

# SECTION 2: PRESERVATION FUNDAMENTALS

Historic preservation seeks to:

- Keep properties and places of historic and cultural value in active, productive use
- Accommodate appropriate changes that maintain the viability of historic places
- Maintain the key character-defining features of historic properties and districts
- Keep cultural resources intact for the benefit of future generations
- Promote neighborhood livability, sustainability, economic development, and cultural appreciation

In order to accomplish these goals, cities create historic preservation ordinances that establish rules for the changes that can be made to historic landmarks and within historic districts. Those ordinances, including the City of Houston's historic preservation ordinance, use terms and are based on standard concepts that are central to preservation practice. These include:

- Significance
- Period of significance
- Integrity
- Contributing and noncontributing classifications
- Character-defining features

The City of Houston also defines another concept — context area — that is used in decision-making.

These historic preservation concepts, and the benefits of utilizing them in decision-making for historic landmarks and districts, are explained on the following pages.

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## KEY HISTORIC PRESERVATION CONCEPTS

### Significance

A historic resource — a building, structure, object, site, or district — may be considered important for a variety of reasons. If the resource meets certain criteria established by local, state, or federal laws, it may be considered *significant*. Usually, these criteria include the quality of architecture, whether the resource is associated with important people or events, or if it might be an important archaeological site.

Government agencies are in charge of historic designations at the local, state, and federal level. Each agency has determined what criteria it will use to evaluate whether a historic resource is significant or not. It is common for local or state criteria to be based on the National Register of Historic Places criteria for the evaluation of significance:

The quality of significance in American history, architecture, archeology, engineering, and culture is present in districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects that possess integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association, and:

- A. That are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; or
- B. That are associated with the lives of significant persons in our past; or
- C. That embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or
- D. That have yielded or may be likely to yield, information important in history or prehistory.

The State of Texas, through the Texas Historical Commission, recognizes buildings that are particularly significant because of their architecture. These Recorded Texas Historic Landmarks also must be significant for their association with people, events, or their importance to the community.

The City of Houston uses eight criteria to evaluate the significance of a potential historic Landmark or Protected Landmark:

1. Whether the building, structure, object, site, or area possesses character, interest, or value as a visible reminder of the development, heritage, and cultural and ethnic diversity of the city, state, or nation;
2. Whether the building, structure, object, site, or area is the location of a significant local, state, or national event;
3. Whether the building, structure, object, site, or area is identified with a person who, or group or event that, contributed significantly to the cultural or historical development of the city, state, or nation;
4. Whether the building or structure or the buildings or structures within the area exemplify a particular architectural style or building type important to the city;
5. Whether the building or structure or the buildings or structures within the area are the best remaining examples of an architectural style or building type in a neighborhood;
6. Whether the building, structure, object, or site or the buildings, structures, objects, or sites within the area are identified as the work of a person or group whose work has influenced the heritage of the city, state, or nation;
7. Whether specific evidence exists that unique archaeological resources are present; and
8. Whether the building structure, object, or site has value as a significant element of community sentiment or public pride.

It is helpful to know why a historic district or landmark was designated, because the basis for its significance comes into play when we consider the following concepts.

### **Period of Significance**

No matter which government agency is evaluating the significance of a historic resource, the basis for significance is always tied to a specific period of time during which the important activities took place. This is called the *period of significance*; it may be as short as a single year or many decades long.

The period of significance usually begins with the construction date of a building or the start of an event. For example, the City of Houston Heights was founded in 1891, so its period of significance begins that year. A period of significance usually ends when construction or the association with a person or event ends, and the end date cannot be less than 50 years ago. For example, the subdivision of Glenbrook Valley was built between 1953–1962, and that is the period of significance for the Glenbrook Valley Historic District.

## Integrity

When a historic resource retains the characteristics that are associated with its significance, we say that it has *integrity*. This can mean, for example, that a building looks much as it did when it was built, or that a park maintains its original design. Sometimes, changes that are made over the years become old enough that they achieve historical significance of their own; in such cases, those alterations do not weaken the resource's integrity. Other changes — especially those that cover or remove important character-defining features — can damage or destroy a resource's integrity, so those types of changes should be avoided. The City of Houston's historic preservation ordinance is intended to prevent the destruction or removal of character-defining features, which would damage a building's integrity.

