



How to Develop Design Standards for Your Local Historic District

The Heritage Society of Austin (HSA) is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization that promotes historic preservation in Austin. An important piece of HSA's work is supporting groups seeking to establish a Local Historic District (LHD) in Austin. The instructions that follow refer to a *Design Standards Template* (DST) document that is available in electronic format by contacting the Heritage Society of Austin at the information below. This document and any portion thereof is the exclusive property and work product of the Heritage Society of Austin, Inc. ("HSA"), and may not be disclosed or transferred except as expressly authorized or licensed by HSA. Unauthorized disclosure, use, reproduction, reprocessing or transfer of this document or any portion thereof is strictly prohibited.

Start With the City of Austin Historic Preservation Office

The first step in establishing a Local Historic District is to contact the City of Austin (COA) Historic Preservation Office. They will get you started on the official application process and answer any questions you might have. For more information, please contact:

Alyson McGee, Deputy Historic Preservation Officer

Phone: 512-974-7801, E-mail: alyson.mcgee@ci.austin.tx.us

One Texas Center, 505 Barton Springs Road, 5th Floor, Austin, Texas 78704

<http://www.austintexas.gov/department/historic-preservation-office>

Background on the Design Standards Template

The process of creating an LHD requires careful research, consideration and deliberation. In response to the challenges neighborhoods were facing in creating Design Standards unique to their Districts, HSA developed a *Design Standards Template* in coordination with the Historic Landmark Commission and City staff. Potential local historic districts can use this *Design Standards Template* as a starting point for creating their unique district standards. The Historic Landmark Commission endorsed the *Design Standards Template* at their meeting on October 24, 2011. The *DST* remains a Heritage Society of Austin document rather than to an official City document, which will allow the *DST* to remain flexible and adaptable over time, while being available to help when and where it is needed most.

How to Complete the Design Standards Template

Please note that final Design Standards submitted by a potential district must be consistent with the *Secretary of Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation*, and will be subject to final review and approval by the City of Austin prior to LHD designation being

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granted. The document is intended as an approvable starting point –this DST will need to be tailored to the unique historical and architectural character of each district. Some specific instructions on how to make those revisions follow.

Checklist for Completing the *Design Standards Template*

1. PURPOSE AND GOALS

Add or delete goals for your particular Local Historic District, as appropriate. All of the goals listed may not be applicable to your district. Others may be missing from the list presented on P.3 and should be added.

2. DESIGN REVIEW PROCESS

District Boundaries

Include the district boundaries here. By this point in the process your district boundaries should have already been defined in consultation with the COA Historic Preservation Office. The written and graphic description of the boundaries should be included here.

All Other Items

In the Design Review Process section, items B, C, and D, should be left as is. This text refers to official policies and practices that are in place to regulate Local Historic Districts. Any changes to these sections would first need to be approved by the COA Historic Preservation Office.

3. ARCHITECTURAL CHARACTER OF THE DISTRICT

Character Photographs

Insert photographs and provide a caption for each. These photographs should illustrate the landscape and streetscape patterns specific for the district.

General Character

Select those items for each of the sub-sections that might be applicable. The following discussion should be tailored to the character of your district. Consult the survey notes and inventory of properties within the district that you have already prepared. Options as listed are merely meant to serve as examples. Select the option that best describes land use in the district. Edit as appropriate and delete options that are not applicable.

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1. Land Use Activities

- **Historic Land Use Patterns.** Select the option(s) that best describes historic land use in the district here.
- **Current Land Use Patterns.** Select the option(s) that best describe the land use in the district as it exists today.
- **Multi-Family Residential Land Use.** If applicable, describe the location and character of multi-family properties in the district.
- **Commercial Residential Land Use.** If applicable, describe the location and character of commercial properties in the district.
- **Institutional Land Use.** If applicable, describe the location and character of institutional properties in the district.
- **Open Space.** If applicable, describe the location and character of open spaces, such as parks, medians, or greenbelts.

2. Natural Environment

- **Topography.** Describe general topography, direction of watershed (i.e., land generally slopes toward the Colorado River), and/or major topographic features such as hills or bluffs.
- **Trees and Natural Landscape.** Summarize the character of the native grasses, brush, and/or trees within the District. Note distinctive trees or clusters of trees.
- **Designed Landscape.** Note the extent and type of landscaping (native, formal, xeriscape, etc.) and whether or not that contributes to the District.

3. Circulation Networks

- Street Patterns.** If applicable, describe the design. Refer to *Historic Residential Suburbs: Guidelines for Evaluation and Documentation for the National Register of Historic Places* for examples.
- **Major Thoroughfares.** Describe relationship to boundaries of District – do they border the District or run through the middle?
 - **Alleys.** If applicable, describe the location and paving materials.
 - **Sidewalks.** If applicable, describe the location and paving materials.

4. Spatial Organization

- **Subdivision of Lots.** Describe the size and shape of lots. Are they regular, or do they vary?
- **Organization of Lots.** Describe the location of buildings and structures on the site. For instance, are houses regularly set back along the streetscape? Are garages typically detached and set back behind the house?
- **Setbacks.** If applicable, describe.

5. Boundary Demarcations

- **District Boundaries.** Describe any entrance signs or gateways into the District.

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- **Property Boundaries.** Describe fencing, retaining walls, hedgerows, or other distinctive property boundaries.
 - **Fencing.** If applicable, describe.
 - **Retaining Walls.** If applicable, describe.
6. **Small-scale Elements**
- **Signage.** If applicable, describe.
 - **Lighting.** If applicable, describe.
 - **Street Furniture.** If applicable, describe.

Local Architectural Type and Character

Include those property types and architectural styles that are present in your district. If particular architectural styles or property types that are listed in the *Template* are not present in your district, you may exclude these from the Design Standards that you develop. Also, if you have styles or types present not included in the *Template*, you should include photos and descriptions of these.

4. LOCAL HISTORIC DISTRICT DESIGN STANDARDS

All Sections

Edit the Standards as determined appropriate for your District, or leave them as is. Final Design Standards submitted will require approval of the Historic Landmark Commission in the application review process.

Feedback on the *Design Standards Template*

The Heritage Society of Austin will continue to make improvements to this document. We would appreciate any input you have on how useful this document was, and how it might be strengthened to assist neighborhoods moving forward. If you have any questions, please contact the HSA directly at 512-474-5198 or isaac@hsaustin.org.

Credits

The Heritage Society of Austin would like to thank the following people, who played an instrumental role creating this *Design Standards Template*.

- Emily Thompson Payne
- Tere O’Connell
- Casey Gallagher
- David Bentley