* of historic materials (even in-kind) is an alteration and requires a COA. Please contact staff if you are unsure whether you need a COA for your project.

- Re-roofing with in-kind materials (see above) with no change to the structure, shape, or pitch of the roof.
- An alteration that cannot be seen from the street because the view is blocked by the original structure. (The view cannot merely be blocked by fencing, landscaping, non-historic additions, etc.)
- Installation or removal of:
 - Gutters and downspouts
 - Storm windows and storm doors
 - Window screens and screen doors
 - Temporary emergency weather protection, such as plywood coverings over windows
 - Porch ceiling fans
 - Light fixtures
 - HVAC units
- Landscaping
- Fences
- Removal of non-historic (aluminum, vinyl) siding to reveal historic siding underneath. If no historic siding is present under non-historic siding, new replacement siding requires a COA but may be approved administratively; see next page.
- Removal of burglar bars
- Removal of accessibility ramps or lifts
- Removal of solar panels
- Removal of satellite dishes or antennae
- Installation of solar panels, satellite dishes, antennae, low-profile skylights, or other roof equipment **on the rear half of the roof**
- Installation or removal of free-standing signs



Examples of items not regulated by the historic preservation ordinance: (from top) satellite dishes, air conditioning units, fences

Note: The information on this page is taken directly from the City's historic preservation ordinance and was accurate at the time of publication. Please check with the Historic Preservation Office staff to ensure that you are using the most current ordinance criteria.

- Painting non-masonry surfaces on a contributing building
- Repainting previously painted masonry surfaces
- Reconstructing a contributing or noncontributing structure that was completely or partially destroyed by a fire, natural disaster, or other damage not intentionally caused by the owner of the structure. **This only applies** if the reconstruction is built within the same footprint and has the same exterior features as the damaged or destroyed contributing structure.
- Demolition of a noncontributing structure

ADMINISTRATIVE APPROVALS

The following types of work **require a Certificate of Appropriateness**, which may be approved by the Planning Director:

Removal of:

- A window or door that was not original to the contributing structure and replacing it with a window or door that **meets all of the following conditions**:
 - It is appropriate to the historic significance of the structure.
 - It does not change the size, shape, or location of the opening from which the window or door elements are to be removed.
 - It does not change the trim, molding, or other features associated with the opening.
- Exterior wall cladding that was not an original feature or characteristic of the structure and replacing it with appropriate cladding.
- Non-historic additions, including attached garages or carports
- Non-historic decorative elements, such as shutters or eave brackets
- Non-historic, low-profile skylights
- Canopies or awnings
- Signs attached to the building

Replacement of:

- Historic materials that are damaged beyond repair with materials of the same size, shape, material, and pattern. For example, if a small amount of siding is damaged beyond repair, it may be replaced with new material that matches exactly.

Note: The information on this page is taken directly from the City's historic preservation ordinance and was accurate at the time of publication. Please check with the Historic Preservation Office staff to ensure that you are using the most current ordinance criteria.

See next page for more Administrative Approvals.

Installation of:

- Burglar bars
- Accessibility ramps or lifts
- Low-profile skylights, solar panels, antennae, satellite dishes, or other roof equipment **on the front half of the roof**
- Shutters
- Awnings or canopies

The following types of work **require a Certificate of Appropriateness**, which may be approved by the Planning Director:

Installation of:

- Architectural details (including porch elements) that have been partially lost or removed, if you can provide proof that they used to exist, either through existing elements that are still in place or by historical documentation, such as architectural plans or photographs
- Signs attached to the exterior of the building that **meet all of the following conditions:**
 - It does not compromise historic exterior features on the structure, such as siding or trim, porch elements, etc.
 - It is 25 square feet or less in total area.
 - It is installed without damage to significant historic material.

Construction of:

- Free-standing (detached) garages and garage apartments, free-standing carports, and other secondary structures, as long as they have a footprint of 600 square feet or less and are located at the rear of the lot
- A rear porch that is not taller than the existing structure and does not extend beyond the existing side walls of the structure

Repair or reconstruction of internal structural elements (such as interior shiplap) that are essential to support the building envelope to which they are attached. The following conditions must be met:

- You must demonstrate to the satisfaction of the Planning Director that the structural repair or reconstruction can be accomplished without harming those exterior features of the structure that are visible from the right-of-way.
- You must provide a written statement from a structural engineer, licensed by the State of Texas, that the proposed repair or reconstruction can be accomplished without harming those exterior features of the structure that are visible from the right-of-way.

