Introduction

The Old Sixth Ward Protected Historic District (OSW) was established in 2007. At the time of designation, Design Guidelines for OSW were adopted; all Certificates of Appropriateness (COA) issued in OSW must comply with the OSW Design Guidelines in addition to Chapter 33 (Historic Preservation Ordinance). No updates have been made to the OSW Design Guidelines since their adoption 10 years ago.

Chapter 33 allows updates to the Old Sixth Ward Protected Historic District guidelines if changes are recommended by the HAHC in any annual report. HAHC has the authority to approve recommended changes after holding a public hearing on the proposed changes.

Sec. 33-277. Amendment of design guidelines.

The HAHC shall conduct a public hearing on amendments to the design guidelines if changes are recommended by the HAHC in any annual report. At the public hearing, interested parties may comment in person or in writing on any recommended amendments to the design guidelines. Following the public hearing, the HAHC may amend the design guidelines.

Old Sixth Ward Protected Historic District

In 2015, representatives of the Old Sixth Ward Neighborhood Association (OSWNA) requested that the Planning Department begin a process to update the OSW Design Guidelines. The request occurred within the same time frame as the initial phases of the Planning Department’s Historic District Design Guidelines Project, which is developing new design guidelines for six Heights-area historic districts. OSW was thus included in the data collection, analysis, and community engagement process conducted by the city’s design guidelines consultant, Winter & Company.

Old Sixth Ward stakeholders were invited to participate in the first Community Workshop of the Historic District Design Guidelines Project in Sept 2016. Planning staff has also attended numerous meetings of the OSWNA and the OSWNA’s Historic Conservation committee to further develop recommendations based on the historic district’s input. The community engagement process is still being conducted, and substantive recommendations are expected later in 2017. The OSWNA asked, however, that a process change requiring all COA applications from OSW to be reviewed by HAHC be adopted as soon as possible.

2017 Historic District Design Guidelines Annual Report

The City of Houston Historic District Design Guidelines Annual Report issued in May 2017 recommended that the OSW Design Guidelines be updated in two phases. The first phase – Phase I – proposes to disallow all administrative approvals in the OSWPHD, so that all future COA applications will be determined by HAHC in a public meeting. Phase II, expected later in 2017, will address further changes determined through the public engagement process.
Proposed Amendment – Phase I

Chapter 33-241.1(g) allows individual historic districts to require, through their Design Guidelines, that all COA applications from the district be reviewed by HAHC, even those applications that would otherwise be eligible for Planning Director approval under Sec. 33-241.1.

Sec. 33-241.1 Same—Administrative approvals.

(g) Design guidelines for an individual historic district may provide that administrative approvals under this section must instead be approved by the HAHC using the criteria of this section, or of this article, as appropriate.

The criteria for review of these projects will remain the same; only the review process will be changed.

Applications eligible for administrative approvals under Chapter 33-241.1 must be approved within 15 business days, or be sent to HAHC for review; the minimum review timeline for applications sent to HAHC is 22 calendar days, based on the current application deadlines. Disallowing administrative approvals may slightly extend the application review process for applicants. It will allow, however, for a public meeting with the possibility of public comment and input for all COA projects proposed in OSW.

Public Notice and Comment

Notice of the public hearing on the proposed amendment to disallow administrative approvals in OSW was issued on May 31, 2017. A letter was mailed to all property owners in the historic district, and the hearing information was posted on the city website. No comment has been received from the public.

Recommendation

Staff recommends approval of the proposed amendment to the OSW Design Guidelines to disallow all administrative approvals in the Old Sixth Ward Protected Historic District.