

## TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

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### STREETSCAPE GUIDELINES FOR HISTORIC COMMERCIAL DISTRICTS

When street and sidewalk improvement projects receive federal funding and oversight, federal agencies or communities must consult with the Texas Historical Commission (THC) in accordance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. Examples of commonly funded federal programs for streetscape projects in Texas include the Texas Capital Fund (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development funding administered by the Texas Department of Agriculture) and the Statewide Transportation Enhancement Program (Federal Highway Administration funding administered by the Texas Department of Transportation). Section 106 requires consideration of the potential effects of a project on historic properties. If your project area is identified as including historic properties in consultation with the THC, **continued close coordination with the THC regarding the design of your project will be a key element for success.** Successful projects tailor design solutions to preserve the history and character of an individual community. The THC's goal in guiding a project is to preserve significant elements and introduce new features that are compatible with the historic character of a community, not to freeze the appearance of a streetscape in time or restore it to a particular period.

As each community in Texas is unique, the design of each project should be tailored to respond to the history and needs of that specific community. In addition, community input and the creativity of your design professional are important components of the design process, and in many cases more than one option can offer a preservation-oriented solution. The THC, therefore, does not set strict rules, but instead assists design decisions, basing its review on the Secretary of the Interior's *Standards for Rehabilitation*. These 10 standards, developed by the National Park Service for projects that require sensitive treatment of historic properties while allowing for their modification to meet continued or changed uses, are as follows (italicized sections represent the THC's interpretation of these standards for streetscape projects):

1. A property shall be used for its historic purpose or be placed in a new use that requires minimal change to the defining characteristics of the building and its site and environment. *Support the use and preservation of the area's historic buildings and streetscape features. Allow the historic setting, human activity, individual businesses, and special events to provide the cultural stimulus and revitalization.*
2. The historic character of a property shall be retained and preserved. The removal of historic materials or alteration of features and spaces that characterize a property shall be avoided. *Identify historic streetscape features in your project area and plan for their preservation.*
3. Each property shall be recognized as a physical record of its time, place, and use. Changes that create a false sense of historical development, such as adding conjectural features or architectural elements from other buildings, shall not be undertaken. *Study the historic appearance of your streetscape and avoid adding elements from other communities that were not historically present in yours.*
4. Most properties change over time; those changes that have acquired historic significance in their own right shall be retained and preserved. *Understand the period within which important events and growth occurred in your historic downtown. Respect the character of buildings and elements added during that period of significance.*
5. Distinctive features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a historic property shall be preserved. *Protect significant historic streetscape features and incorporate them into your project. Protect adjacent historic buildings from damage during construction.*
6. Deteriorated historic features shall be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature shall match the old in design, color, texture, and other visual qualities and, where possible, materials. Replacement of missing features shall be substantiated by documentary, physical, or pictorial evidence.
7. Chemical or physical treatments, such as sandblasting, that cause damage to historic materials shall not be used. The surface cleaning of structures, if appropriate, shall be undertaken using the gentlest means possible.
8. Significant archeological resources affected by a project shall be protected and preserved. If such resources must be disturbed, mitigation measures shall be undertaken.
9. New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction shall not destroy historic materials that characterize the property. The new work shall be differentiated from the old and shall be compatible with the

massing, size, scale, and architectural features to protect the historic integrity of the property and its environment. *Design new elements, such as ramps for accessibility, to be in keeping with the historic character of the streetscape but distinguishable as modern additions. Respect the existing character of the project area. Avoid the urge to overdesign and recognize that new features should be secondary, supporting elements.*

10. New additions and adjacent or related new construction shall be undertaken in such a manner that if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment would be unimpaired.

Guidelines for the design and treatment of sidewalks and streets, accessibility, corner extensions, trees and vegetation, historic canopies and awnings, street furniture, street lights, artwork and decoration, and historic buildings are listed below to assist you in the application of the *Standards* to streetscape projects. THC staff can provide additional assistance regarding how to interpret this guidance in the context of your project and historic commercial district. Please do not hesitate to contact us with questions.

The THC encourages you to consult and incorporate these guidelines as early as possible, ideally before public meetings are held to discuss the scope and nature of the streetscape project. Material may be submitted to the THC for preliminary review early in the design process to ensure that the proposed work is in keeping with the *Standards*. To complete the Section 106 process, construction documents nearing finalization must be submitted for THC review. If the proposed work meets the *Standards*, a determination of “no adverse effect to historic properties” will conclude the review process and the project may proceed without further consultation; however, any changes made following this determination must be submitted for review. Please see our website at <http://www.thc.state.tx.us/crm/crmdefault.shtml> for additional information on the Section 106 process and what to submit for a project review. The project must be coordinated separately with other state agencies with regulatory authority.