WHEN IS A PROPERTY CONSIDERED SINGLE FAMILY VS. MULTI-FAMILY?

A property may contain two dwelling structures and still retain its classification as Single Family Residential property, as long as the secondary structure (such as a garage apartment) is not larger than 900 square feet and contains only one living space.

A property with a main house plus a garage apartment building with two apartment units, or a main house plus a garage apartment with one unit over 900 square feet, would be classified as Multi-Family and subject to the applicable building code.

Note: The information on this page is taken directly from the City's historic preservation ordinance and was accurate at the time of publication. Please check with the Historic Preservation Office staff to ensure that you are using the most current ordinance criteria.

MANDATORY APPROVALS FOR ADDITIONS

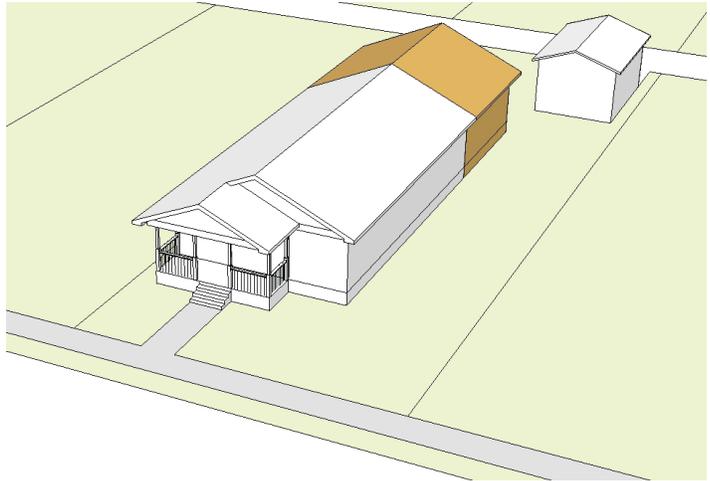
The City of Houston's historic preservation ordinance provides that the Planning Director shall issue a Certificate of Appropriateness for the construction of any one, but not a combination, of the following additions to a contributing structure in a historic district. This has been referred to in the past as "shall approve" criteria.

In order to qualify for Mandatory Approval, your project must meet **all** of the following conditions for **one** of these types of additions.

REAR ADDITION "SHALL APPROVE"

A rear addition that:

- a. Is not taller than the existing structure;
- b. Is set back from the side property lines at least as much as the structural walls of the existing structure;
- c. Is not wider than the wall to which it is attached;
- d. Does not require the demolition of any portion of the existing structure except for the rear wall to which the addition will be attached;
- e. Has a roof pitch that is less than or equal to the existing structure; and
- f. Is not constructed on a building that has already had an addition approved with a Certificate of Appropriateness.



Note: The width of the addition may not exceed the width of the structural rear wall to which the addition is attached.

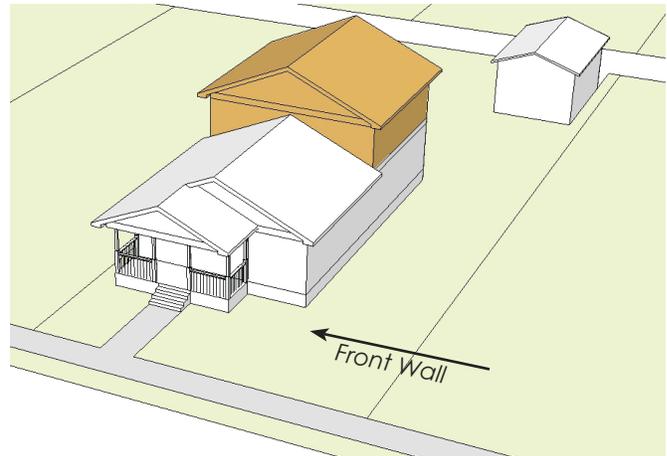
- If the existing house features a small open or screened-in side porch, that porch is not used to determine width.
- If the proposed addition includes a side porch, the porch is included in the width of the rear addition.
- If a porch is desired, consider instead incorporating one which is inset, with the front of the porch in line with the side wall of the addition.

