

# Frequently Asked Questions

This FAQ sheet is intended to provide a brief orientation to the Historic Design Standards. Please contact [preservation@austintexas.gov](mailto:preservation@austintexas.gov) if you have further questions.

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**1** Why were the Historic Design Standards developed? Don't we already have standards for historic properties?

The Historic Design Standards were developed to clarify existing standards for historic landmarks and National Register districts. They also make the historic district application process easier and more equitable for new districts.

The [Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation](#) form the foundation of preservation practice in the United States and are used in Austin to evaluate proposed changes to historic landmarks and in National Register districts. However, these very general standards can be hard to interpret when planning and evaluating specific projects. The Historic Design Standards clarify them with more specific good practices and illustrations.

The Historic Design Standards provide a consistent, predictable set of standards for all areas considering historic district designation. Previously, community members compiling a historic district application had to hire a consultant or learn how to develop their own design standards. Then multiple rounds of review were required with other property owners and City staff. This added time and cost to the application process—and resulted in design standards that nearly identical to those for other districts.

**2** I own a historic landmark. How do the Historic Design Standards affect me?

The Historic Design Standards *clarify existing standards* for exterior changes to historic landmarks, as well as new construction on landmarked properties. The Historic Design Standards are based on the standards that City staff and the Historic Landmark Commission previously used to evaluate projects. However, they are clearer, more specific, and easier to use.

The historic review process remains the same.

**3** I own a property in a locally designated historic district. How do the Historic Design Standards affect me?

The Historic Design Standards do not affect previously agreed-upon design standards for existing historic districts. They do align with existing district design standards and may be adopted by property owners within each district if desired.

**4** I own a property in a National Register district. How do the Historic Design Standards affect me?

The Historic Design Standards will *clarify previously used guidelines* for National Register district properties. They are based on the standards that City staff and the Historic Landmark Commission already used to evaluate proposed projects. However, they are clearer, more specific, and easier to use.

Like the existing guidelines, the Historic Design Standards are applied on an advisory basis. The historic review process remains the same.

**5** I'm interested in creating a historic district in my neighborhood. Can I use the Historic Design Standards?

The Historic Design Standards apply to all historic districts designated after November 2022. They will reduce the time and money required for the historic district application process and help property owners in potential districts clearly understand the benefits and responsibilities of district designation.

Property owners in new historic districts may create a supplement to the Historic Design Standards if they wish to add more specific requirements for their neighborhood.

## 6 What projects do the Historic Design Standards apply to?

The Historic Design Standards apply to the projects on historic properties that are required to go through historic review: exterior changes, additions, and stand-alone ground-up new construction.

Work on historic landmarks and in newly designated historic districts must meet the standards to be approved. Work in National Register districts is evaluated on an advisory basis.

## 7 How did the public help shape the Historic Design Standards?

The community working group that developed the Historic Design Standards included property owners who will be affected by the standards, as well as community members with experience creating and implementing historic district design standards in their neighborhoods.

Many community members and the Historic Landmark Commission reviewed publicly available draft text in summer 2019 and submitted nearly 200 comments. These are reflected in the Historic Design Standards.

## 8 All this sounds familiar. Were the Historic Design Standards presented before?

Yes, the Historic Design Standards were presented to several City commissions in fall 2020. They were supported by all of them: the Historic Landmark Commission, Planning Commission, Zoning and Platting Commission, Design Commission, and Downtown Commission.

City Council formally adopted the standards into City code in November 2022.