## **SIDEWALKS AND STREETS**

- Identify historic features of the sidewalks and streets, such as high or stepped curbs, stone or brick curbs, stamped concrete in the sidewalks, historic manhole covers, mosaic tile street names, tiled store entries, trolley tracks, and brick streets. When these elements contribute to the distinctive character of your historic downtown, preserve them in place whenever possible.
- Repair damaged brick streets if necessary and perform selective, in-kind replacement with matching brick for areas damaged beyond repair. Likewise, repair historic sidewalks or consider replacing them with like material if damaged beyond repair.
- If sidewalk replacement is necessary, the preferred option is to use either the same material as currently exists or a material used in the location historically, based on adequate documentation. Unless documentation shows historic brick sidewalks, accepted preservation practice discourages the introduction of brick or modern pavers to sidewalks as it can create a false sense of historical development of the community. However, the use of removable concrete panels or pavers for ease of access to in-ground utility boxes or channels is acceptable, when the color of the pavers is similar to or matching the existing sidewalk. Similarly, pavers may be used to distinguish pedestrian zones in areas where there are multiple curb cuts or no curb separating the sidewalk from the street. Avoid pavers that are brightly colored, multicolored, placed in decorative patterns, or inscribed with donors’ names, because they can be distracting from the historic character of a commercial district.
- If you wish to introduce variety to concrete sidewalks, vary the texture by the use of a simple trowel or broom finish. Elaborate paving patterns, multiple colors, and different materials distract users and are generally not compatible with the character of historic streetscapes. However, where a variety of historic materials contribute to the varied character of the historic streetscape, these materials should be preserved.

## **ACCESSIBILITY**

- The THC supports efforts to make historic commercial districts accessible by bringing sidewalks into compliance with Texas Accessibility Standards (TAS) and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Accessibility Guidelines. However, an effort should be made to balance new features, such as ramps and handrails, with the historic character of the commercial district.
- Retain historic high curbs with the addition of new steps and accessible ramps in a compatible material. Where

possible, install these features on side streets to better preserve the main street's historic appearance.

- Railings may be necessary at ramps or along sidewalks to meet current accessibility and safety requirements. Select railings that are simple in design and as unobtrusive as possible so as not to block views or distract from the historic storefronts.

## **CORNER EXTENSIONS**

- Corner extensions (expansion of the sidewalk into the parking lane at street corners, also known as bump-outs or aprons) are sometimes necessary when sidewalks are too narrow or have too high an elevation for other solutions, for the control of vehicle traffic and parking, or for the provision of pedestrian safety. However, when not carefully considered, these new elements can dramatically change the character of a block or district.
- When corner extensions are planned, either minimize their size as much as possible and use materials that are compatible in color and texture with the historic sidewalk, or allow these spaces to be the foci for introducing new elements such as light poles, planters, trees, and benches.

## **TREES AND VEGETATION**

- Historically, trees and vegetation were primarily planted on residential streets and around civic buildings like courthouses, post offices, and libraries. In commercial districts, canopies and awnings (see below) were the most common method of providing shade to sidewalks. Historic documentation, such as photographs of the downtown area, should inform your decisions about whether to plant trees in your commercial district.
- New plantings reduce can visibility to storefronts and signs, block future restoration of canopies, and obscure street lighting. When introducing trees, plant them on side streets with no or limited storefronts, in corner extensions, or in specific spaces such as pocket parks, vacant lots, parking lots, and blocks with non-historic buildings. Vegetation should be low in profile so as not to block historic features of buildings and districts.
- Take into account necessary periodic maintenance of proposed trees and other plantings, their likelihood of survival in a heavily paved area, and potential future damage to paving from root growth.

## **HISTORIC CANOPIES AND AWNINGS**

Historically, canopies (projecting roof structures) and awnings (lightweight shade structures, often fabric stretched over a frame) sheltered entrances to businesses and shaded sidewalks in commercial districts. In some cases, these elements are no longer extant or have been modified over time. Although enhancement projects may not include repair or reconstruction, protect support poles for canopies or balconies during construction (see "Protection of Historic Features during Construction" below). In addition, do not introduce new elements to the streetscape that will inhibit future restoration of historic canopies and awnings by building owners.

