

Historic Preservation Commission

August 18, 2015 Work Session Minutes

A. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 5:45 p.m.

B. Roll Call

Present: Chairperson Jerry Hodges, Vice-Chair Pamela Sue Anderson, Commissioner Paul Emerson, Commissioner Barbara Keese, Commissioner Rae Lynn Tipping, and Alternate Cathleen Quick.

Absent: none

Staff present: Senior Planner Joelle Jordan, Planning Technician Kerstin Harding, Assistant Transportation Director John Dean, Transportation Engineer Leah Collier, Transportation Operations Manager Todd Keltgen, and CIP Program Manager Gerald Pohlmeier

Also present: Local legend Selection Committee members Jesus Franco and Dana Oglesby, and resident Sharon Whitaker

C. Election of Officers

C.1 Consider the nomination and election of a Chair and Vice-Chair.

Chairman Hodges asked the Commissioners for nominations for a Chair and Vice-Chair.

Motion: by Commissioner Anderson and Second by Commissioner Emerson to elect Commissioner Pamela Sue Anderson as Vice-Chair of the Historic Preservation Commission.

Vote: Aye: Chairperson Hodges, Vice-Chair Anderson, Commissioner Emerson, Commissioner Keese, and Commissioner Tipping. Nay: none. The vote was 5-0.

Motion: by Commissioner Keese and Second by Commissioner Emerson to elect Commissioner Jerry Hodges as Chair of the Historic Preservation Commission.

Vote: Aye: Chairperson Hodges, Vice-Chair Anderson, Commissioner Emerson, Commissioner Keese, and Commissioner Tipping. Nay: none. The vote was 5-0.

D. Presentations

D.1 Consider a presentation and recommendation from the Local Legend Selection Committee and action concerning 2015 Local Legend Award nominations.

Ms. Jordan introduced Local Legend Selection Committee members Jesus Franco and Dana Oglesby. This year there were seven nominations and three others suggested by Committee members, and the Committee chose five of them. She and Mr. Franco gave short summaries of the selections and their accomplishments.

While they approved of the Committee's choices, several Commissioners had hesitations about the number of selections. They asked how many nominations the Committee considered, expressing concerns about dilution of the award. Generally the Commission would prefer to name no more than 2-3 Legends each year, and liked to have a variety of types: historical figures, individuals, and places or institutions. They discussed communicating their concerns to the Committee next year.

Motion: by Commissioner Tipping and Second by Vice-Chair Anderson to accept the five Local Legends chosen by the Local Legend Selection Committee.

Vote: Aye: Chairperson Hodges, Vice-Chair Anderson, Commissioner Emerson, Commissioner Keese, and Commissioner Tipping. Nay: none. The vote was 5-0.

D.2 Consider an update from the Transportation Department on the RM 620 Safety Improvements Project and the Mays Street Improvement Project.

Assistant Transportation Director John Dean gave a status update on the RM 620 Safety Improvements Project. The project is currently under environmental review as part of its application for federal funding, and has hired a consultant for additional research in response to review by the Texas Historical Commission. The report will be submitted to the HPC when completed.

Transportation Operations Manager Todd Keltgen gave an update on the Mays Street Improvement Project. The project reconfiguring the Mays and Main intersections and improving Mays Street is moving along well. The overall street improvements as described in the Downtown Master Plan extend further east, but the character of the improvements will change in the areas that are more residential.

D.3 Consider the introduction of new commissioners and a presentation from the Chair concerning meeting procedures.

Commissioners and staff introduced themselves, and welcomed new commissioner Paul Emerson. Chairman Hodges reviewed meeting procedures, reminding the Commissioners to be very specific yet concise when making a motion. The Commission may condition that some specifics may be deferred to staff, but it creates complications if aspects of the project are not included in the motion. He asked the Commissioners for their feedback on the previous year, noting that follow-ups on some of the Certificate of Appropriateness review procedures would be discussed later in the meeting.

D.4 Consider a presentation and update concerning the state's tax credit program for the rehabilitation of historic structures.

Ms. Harding gave a brief description of the federal income tax credit for rehabilitation of historic buildings, and a similar state franchise tax exemption that was recently enacted. HPC and City staff do not have a direct role in administration of either the state or federal tax credit, but knowing how they work will help evaluate a property owner's options regarding the repair of their historic property. The property must be an income-producing property (the state credit may also be used by a nonprofit); owner-occupied homes are specifically ineligible.

There are significant differences between the City's tax exemption program and the federal and state tax credits. The City's program is a yearly exemption of a portion of property taxes in return for keeping historic properties well-maintained. The state and federal programs are tax credits (against income taxes for the federal and franchise taxes for the state) equal to a percentage of eligible rehabilitation costs. The owner may apply for both credits for the same project, potentially for a total credit equal to 45% of eligible expenses.

The Texas Historical Commission (and also the National Park Service for the federal tax credit) evaluates the appropriateness of the entire project and what parts of the project expenses are eligible, and later inspects the property on completion to confirm that it was completed as agreed. With their approval the owner may then apply for the credit from the IRS or the State Comptroller. The state credit is transferable, so if the owner is not subject to the franchise tax they may sell the credit to a party that does pay the franchise tax. The federal credit is revocable if changes that violate the agreement are made within five years.

D.5 Consider a presentation and update on the 2015 Partial Tax Exemption for Historically Significant Sites program.

Ms. Jordan summarized the outcome of the 2015 historic tax exemption program. There were 51 applications submitted, of which 50 were approved to receive the exemption, totaling \$82,021. The total exemption is a significant increase from the previous year because of increased property values downtown. Sixteen of the eighteen applications that the HPC had given conditional inspection ratings made sufficient repairs or repair plans before the exemption ordinance was presented to the City Council. In the adopted ordinance 15 properties had a final "pass" inspection rating and 35 had a "needs maintenance" final rating.