The illustrations below show how integrity can be lost through alterations. One major alteration can destroy integrity, but a series of multiple smaller changes — which singly might be fine — can have the same cumulative, negative effect.

However, it is also important to note that a building can be altered without losing its integrity. The presence of alterations does not mean that integrity has necessarily been damaged. In cases where integrity has been impacted, it can be restored by returning a historic resource to the condition it was in during the period of significance. While that is possible, it is better to maintain integrity through good preservation practices.

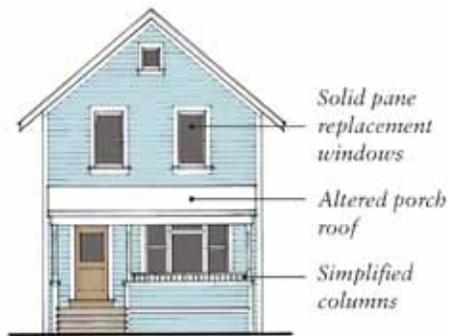
## Building Integrity

Original design



*“Contributing” Structure:  
This building retains its  
integrity.*

Partially altered



*“Contributing” Structure  
with some alterations:  
This building remains  
contributing with  
opportunity for restoration.*

Substantially altered



*“Noncontributing” Structure  
with major alterations:  
This building does not retain  
its integrity.*

# Contributing and Noncontributing Classifications

When a historic district is designated, the City creates an inventory that lists each historic resource (building, structure, object, or site), along with its address, legal description, construction date, and whether the resource is *contributing* or *noncontributing* to the district.

The City's historic preservation ordinance says that a resource is considered contributing when it "reinforces (or has conditions which, if reversed, would reinforce) the cultural, historical, or architectural significance of the district" as a whole. The presence of alterations do not automatically make a building noncontributing, however, just as changes do not necessarily impact integrity.

Any building that was constructed outside of the period of significance is considered noncontributing, even if it looks like a historic building. That is because contributing status is based on the property's ability to convey the significance of the district, not its appearance or compatibility with historic properties.



## Houston Heights South Historic District

- Historic District Boundary**  
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- Building Classification**
- Contributing**
- Noncontributing**
- Park**

## Character-Defining Features

We can judge whether a historic resource is significant and retains its integrity based on its *character-defining features*. These are visible, physical parts of a building and include the overall shape of the building, the materials with which it was built, evidence of craftsmanship in design and construction, decorative details, and elements of the site. The historic preservation ordinance states that the “distinguishing qualities or character” of a property should be preserved.

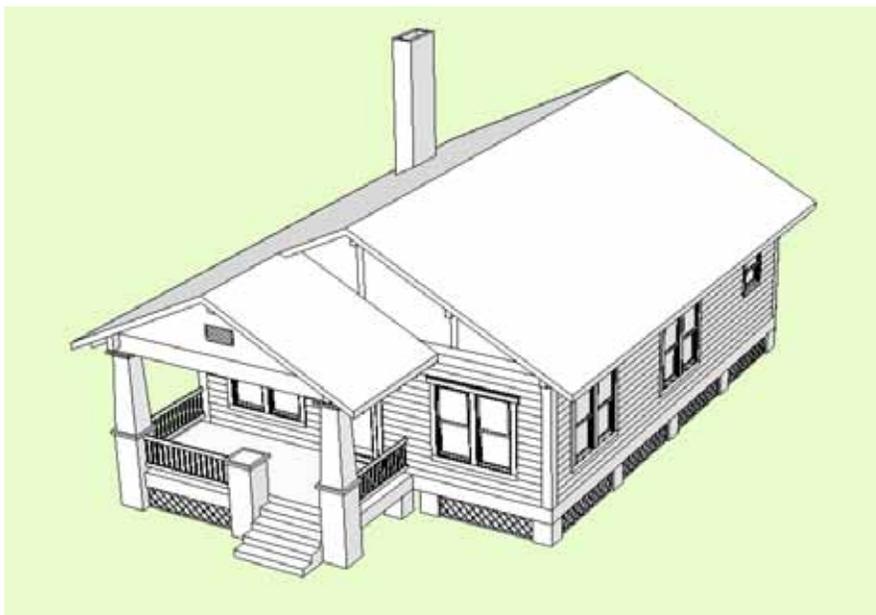
The following sketches illustrate character-defining features of two typical building types found in some of Houston’s residential historic districts.