## **STREET FURNITURE**

- Identify and protect historic street signs, planters or historic plantings, hitching rings, benches, and other historic street furniture and preserve these elements in their original locations.
- Concentrate new street furniture, such as benches, planters, and trash receptacles, at corners. Only include furniture where sidewalks are wide enough to accommodate these elements. Select furniture based on a local historic design, or introduce a simple, modern design that is compatible in scale, style, color, and texture with surrounding significant historic features. Do not introduce historic designs from other locations as this will present a false sense of local history. Choose muted colors for modern elements to avoid distracting attention from the historic features of the buildings and streetscape.
- Do not permanently fix new street furniture to historic features. Instead, connect furniture through pavement joints, with chains to stationary objects, or other reversible methods.

## **STREET LIGHTS**

- Protect and incorporate existing historic lighting into the streetscape design where possible.
- If historic street lights are no longer extant, choose new fixtures that match the historic as closely as possible. Some manufacturers continue to produce historic designs. However, if a commercial district did not have street

lights during the historic period or if the community does not wish to replicate the historic lights, choose new street lighting that is a modern design but compatible in scale, appearance, and color with the character of the downtown. Do not select historic designs from other locations as this would create a false sense of historical development.

## ARTWORK AND DECORATION

- Retain and preserve historic artwork such as murals and sculpture.
- Carefully consider proposed new decorative features for their compatibility with the historic district or buildings, and whether their design and construction are likely to stand the test of time. Plan for staff time, training, and funding for periodic maintenance of proposed new features.
- Consider limiting the number of new decorative features in an effort to retain the historic character of the area.
- Seasonal enhancements and decorations are generally acceptable, provided they do not damage historic fabric. Attach festive lighting and decorations to non-historic surfaces.

## PROTECTION OF HISTORIC FEATURES DURING CONSTRUCTION

Historic features, such as buildings, fences, and canopies, should be protected from damage during sidewalk demolition and construction. At the request of the THC, the Texas Department of Transportation has produced standard protection notes, below. Insert these, or similar protection notes, in construction documents:

### PROTECTION NOTES FOR THE REMOVAL OF EXISTING PAVEMENT, CURB OR SIDEWALK AND CONSTRUCTION OF NEW PAVEMENT, CURB OR SIDEWALK ADJACENT TO HISTORIC BUILDINGS, CANOPIES, MATERIALS, FENCES, AND RETAINING WALLS

Where proposed work is in proximity to historic buildings or other structures (walls, canopies, retaining walls, fences), and planting beds, and vegetation/groundcover, follow the procedures listed below for demolition, protection, and construction at these addresses:

In the city of \_\_\_\_\_, at \_\_\_\_\_ (list addresses):

1. To minimize potential damage to historic structures and materials, contractor to saw cut existing sidewalk 8 to 12 inches away from the historic structure, canopy supports, fence, or retaining wall.
2. Contractor to construct new sidewalk next to the saw cut edge with installation of expansion joint in between. If existing sidewalk is to be removed entirely, the remaining 8 to 12 inches next to the historic structure, canopy supports, material, fence, or retaining wall will be removed by hand. Expansion joint to be placed between historic structure, canopy support, material, fence, or retaining wall and new sidewalk.
3. Contractor is responsible for preventing damage to historic structure, canopy supports and their awning, materials, fences, retaining walls, including garden elements (planting beds, plantings) during the entire construction project, especially during removal of existing pavement, curb, or sidewalk. During the saw cut and hand removal process, contractor will exercise utmost caution and will physically protect historic structure foundation, canopy supports, materials, elevations, entryways with decorative flooring, fences, retaining walls, and landscape elements.
4. Contractor to repair or replace in kind, at his own expense, any historic materials damaged in the course of executing the work. Contractor is responsible for locating replacement source for historic materials damaged in the course of the work. Texas Historical Commission to be informed of damage and proposed repairs prior to execution of repair work.

## CONCLUSION

Providing a safe and pleasant streetscape environment is important but does not require the loss of historic context. Streetscape modifications can be accomplished while being sensitive to and enhancing local historic resources. Early and consistent consultation is the most effective way to assist the THC in providing a smooth and efficient review. Designs may need to be revised in order to comply with preservation standards—please do not wait until the construction documents are completed to involve the THC. *(Updated 2011.)*

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