Note: The information on this page is taken directly from the City's historic preservation ordinance and was accurate at the time of publication. Please check with the Historic Preservation Office staff to ensure that you are using the most current ordinance criteria.

PARTIAL SECOND-STORY ADDITION "SHALL APPROVE"

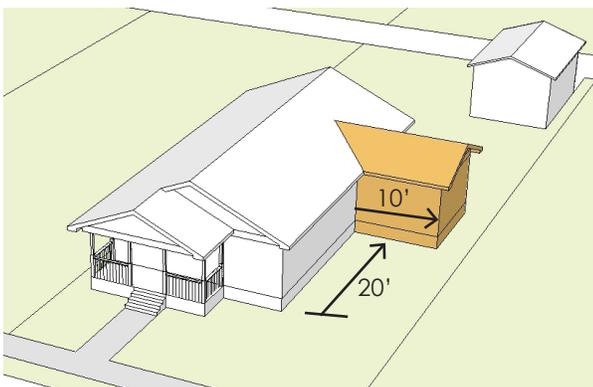
A partial second-story addition that:

- a. Is constructed on top of a one-story structure;
- b. Does not extend outside of the footprint of the existing structure;
- c. Is set back from the front wall of the existing structure at least half the distance between the front wall of the existing structure and the farthest point of the rear of the existing structure;
- d. Has a plate height that does not exceed the plate height of the story beneath the proposed addition;
- e. Has a roof pitch that is less than or equal to the existing structure;
- f. Is constructed without the removal of any existing exterior walls; and
- g. Is not constructed on a structure that has already had an addition approved with a Certificate of Appropriateness.



Note: The front wall of the porch is NOT considered to be the front wall of the house.

SIDE ADDITION "SHALL APPROVE"



Example: This addition is set back 20 feet from the front of the side wall, so the addition may not be more than 10 feet wide.

A side addition that:

- a. Is not taller than the existing structure;
- b. Is attached only to one exterior wall of the existing structure and does not extend past the existing rear wall of the side to which it is attached;
- c. Is set back from the front of the wall to which it is attached at least 30% of the distance between the front of the wall to which it is attached and the rear of the wall to which it is attached;
- d. Is not wider than half the distance that the addition is set back from the front of the wall to which it is attached;
- e. Does not require the demolition of any portion of the existing building except for the exterior wall to which the addition is attached;
- f. Does not deviate from the roof pitch of the existing structure, except for cross-gabled or hipped roofs; and
- g. Is not constructed on a building that has already had an addition approved with a Certificate of Appropriateness.



A contributing structure

OTHER ALTERATIONS AND ADDITIONS TO CONTRIBUTING STRUCTURES

All other activities, including additions, require a **Certificate of Appropriateness** and must meet the criteria for exterior alterations as established in the historic preservation ordinance (Sec. 33-241):

1. The proposed activity must retain and preserve the historical character of the property.
2. The proposed activity must contribute to the continued availability of the property for a contemporary use.
3. The proposed activity must recognize the building, structure, object or site as a product of its own time and avoid alterations that seek to create an earlier or later appearance.
4. The proposed activity must preserve the distinguishing qualities or character of the building, structure, object or site and its environment.
5. The proposed activity must maintain or replicate distinctive stylistic exterior features or examples of skilled craftsmanship that characterize the building, structure, object or site.
6. New materials to be used for any exterior feature (excluding what is visible from public alleys) must be visually compatible with, but not necessarily the same as, the materials being replaced in form, design, texture, dimension and scale.
7. The proposed replacement of exterior features, if any, should be based on accurate duplication of features, substantiated by available historical, physical, or pictorial evidence, where that evidence is available, rather than on conjectural designs or the availability of different architectural elements from other structures.
8. Proposed additions or alterations must be done in a manner that, if removed in the future, would leave unimpaired the essential form and integrity of the building, structure, object or site.
9. The proposed design for any exterior alteration or addition must not destroy significant historical, architectural, archaeological or cultural material, including (but not limited to) siding, windows, doors, and porch elements.
10. The proposed alteration or addition must be compatible with the massing, size, scale, material, and character of the property and the context area.
11. The distance from the property line to the front and side walls, porches, and exterior features of any proposed addition or alteration must be compatible with the distance to the property line of similar elements of existing contributing structures in the context area.