Ms. Jordan asked the Commissioners for their comments on the exemption inspection and recommendation process. She said that staff had investigated formatting the forms so that the inspections could be done on iPads, but the Commissioners responded that they felt the paper forms with notes from the previous year had worked well and didn't need improvement. They discussed how to reach out to non-participants, and noted that some non-participants want to be left alone. Staff had mixed opinions about the effectiveness of sending postcards in January to those who had received a "needs maintenance" rating in 2014, as a reminder that these items need to be addressed by April in order to qualify for the exemption.

D.6 Consider a presentation and policy discussion concerning the progress on renovation projects and an update concerning recent administrative Certificates of Appropriateness.

Ms. Jordan presented an update on the administrative Certificates of Appropriateness (CofAs), which had been implemented in 2012. She distributed a log of administrative CofAs that had been issued in the past year. Some were for items that had been delegated to staff as part of a Commission-issued CofA, and others were for individual small projects.

Some complications have emerged in cases when the Commission issues a CofA with some conditions delegated to staff review. In some of the more complicated projects it becomes difficult to keep track of which delegated items have received administrative CofAs and which items still require them. It is also difficult for the applicant to keep track of which items still need staff approval. Also there has not been a formalized inspection process to verify that the conditions of each CofA have been met.

Staff proposed using some type of checklist to keep track of the conditions in the original HPC-issued CofA and subsequent administrative CofAs. Ms. Harding distributed draft checklists in different formats for the Commission's feedback. A simplified form would help both contractors and staff keep track of what parts of the project still need to be staff-reviewed, and could also be used to update the Commission on the process of the project. Chairman Hodges thought it would be helpful, but wanted the Commission to have some time to consider it and discuss at a future meeting.

The Commission also discussed the CofA appeal process. As many owners claim not to have known about needing to meet design standards and go through the review process, several Commissioners asked whether new owners received some kind of notice. Ms. Jordan said that staff does communicate with new owners but doesn't necessarily know when a property is sold. Historic properties are indicated in the building permit database and she must sign off on any requested permits, but many changes do not require permits.

Ms. Jordan then presented some slides of recent projects for an open-ended discussion of "appropriateness" and how the CofA conditions have been implemented.

- When is a distressed finish be considered in need of repair and when should it be considered a patina?
- When (if ever) are prefinished materials appropriate on historic buildings? What types of finishes and materials?
- Should items like kegs and CO₂ tanks behind buildings be screened, and should it be in the same manner as mechanical equipment? Should a CofA be required before a hole can be drilled in an exterior wall for the CO₂ tank connection? Should tanks be required to be inside?
- When new doors or windows are necessary, the CofA conditions often specify (as given in the *Design Guidelines*) that they be made of wood or a wood-appearing composite material. There are many good composite products, and some fiberglass doors appear quite appropriate when stained or painted. But there are also composite products that look like they were molded, or have modern window inserts, and do not have the characteristics of a true paneled door.
- When a building has existing historically inappropriate windows, is it acceptable for the owner to glue a grille (or metal strips resembling a grille) to the glass to make the windows look somewhat more appropriate?
- Sometimes the HPC approves a major alteration to a historic building in order to satisfy a building or fire code requirement (such as cutting a new doorway to serve as a fire exit). As the project progresses these alterations may become unnecessary. Should the conditions the HPC specifies for major alterations include some kind of clause requiring the applicant to pause construction and demonstrate that the alteration is still necessary before undertaking it?

D.7 Consider a presentation and update on the Round Rock Historic Preservation Education and Awareness Program.

Ms. Harding referred to a summary of the year's Preservation Education and Awareness activities that had been distributed with the meeting packets. There were fewer articles written about Round Rock's history or preservation programs, but more activities for National Preservation Month in May 2015. There was some discussion about possible activities for the next Preservation Month.

Ms. Harding also asked whether the Commission was interested in pursuing a local historic building plaque program. The owner of a recently-rehabilitated property had asked about getting one for his

property, but there currently is no program for City-designated buildings. There are plaque programs for buildings on the National Register or are Registered Texas Historical Landmarks, but most historic buildings in Round Rock have only City designation.

D.8 Consider a presentation and development concerning the Historic Preservation Commission's 2015-2016 goals.

Chairman Hodges excused himself and left the meeting, but said that what he thought was most important to keep in the goals are options for addressing CofA noncompliance, and additional Commissioner education opportunities, now that the Texas Historical Commission no longer offers training sessions. Commissioner Quick also left the meeting.

Ms. Jordan asked the commissioners to review the previous year's goals and consider what changes they would like to make for the upcoming year. The four overarching goals of the Commission may remain the same, but the individual items to meet those goals need to be annually reassessed.

The Commissioners discussed some of the issues that had been raised and how new (or existing) goals might address them. Commissioner Tipping suggested exploring options for addressing noncompliance issues, perhaps with humorous outreach activities for Preservation Month. Other education and awareness suggestions included promoting the new state tax credit, pursuing the plaque program, and working up a list of suggested topics for schoolkids looking for a project. It was suggested that a meeting with the City's new Social Media Specialist might be helpful.

They felt that noncompliance issues were a significant issue that might be addressed with a project checklist and public outreach. They also agreed that they needed to develop clearer instructions for the Local Legend Selection Committee and find more opportunities for Commissioner education.

E. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 9:46 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted;



Kerstin Harding
Planning Technician