### CHARACTER DEFINING ELEMENTS: 1-STORY CRAFTSMAN HOUSE/BUNGALOW FORM



#### KEY:

<b>A</b>	Gabled Roof (can also be hipped)
<b>B</b>	Chimney
<b>C</b>	Decorative Roof Beam/ Triangular Knee Brace
<b>D</b>	Attic Vent or Window
<b>E</b>	Exposed Rafter Tail
<b>F</b>	Double-Hung Windows (often paired or multiple in the same frame)
<b>G</b>	Columns/Posts (sometimes tapered)
<b>H</b>	Squared Piers
<b>I</b>	Porch Railing
<b>J</b>	Foundation Piers
<b>K</b>	Foundation Screening

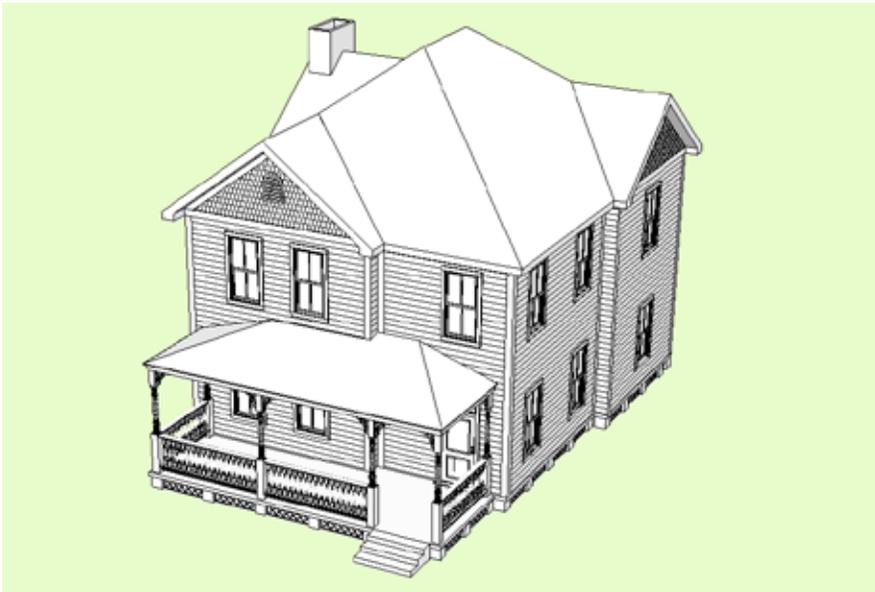


## CHARACTER DEFINING ELEMENTS: 2-STORY QUEEN ANNE



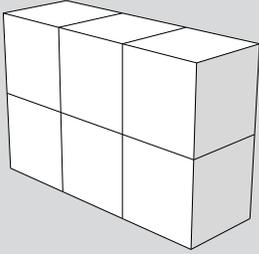
### KEY:

<b>A</b>	Steep, Complex Hipped Roof
<b>B</b>	Chimney
<b>C</b>	Attic Vent or Window
<b>D</b>	Gabled Roof, Hipped Roof
<b>E</b>	Double-Hung Windows
<b>F</b>	Spindlework or Jigsaw Elements
<b>G</b>	Turned Columns/Posts
<b>H</b>	Primary Entry Door
<b>I</b>	Foundation Piers

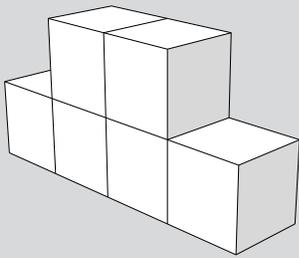


## MASSING CUBE ARRANGEMENT

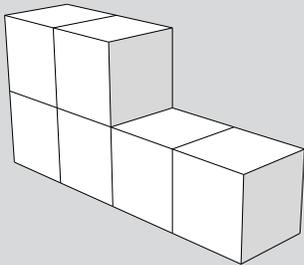
Arrangement #1



Arrangement #2



Arrangement #3



Arranging equally sized cubes into different configurations changes the effect of massing while keeping the volume equal.