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CRITERIA FOR CHANGES TO NONCONTRIBUTING STRUCTURES

A structure may be classified as *noncontributing* because it was less than 50 years old when the district was designated, or because it has been altered in a way that removes or conceals character-defining features or otherwise does not share the characteristics that make the historic district, as a whole, significant. Since noncontributing buildings already do not support the historic qualities of the district, the criteria for making changes to them are less strict than those for contributing structures. However, the visual qualities of noncontributing structures still impact the character of the historic district, so many changes to them must be managed.

In addition, a building that is classified as noncontributing due to previous inappropriate alterations may have the potential to be restored. **Neither the historic preservation ordinance nor these design guidelines require any property owner to restore a building.** However, it is important to recognize whether a building has the potential to contribute to the significance of the historic district, and avoid destroying that potential with additional changes, if possible.

Most changes to noncontributing structures within a historic district require a Certificate of Appropriateness. If the Historic Preservation Office staff find that a proposed alteration or addition to a noncontributing building is appropriate, the Planning Director can approve it administratively. If staff find that the proposed project is inappropriate, or if they are unable to make a determination, the Planning Director can send the COA to HAHC for review.

Alterations, Rehabilitation, or Restoration

The HAHC is required to review any application for a Certificate of Appropriateness that proposes the alteration, rehabilitation, or restoration of a noncontributing structure if the proposed change requires the removal or replacement of the structural elements (not including the foundation) within **67% or more** of the structure. In other words, that level of “alteration” qualifies as new construction and, therefore, must be reviewed by HAHC if the result conforms to the criteria for new construction.

An addition, alteration, rehabilitation, or restoration of a noncontributing structure that *does not require* the removal or replacement of the structural elements (not including the foundation) within 67% or more of the structure, can be approved administratively by the Planning Director, **if it meets both of the following conditions:**

- The proposed activity must recognize the building, structure, object, or site as a product of its own time and avoid alterations that seek to create an earlier or later appearance; and
- The proposed activity must match the architectural features, materials, and character of either the existing noncontributing structure or the contributing structures within the context area.



This noncontributing house was constructed in 2004.

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Additions Must Also Meet These Criteria

Proposed additions to a noncontributing structure are eligible for administrative review, as long as they meet the following conditions:

- The front and side setbacks (the distance from the property line to the front and side walls, porches, and exterior features) of any proposed addition or alteration must be compatible with the front and side setbacks of existing contributing structures in the context area.
- The noncontributing structure with the constructed addition is compatible with the typical proportions and scale of existing contributing structures in the context area.

Regardless of style and features, additions to a noncontributing building must be compatible with the contributing buildings in the context area in terms of mass, scale, and proportion. If your building is already larger than the contributing buildings in the context area, an additional expansion may not be appropriate.

The Planning Director may approve a COA if they find that the application meets these conditions. If not, the application will be reviewed by HAHC.

Relocation

A noncontributing structure can be **moved out of** a historic district without a Certificate of Appropriateness.

In order for a noncontributing structure to be **moved within or into** a historic district, it must meet the criteria for new construction. This applies to structures that come from non-historic district areas, as well as buildings that were classified as contributing or noncontributing within another historic district. A contributing classification in another historic district does not automatically transfer.

Demolition

Demolition of a noncontributing structure does not require a Certificate of Appropriateness.

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NEW CONSTRUCTION

Historic districts can change over time and still retain the qualities that make the area historically, culturally, and architecturally significant. For the purposes of this document, “new construction” means an entirely new building or structure, rather than an addition. The construction of any new building or structure within a historic district requires a Certificate of Appropriateness.

The City of Houston’s historic preservation ordinance establishes clear requirements for new construction within a historic district. These rules seek to differentiate old from new, while ensuring that all buildings within the district are compatible with one another.



