

Town Green Certificate of Appropriateness HP24-000018

Request: Certificate of Appropriateness for the areas with H overlay zoning in the Town Green

Date of Review: November 19, 2024

Historic Designations and Zoning:

Subject property has H overlay zoning with MU-1 (Mixed-Use Historic Commercial Core) base zoning.

Review Considerations:

Reference documents available in [HPC Commissioners](#) folder

The *Secretary's Standards* for Rehabilitation (pg. 76) apply indirectly to public space. The Guidelines include sections on Building Site (pgs. 137-142) and Setting (District/Neighborhood) (pgs.143-146) that offer guidance to outdoor spaces.

The *THC's Streetscape Guidelines for Historic Commercial Districts* offers an interpretation of the 10 Standards for Rehabilitation as they relate to the streetscape. Although the elements of the streetscape described don't directly apply to this project, it is instructive in how to interpret appropriateness with respect to features of public spaces.

The *City's Design Guidelines for Historic Residential and Commercial Properties* does not include guidelines for open spaces.

Staff Review and Analysis:

Project

The Town Green project is a proposal to create a public space on the block around the historic water tower. Please refer to the attached application.

The project will have areas that are adaptable for different types of events. There are also smaller gathering areas, including tables and chairs with a domino theme under the gas station canopy (where the legendary Domino Players met for several decades).

The project designers worked with the City Arborist to retain as many of the existing trees as possible, although some have been damaged by recent ice storms and droughts. Other existing features to be retained are some of the low walls that were constructed as part of the roundabout project and the tree-lined path along the closed street right-of-way. The trees along this path are in good shape and should be largely unaffected.

The former gas station on Mays will be restored to its original size and Mediterranean style to house public restrooms.

About the property

The Town Green is at the heart of Round Rock's historic downtown, although it is not part of the National Register district. ***The HPC's review for the Certificate of Appropriateness applies only to areas of the project that have H overlay zoning.***

Town Green Certificate of Appropriateness HP24-000018



Aerial photo of the water tower block, areas with H overlay zoning areas shaded.

The Town Green area includes part of the Round Rock Avenue right-of-way that was closed when the traffic circle was constructed in 2010. The former path of Round Rock Avenue is indicated with a tree-lined sidewalk. The site also includes a part of block 24 south of it. When the traffic circle was constructed, the City planned to redevelop the block a dense, mixed-use project. Several buildings were demolished or relocated from the block at that time.

Historic structures: The Water Tower is the only structure with H overlay zoning currently on the site. The other lot with H overlay zoning is the former location (106 N. Mays St.) of the Telephone Exchange building, which was relocated in 2019. The lot is currently vacant.

The former gas station building at 102 N. Mays (Johnson Building) does not have H overlay zoning but was identified as historically significant in the 1992 and 2010 historic resource surveys. Since the gas station does not have H overlay zoning it is not included in the CofA, so the HPC may provide feedback, but cannot include required conditions in the motion. The gas station was built shortly after US 81 (Mays St.) was completed in 1936 and originally had a Mediterranean style. By 1971, the appearance had been modernized and a service garage added to the north. From the mid-1970s-mid 1990s a group of friends met regularly outside the station to play dominoes under the canopy, becoming such a regular sight that they were dubbed the Domino Players and were named Local Legends in 1991. By 1997, the station had closed and there was a 2-story office space addition to the west side.

The Town Green plans originally called for the additions to be removed and the gas station restored to its original size and Mediterranean style in order to house public restrooms. After inspecting the structure, it was determined that the building's condition has deteriorated to the extent that the current plan is to demolish most of it and build a new reconstruction. The demo will likely take the structure down to the studs, although the intent is to retain as much of the structure as possible.

**Town Green
Certificate of Appropriateness HP24-000018**



2010 photo of the gas station after additions and adding shutters. Water tower in background.



1938 photo of the gas station, the water tower and Telephone Exchange building are visible in the background.

Analysis

The extent of the project subject to Certificate of Appropriateness conditions is only those portions that have Historic Overlay Zoning.

The only structure with H overlay zoning is the water tower, which will not be altered. Typically, projects that involve landscape elements would have an administrative review by Staff for a Certificate of Appropriateness. In this case, because of the high-profile nature of this public project, staff is presenting the CofA for Commission review. That being said, since historic structures are not being impacted and the HPC does not have purview over the filling station reconstruction, project appropriateness should be judged by whether the proposed park complements or diminishes the historic character of the Water Tower.

Town Green Certificate of Appropriateness HP24-000018

The Secretary's *Standards for Rehabilitation* (pg. 76) are clear about preserving the features of historic structures, and the project does not involve any alterations to the Water Tower itself. The Guidelines include sections on Building Site (pgs. 137-142) and Setting (District/Neighborhood) (pgs.143-146) that are more applicable to outdoor spaces. They discourage removing structures and landscape features that are important in defining the historic character of the property and caution against careless treatment of historic structures when performing landscape work. The guidelines advise that new construction should be compatible in terms of size, scale, design, material, and color.

Defining the Water Tower's "historic setting" is not obvious. For much of its existence, it was considered a utility, noticeable from afar but up close its feet were hidden by trees and buildings. In the 1990s, the area around the tower's feet was developed as Koughan Park. The setting was altered a decade ago when buildings were removed and the streets reconfigured. The former Round Rock Avenue right-of-way, which was established in the original plat, has been referenced as a view corridor, which is included in the Town Green plans.

Staff believes that restoring the gas station to its original Mediterranean style rather than retaining its current appearance is an appropriate treatment, **although the gas station does not have H overlay and is not part of this CofA**. The Standards for Restoration (pg. 164) and Standards for Reconstruction (pg. 226) are more applicable to this aspect of the project than the Standards for Rehabilitation that are utilized for most project reviews. These standards apply when restoring a structure to an earlier condition or reconstructing something that no longer exists, rather than rehabilitation, which is adapting a structure for a different use. These standards generally encourage repair rather than replacement when possible, acknowledging that sometimes repair is not possible. The standards are very clear that there needs to be sufficient information to make accurate restoration or reconstruction of features that no longer exist, without resorting to conjecture of what might have been. The Standards also indicate that a reconstruction is to be clearly identified as a contemporary re-creation.

Recommendation:

Staff recommends approval of the Certificate of Appropriateness for the Town Green. The Parks and Recreation Department has been working with the consultant to finalize the plans. The plans as they exist today are provided in your packets so that you have the opportunity to comment.

Please keep in mind that your comments need to be focused on appropriateness. The specifics of materials and design do not need to be included in the motion. As many details are being finalized, staff requests that the HPC defer elements of the CofA to later administrative reviews.