## Mass, Form, and Scale

A building's size and shape have as much effect on its overall appearance as do stylistic details and decorative accents. In architectural terms, size and shape are more precisely described by the terms mass, form, and scale. These three characteristics are important by themselves, but together they determine a building's visual impact. They are among the most important character-defining features of a historic building. (See "Section 4: Exterior Alterations To Contributing Structures" on page 4-1)

### Mass

Mass, or massing, is a combination of building volume (height x width x depth) and the arrangement of the shapes and forms that make up the building. Each dimension in the volume equation also contributes individually to the overall visual effect of the building. For example, a building might be made up of six equally sized cube forms; no matter how you arranged the cubes, the volume would be the same, but the overall effect would be different. The building could be long and low, tall and skinny, or something in between. (See diagram at left.)

The arrangement and the size of differently-shaped building components, in relation to one another, contribute to the building's overall massing.

### Form

These four examples of houses in the Houston area (below) are all similar in size, but the building volume is arranged very differently from house to house. In large part, that is because they were built in different decades, and the design of each house reflects changing tastes and trends in architecture.



1920s



1960s



2000s



2015

We can look at those houses another way: in terms of the building blocks that are put together to create those volumes. This is what we mean by the arrangement of forms in a building and how that contributes to massing. Massing can be simple, as in the 1920s and 2015 examples, or complex, as in the 2000s example.



1920s



1980s



2000s



2015

### Scale

Scale includes not just the overall height and width of a building, but also to the size and proportions of building elements and details, as they relate to each other and to people. A sense of scale is also affected by the size and proportions of a building as it relates to its neighbors.

In the photo below, a building with a contemporary design (right) is similar to a more traditional one in scale, because key building elements are the same height: the ridge of the roof, the porch roof (eave), and the foundation. The width of these houses is also similar.



Although the two houses are quite different in design, the overall effect is harmonious, thanks to similar massing, scale, and form.

## The Cumulative Effect of Multiple Alterations

As noted above, a series of multiple changes to a building can have a negative impact on integrity and, as a result, contributing status. Therefore, all proposed changes must be considered as part of a whole. A project that might be found appropriate, if the building has not already been altered, could be considered inappropriate as the latest in a series of changes, each of which chip away at character-defining features and the overall integrity of a building.

Keep in mind that the entire planned project should be presented in the Certificate of Appropriateness application. Applicants who hold back "future phases" of a project in order to gain approval for initial work may find that subsequent proposals will not be approved, if the cumulative effect of all of the changes is too great and, collectively, diminishes the integrity of the building.

### CUMULATIVE EFFECTS DIAGRAM



1. Original condition



2. Window on the side has been altered



3. Side addition with gable roof



4. Large rear addition

## Context Area

When a property owner wants to make changes to a building in a historic district, they must (with some exceptions) apply for a Certificate of Appropriateness and get approval from the City before work can begin. Members of the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission (HAHC), with help from the Planning staff in the Historic Preservation Office, must decide if the proposed changes are compatible with the surrounding historic district. Rather than compare the project to the entire district, the City of Houston's historic preservation ordinance establishes a smaller area, called the *context area*, for comparison purposes.

The ordinance defines the context area as the blockface on which the proposed project is located and opposing blockface, as shown in the diagram below.



Context area diagram

The context area may be defined differently, if the HAHC and staff find that unusual and compelling circumstances exist or if it is described differently in design guidelines. The HAHC may decide to expand the context area for a particular project if not many buildings within the context area are contributing structures, or if the proposed project is unusual for the area.

**This set of design guidelines does not include an alternate definition of context area for Houston Heights Historic District East, Houston Heights Historic District West, or Houston Heights Historic District South.**

## **Accommodating Contemporary Design in Historic Districts**

Many changes can take place within a historic district. New construction, alterations to existing buildings or structures, and other changes can all affect the character of a historic district. The Planning staff and members of the HAHC are charged with determining whether those alterations are *compatible* with the district — in other words, whether the proposed change preserves the character of the district.

