TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
real places telling real stories
Design Review: Best Practices and Troubleshooting Common Challenges
DESIGN REVIEW: WHO’S IN CHARGE?

On the local level:

- City/County staff – initial meetings, review of applications, administrative review, digesting more complex projects for Commission
- Historic Preservation Commission – most certificate of appropriateness projects
- City council – appeal cases

What do they review?

- New Construction
- Alterations
- Relocation
- Demolition
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DESIGN REVIEW: WHAT DO I NEED?

- A complete application
- Ordinance criteria/SOI Standards for Rehabilitation
- Design guidelines (if available)
- Staff Report
A complete application should at minimum contain:

- Address
- Owner info
- Designation type
- Written description of work
- Photos of property
- Drawings/photos of proposed work
- *Bonus: ‘and any other information required by the director’
Best Practices:

• Ask yourself questions that the Commission might have
  – Ex: Proposing a sign- ‘What material is the sign? Will it be internally or externally lit?’
  – Proposing a two-story addition- ‘How much taller is it than the one-story original structure?’

• Pull all the information your office might have:
  – Previous applications, historic photos, designation report, Sanborns, Google Earth or Street views of the property and block, permit history for code violations

• Make a site visit
Benefits of a Staff Report:

- Information for inventory/survey updates
- Record-keeping, reporting purposes
- Consistent format to display all projects – good for applicant and commission
- Easily digests complex information for the Commission or Council
- Holds applicant accountable
- Cuts down on staff time
A Staff report should include the following:

- Concise description of the project
- ALL application materials
- Drawings in scale with each other
- Review criteria and Design Guideline language and how it does or does not meet them
- Short description of property history - include previous alterations substantiated by physical or documentary evidence
- Staff Recommendation

**LANDMARK COMMISSION**

**FILE NUMBER:** CA189-175(JKA)  
**LOCATION:** 1617 Abrams Road  
**STRUCTURE:** Main, Contributing  
**COUNCIL DISTRICT:** 14  
**ZONING:** PD No. 397  
**DATE FILED:** December 6, 2018  
**DISTRICT:** Junius Heights  
**MAPSCO:** 36-Y  
**CENSUS TRACT:** 0013.01

**APPLICANT:** Tom Guerin  
**OWNER:** MCFAUL MAJA  
**REQUEST:** Install French doors on rear elevation.

**BACKGROUND / HISTORY:**
- 06/06/2014 – Landmark approved demolition of an accessory structure (CD134-016(JKA)) relocation of a chain link fence, and a chicken coop (CA134-293(JKA)).  
- 04/12/2018 – Landmark approved an accessory structure (CA178-372(MP)).

The structure is listed as contributing to the Junius Heights historic district.

**ANALYSIS:** The French doors are proposed for the rear elevation, which is on an unprotected façade and not visible from the street. The proposed salvaged doors are compatible with the Craftsman style of the main structure. Staff is recommending approval of the work with the finding that it is compatible with the preservation criteria and City Code.

**STAFF RECOMMENDATION:** Install French doors on rear elevation – Approve – Approve drawing and specification dated 01/07/19 with the finding that the work is consistent with preservation criteria Section 4.2 and meets the standards in City Code Section 51A-4.501(g)(6)(C)(i).

**TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATION:** Install French doors on rear elevation – Approve.
Best Practices:

• Use concise language and bullet points to describe project.
• Refer to which criteria it does or does not meet.
• Make sure your explanation stands out so that the Commission can focus the conversation on those points.
• Drawings are in-line with each other.
• If something is difficult to tell from a drawing, highlight it with a color or arrow.
• If necessary, include a summary of your site visit.
DESIGN REVIEW: IS THIS APPROPRIATE?

Scenario 1: Which window is right for me?
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- Code language: Alterations must be compatible with what is typical in the district
- Design Guidelines language: All new windows must be or resemble wood
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- Solution:
Scenario 2: Where can I put this addition?

Owner says: I want to start my addition further forward than the end of the existing house.
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You see: Two different Sanborns, Ghosting, different siding material

Solution: Recommend approval
DESIGN REVIEW: IS THIS APPROPRIATE?

Best practices:

- See what is present in the area and have a good grasp of the character defining features
- Collect as much information about a property as you can
- If you don’t have a ‘smoking gun’, go with something simple to avoid creating a false history
- Refer back to your criteria

From Galveston Design Standards
Scenario 3: New Construction
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Code:
• New construction should be compatible with what is in the district

Design Guidelines:
• New construction should be appropriately sized to be compatible with the existing neighborhood, in terms of height and width
• New construction may incorporate architectural features that have been described as Compatible with the historic district in these Guidelines. New construction does not need to look “historic.”
Scenario 3: New Construction

Think about and try to answer:

- How would you describe the existing buildings?
- How would you describe the proposed building?
- Building your hoard: What other information do you think you need?
- What is your recommendation? Use the code language to explain your recommendation.
Scenario 3: New Construction

Think about and try to answer:

- How would you describe the existing buildings?
  - One-story
  - Minimal traditional/Craftsman influence
  - Shallow rooflines
  - Not decorative

- How would you describe the proposed building?
  - Two-story
  - Victorian/Gothic influence
  - Ornate windows and details
Scenario 3: New Construction

- Building your hoard: What other information do you think you need?
  - Where is it situated on the lot
  - What is the minimum setback for the block
  - What are some of the defining features/materials of the contributing homes
  - Need the other elevations
  - What is the ridge height
  - What is the porch depth
Scenario 3: New Construction

- What is your recommendation? Use the code language to explain your recommendation.
  - DENIAL, not appropriate.
- New construction should be appropriately sized to be compatible with the existing neighborhood, in terms of height and width.
  - The two story residence is not compatible with the mainly one-story residences in the historic district. The residence is 11’ taller to the ridge than the contributing neighbors and 5’ wider. The mass overwhelms and detracts from the historic character of the one-story residences.
- New construction may incorporate architectural features that have been described as Compatible with the historic district in these Guidelines. New construction does not need to look “historic.
  - The ornate details and volumes of the two-story residence such as the gingerbread verge board and highly-pitched roof are not compatible with the simple, low rectangular forms of the contributing residences in the historic district.