A contemporary infill house in a historic district in Little Rock, Arkansas

Accommodating Contemporary Design in Historic Districts

Many changes can take place within a historic district. New construction, alterations to existing buildings or structures, and other changes can all affect the character of a historic district. The Planning staff and members of the HAHC are charged with determining whether those alterations are *compatible* with the district — in other words, whether the proposed change preserves the character of the district.

Compatibility does not require new buildings to mimic historic properties. In fact, the City encourages contemporary design within its historic districts. When a new building is constructed, its design should relate to historic buildings in the area through mass, form, scale, proportion, siting, and materials, but a new building should be “of its own time.”

New buildings can relate to historic buildings in the context area by being similar to:

- The way contributing buildings (and their front doors) are oriented to the street
- The basic forms and materials of contributing buildings
- The height of contributing buildings’ foundations, porches, eaves, and walls
- The arrangement of windows and doors on the front of contributing buildings

These basic design elements are more important than the details of individual architectural styles. As a result, new buildings can be compatible with the historic district even when they are clearly of contemporary design and construction.

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The mass and scale of this new infill building would be appropriate in some Houston Heights contexts. In addition, the materials, porch, and window features would be appropriate if they were similar to other buildings in the context area.



The mass and scale of this infill building might be appropriate for Houston Heights, but the stone materials, shutters, and solid-to-void ratio are incompatible.

The construction of any new building or structure within a historic district requires a Certificate of Appropriateness, which must meet the following criteria:

Any new building or structure must be compatible with the existing contributing structures in the context area in the following ways:

1. Front and side setbacks (the distance from the property line to the front and side walls, porches, and exterior features).
2. Exterior features.
3. Scale and proportions, including the relationship of the width, overall heights, eave height, foundation height, porch height, roof shape, and roof pitch, and other dimensions to each other.

Note: Special circumstances, such as an atypical use, location, or lot size, may warrant an atypical scale and proportions.

4. Height. The new construction must not be taller than the typical height of existing contributing structures in the context area unless special circumstances, such as an atypical use, location, or lot size warrant an atypical height.

However, in the Houston Heights Historic District East, Houston Heights Historic District West, and Houston Heights Historic District South, a new two-story building may be constructed in a context area with only one-story contributing structures as long as:

- the proportions of the first story of the new building are compatible with the contributing structures in the context area, and
- the second story has similar proportions to the first story.

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RELOCATION

Relocation, for the purposes of the City of Houston's historic preservation ordinance, includes the following activities:

- Moving a structure into a historic district
- Moving a structure out of a historic district
- Moving a structure to a different location on the same lot or to a different lot within the same historic district

Relocation may be used as a tool to protect a contributing structure from demolition resulting from a public improvement project, or as an alternative to demolition, following an application for a Certificate of Appropriateness for demolition.

Relocation of historic buildings from other, similar areas of the City into one of the Houston Heights Historic Districts is an acceptable strategy for infill. Buildings being relocated into the districts should be appropriately sized to be compatible with the existing neighborhood. Infill on vacant lots is encouraged.

The ordinance lists different requirements for these activities, depending on where the structure is being moved and whether it is classified as contributing or noncontributing.

In order to **move a contributing structure within the same historic district**, the applicant must meet all of the following criteria:

- a. The structure can be relocated without significantly diminishing the integrity of the historic district in which it is located.
- b. The structure can be moved without significant damage to its physical integrity.

Note: It may be necessary to install structural supports within the building during the move. Consult a qualified structural mover, who can assess the condition of the structure and take the appropriate steps to stabilize it before, during, and after relocation. Secure the building to prevent unauthorized entry while it is unoccupied.

- c. The structure will be located to an area that is compatible with and retains the distinguishing qualities and historical and architectural character of the contributing structure.
- d. There are compelling circumstances justifying the relocation of the structure.
- e. The front and side setbacks of the structure in its new location will be compatible with the front and side setbacks of existing contributing structures in the new context area.

These criteria apply to either moving the structure to a different location on the same lot or moving it to a different lot within the same historic district. *Note: the original primary building on a lot should not be relocated behind a new main house.*



These houses were relocated from various locations within the City of Houston.