Compatibility does not require new buildings to mimic historic properties. In fact, the City encourages contemporary design within its historic districts. When a new building is constructed, its design should relate to historic buildings in the area through mass, form, scale, proportion, siting, and materials, but a new building should be of its own time and reflect contemporary design trends.

New buildings can relate to historic buildings in the area by being similar to:

- The way contributing buildings (and their front doors) are oriented to the street
- The basic forms and materials of nearby contributing buildings
- The height of contributing buildings' foundations, porches, eaves, and walls
- The arrangement of windows and doors on the front of contributing buildings

These basic design elements are more important than the details of individual architectural styles. As a result, new buildings can be compatible with the historic district even when they are clearly of contemporary design and construction.

## Alternative Treatments for Historic Resources

What is the appropriate approach for work on a historic resource that will help to maintain its integrity? Four treatments are recognized by the National Park Service: *preservation*, *restoration*, *reconstruction*, and *rehabilitation*. Although these approaches are not part of the City of Houston's historic preservation ordinance, they are included here for informational purposes, and property owners are encouraged to consider them during project planning.

**Preservation** focuses on the maintenance and repair of existing historic materials and retention of a property's form as it has evolved over time.

**Rehabilitation** acknowledges the need to alter or add to a historic property to meet continuing or changing uses, while retaining the property's historic character.

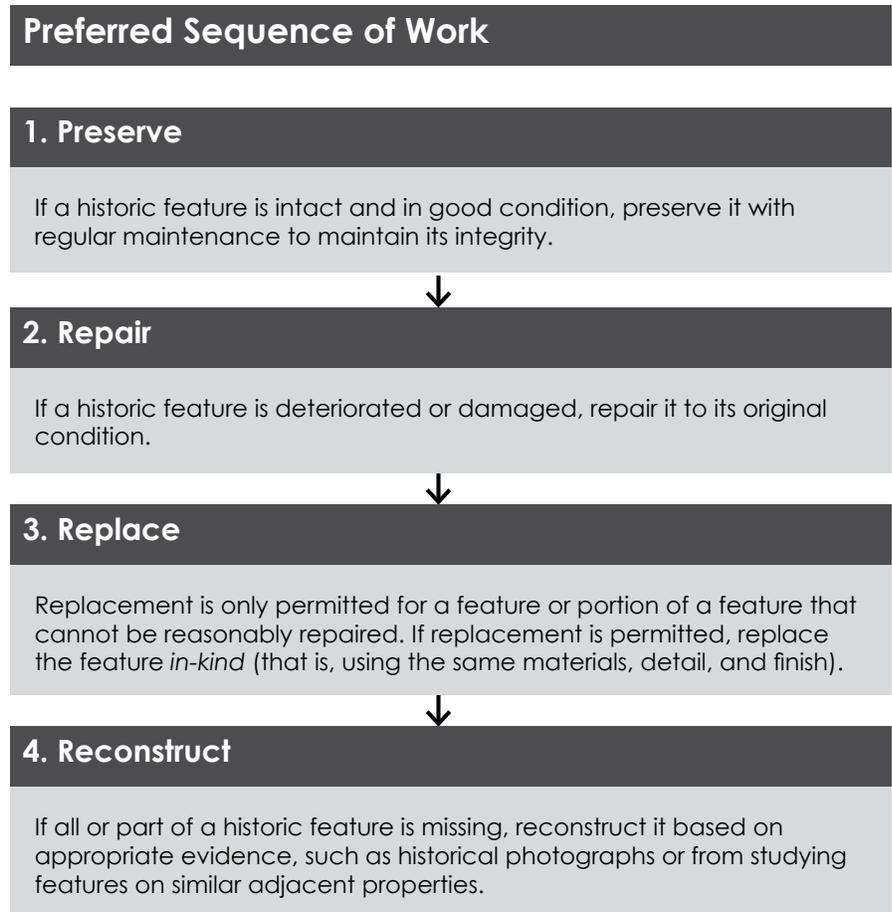
**Restoration** depicts a property at a particular period of time in its history, while removing evidence of other periods.

**Reconstruction** re-creates vanished or non-surviving portions of a property for interpretive purposes.

It is common to combine these approaches in a single project. For example, if key character-defining features are still intact, preservation is the appropriate treatment. *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties* (which are available free of charge online) provide a practical guide to applying these concepts to real-world situations. While Houston's historic preservation ordinance does not refer to the Secretary's Standards, they include a great deal of useful information and are, therefore, recommended reading.

## Preferred Sequence of Work

This set of design guidelines is organized based on the recommended order for undertaking work on a historic resource, as shown in the chart below.



# BENEFITS OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION

Historic areas within a city, when preserved and maintained, are often attractive places to live and work. Each historic district has its own distinct character, created by the collection of historic resources within its boundaries. Because every historic building contributes to the qualities of the district as a whole, changes to any one building can impact the district's overall character. A historic district can only be preserved through the protection of individual buildings.

Historic preservation programs and activities — whether carried out by the City, nonprofit organizations, businesses, or individuals — add value to the City of Houston in many ways. Investing in historic resources, to keep them in good condition and productive use, returns a variety of benefits.

## Quality of Life

Historic districts appeal to individuals, families, and businesses that value an authentic sense of place. Unlike modern suburban development, most historic neighborhoods contain a variety of buildings that were constructed over time. As a result, they feel genuine, rather than manufactured or designed. The architectural styles found in historic districts also distinguish these areas from newer areas of the city and attract property owners who want to own and maintain buildings that represent our heritage.

Whether in a residential neighborhood or a commercial district, the size and scale of historic buildings is often smaller than modern buildings being constructed today. While this is due in part to changing consumer expectations, the growing popularity of narrow houses, townhouses, and the "tiny house" movement signals a return to the efficient utilization of space that can be found in, for example, 1920s bungalows. In fact, downsizing has been recognized as one of the most important trends in real estate in the past five years. Individuals and families of all ages are choosing to live in smaller spaces, particularly in urban areas. Historic buildings also are often right-sized for start-ups, small businesses, and entrepreneurs who share this less-is-more philosophy.



**Preservation**



**Restoration**



**Reconstruction - before**



**Reconstruction - after**



**Rehabilitation - before**



**Rehabilitation - after**

## **Promotes Economic Sustainability**

Historic preservation is an effective economic development tool. Commercial, residential, and mixed-use neighborhoods have all benefited from the injection of new vitality that comes with the appropriate rehabilitation of older buildings. The economic benefits of investing in historic buildings and preserving historic districts is well-documented through studies nationwide and here in Texas, such as the report *Economic Impact of Historic Preservation in Texas*, first published in 1999 and most recently updated in 2015. According to that report, "Historic preservation is a major industry in Texas. The numbers tell the story: in 2013, preservation activities in Texas generated more than \$4.6 billion of state gross domestic product (GDP) in Texas, and supported more than 79,000 Texas jobs. This produced significant net tax revenue for both state and local governments in Texas, equaling over \$290 million annually."

## **Supports the Local Economy**

Projects that involve rehabilitating existing buildings contribute more to the local economy than tearing a building down and constructing a new one. Most of the cost of a rehab project (up to 70%) is usually spent on labor, which tends to be local and often made up of job-creating small businesses. Those workers spend their earnings in the community and support the local economy. At least 50% of the budget for new construction, however, typically goes to buy materials, which are likely manufactured by non-local companies. Even if a new building is being constructed by a local contractor, much of the money associated with that building leaves the community in the form of payment for materials. Rehab projects also typically create 50% more jobs than new construction projects, according to the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Preservation Green Lab.

## **Supports Stable Property Values**

Designated historic districts have been shown, through multiple studies all over the United States, to protect the investments of those property owners who have spent time and money to preserve the character of the area. (See the *Economic Impact of Historic Preservation in Texas* report for more details.)

When the size of new construction and additions in a historic district is not managed, however, speculative development can drive up property values until the land is more valuable than the historic building that occupies the lot. As a result, property owners can be forced out of the neighborhood by rising property taxes. This has happened in several Houston neighborhoods, before the City's historic preservation ordinance was changed to protect buildings in historic districts.