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Moving a contributing structure out of a historic district is equivalent to demolishing that building. The applicant must comply with all of the criteria listed on the previous page. They also must establish that relocation is necessary to prevent an unreasonable economic hardship by meeting **all of the following criteria (the same criteria that are required for demolition)**. The applicant must prove that:

1. The property is incapable of earning a reasonable return, regardless of whether the return is the most profitable return, including without limitation, regardless of whether the costs of maintenance or improvement of the property exceed its fair market value;
2. That the owner has demonstrated that the property cannot be adapted for any other use, whether by the current owner, by a purchaser, or by a lessee, which would result in a reasonable return;
3. That the owner has demonstrated reasonable efforts to find a purchaser or lessee interested in acquiring the property and preserving it, and that those efforts have failed; and
4. If the applicant is a nonprofit organization, determination of an unreasonable economic hardship shall instead be based upon whether the denial of a Certificate of Appropriateness financially prevents or seriously interferes with carrying out the mission, purpose, or function of the nonprofit corporation.

This applies even if the structure is proposed to be moved into another historic district.

A noncontributing structure may be moved out of a historic district without a Certificate of Appropriateness.

In order to move any structure into a historic district, it must meet the criteria for new construction, as established in the historic preservation ordinance. This applies to structures that come from non-historic district areas, as well as those that were classified as contributing or noncontributing within their own historic district; a previous contributing classification does not automatically transfer.

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DEMOLITION

Demolition should be a measure of last resort. A historic district is created in order to protect an area that has historic and architectural significance, and designating an historic district in the City of Houston requires the support of 67% of property owners. All of the properties in an historic district, together, establish the character of the neighborhood. The removal of a contributing house or building is damaging to the neighborhood as a whole.

Demolition of a contributing resource is not allowed, except when:

1. The building, structure, or object has seriously deteriorated to an unusable state and is beyond reasonable repair; and
2. The HAHC finds, based on the preponderance of credible evidence presented by the applicant, the existence of an unreasonable economic hardship, per criteria established in the historic preservation ordinance, Sec. 33-247(c), or the establishment of an unusual and compelling circumstance, Sec. 33-247(c).

Substantial documentation and evidence is required to establish these claims, and the burden of proof rests on the applicant. An application for a Certificate of Appropriateness for demolition **requires all of the following information:**

1. Photographs and other documented evidence detailing the deteriorated state of the property and the inability to reasonably repair the property;
2. A certified appraisal of the value of the property conducted by a certified real estate appraiser that takes into account that the property is a landmark, protected landmark, or contributing structure in a historic district, as well as the two most recent assessments of the value of the property, unless the property is exempt from local property taxes;
3. All appraisals obtained by the owner in connection with the acquisition, purchase, donation, or financing of the property, or during the ownership of the property;
4. All listings for the sale or lease of the property by the owner within the last year, and a statement by the owner of any bids and offers received and counteroffers given on the property;
5. Evidence of any consideration by the owner of uses and adaptive reuses of the property;
6. Itemized and detailed rehabilitation cost estimates for the identified uses of the property;
7. Any financial statements showing revenue and expenses incurred for the property;
8. Complete architectural plans and drawings of the intended future use of the property, including new construction, if applicable; and

(continued on next page)



Examples of demolition

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES

Please refer to the historic preservation ordinance (Sections 33-246 and 33-247) if the proposed project would relocate a building, structure, or object into or out of an archeological site.

9. Plans to salvage, recycle, or reuse building materials, if a Certificate of Appropriateness is granted.
10. An applicant that is a nonprofit organization shall provide the following additional information:
 - a. A comparison of the cost of performance of the mission or function of the nonprofit organization in the existing building and in a new building;
 - b. The impact of the reuse of the existing building on the organization's program, function, or mission;
 - c. The additional cost, if any, attributable to the building of performing the nonprofit organization's function within the context of costs incurred by comparable organizations, particularly in the Houston area;
 - d. Grants received, applied for, and/or available to maintain or improve the property;
 - e. The nonprofit organization's budget for the current and immediately past fiscal year.
11. In addition, an applicant may be required to provide any additional information the Planning Director determines is reasonably necessary to the review of the application.

The removal of non-historic additions, including attached garages or carports, requires a Certificate of Appropriateness, but that can be approved administratively by the Planning Director.

Demolition of noncontributing structures does not require a Certificate of Appropriateness. However, historic garages that are visible from the public right-of-way should be maintained and preserved when possible.

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