## **Supports Local Business Development**

Unlike many Class A office buildings, historic commercial spaces are often right-sized for new businesses. Historic homes also may be repurposed as office space, or for retail establishments or restaurants. As *Entrepreneur Magazine* wrote about Boston in 2016, "While shiny, new buildings are nice for impressing out-of-town visitors or luring Fortune 500 companies, gritty old cheap space is essential if we want to be a city that has room for fledgling companies focused on the future."

## May Include Tax Breaks

Tax incentives for historic preservation are available through the following programs:

- Federal Historic Preservation Tax Incentives offer a 10% or 20% credit against federal income tax for projects that follow the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties. Information about this program is available from the National Park Service and the Texas Historical Commission.
- The Texas Historic Preservation Tax Credit Program offers a tax credit, worth 25% of qualifying expenses, which can be transferred through the state comptroller's office. For-profit businesses, nonprofit organizations, and city/county governments are all eligible to participate, under certain conditions. This program can be combined with the Federal incentives. The Texas Historical Commission manages this program.
- The City of Houston offers a Historic Sites Tax Exemption program, which freezes property taxes at pre-improvement levels for a number of years, when a historic property undergoes significant rehabilitation. More information is available through the Planning Department and the Historic Preservation Office.

## Enables Heritage Tourism

Many cities have experienced the economic benefits of heritage tourism, which the National Trust for Historic Preservation defines as "people traveling to experience the places, artifacts, and activities that authentically represent the stories and people of the past." According to the 2015 *Economic Impact of Historic Preservation in Texas* report, by University of Texas and Rutgers University, heritage tourism is a \$7.3 billion dollar industry in Texas and accounts for more than 10.5% of all travel in the state. Studies show that heritage travelers stay longer and spend more money than other tourists, and this economic activity helps to create and sustain jobs in travel, retail, restaurant, and service businesses.

Promoting heritage tourism is an important part of the City of Houston's adopted Arts and Cultural Plan, which identifies heritage as a component of *culture*, which is defined as "traditions, historical resources, community heritage, and practices and forms of expression that are valued, practiced, and preserved by a community." The Plan specifically recommends that, among other things, the City should develop a program of neighborhood-based cultural tourism with the Greater Houston Convention and Visitors Bureau and other partners.

Neighborhood-based cultural tourism is most likely to occur in historic districts, where the authentic architecture and character of the neighborhood has been preserved. Historic areas inherently provide a strong foundation for the arts and other cultural activities. The City of Houston's historic preservation program, therefore, directly supports these tourism objectives.

### NOTE:

For more information about tax incentives for historic preservation, visit the Texas Historical Commission's website: <http://www.thc.texas.gov/preserve/projects-and-programs/preservation-tax-incentives/about-preservation-tax-incentives>.

### NOTE:

Old-growth wood used in historic buildings is more durable than the lumber available today.



## **Promotes Environmental Sustainability**

Sustainable development and conservation are central principles of historic preservation. Reusing an existing building keeps construction materials out of landfills and reduces the need to produce new materials. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has estimated that 40% of the nation's waste every year is made up of construction materials. A study by the National Association of Home Builders found that about 8,000 pounds of waste material – mostly wood, drywall, and cardboard – is created from the construction of a 2,000-square-foot home.

Careful maintenance and continuing to use an existing building preserves the resources that were already invested in its construction. According to the Preservation Green Lab of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, "It can take between 10 – 80 years for a new energy efficient building to overcome, through efficient operations, the climate change impacts created by its construction. The study *The Greenest Building: Quantifying the Environmental Value of Building Reuse* finds that the majority of building types in different climates will take between 20 – 30 years to compensate for the initial carbon impacts from construction."

Historic buildings can save energy, too, although some people may think otherwise. The most cost-effective energy savings are usually achieved not by replacing original building materials but by repairing, weather-stripping, and insulating them. For instance, you can save energy at a higher rate by properly caulking windows and doors and adding insulation to attic spaces than by replacing single-pane windows. In addition, the materials used to build historic houses (such as old-growth lumber) are more durable than materials available today. A 100-year-old window is made of stronger wood than a new wood window; vinyl is a plastic, petroleum-based product that not as recyclable as wood and may not be as durable.