

Dear Committee Members,

My name is Joy Tober, I am a homeowner within the Houston Heights East historic district as well as a professional preservationist and I would like to express with you my thoughts and questions concerning the agenda items you will be discussing on October 27<sup>th</sup>.

### **1. Administrative Approvals**

Those Administrative Approval items requiring public notice:

4. Alterations to non-contributing structures – *some alterations to a non-contributing structure can result in a negative impact to the historic district. I feel this category should either be eliminated, allowing the HAHC to review all alterations, or more detailed language added to allow only minor alterations such as window and door replacements.*

7. Minor changes to previously approved COAs – *what type or “minor” changes? Some people may try to take advantage of this if details are not provided.*

### **2. Exemptions**

Additions obscured from view from the public right of way by the original structure - *I feel this exemption should be eliminated. I have seen numerous homeowners and builders take liberty with plans approved by the HAHC and go beyond what is considered appropriate and what was approved. I think allowing any type of exemptions in relation to additions would only result in irreversible damage to existing historic structures.*

### **6. Change the designation of a structure located in a historic district**

*I could not agree more with staff's suggestion for this approach. The best course of action would be to encourage property owners to speak with staff about their concerns so that both the owner and staff can do research. Staff has both the experience and knowledge in determining if a structure should qualify for a re-designation. This process would also curtail frivolous applications being brought to the HAHC by owners who simply do not want to comply with the ordinance and avoids wasting the time of both HAHC and staff.*

### **9. Certificate of appropriateness application requirements**

*One suggestion I would like to offer for COA application requirements is charging a fee for applications. Application fees are not unusual at the city of Houston and COA fees are actually very common in other cities; I believe Houston is one of few cities that do not charge. The money obtained through application fees can also be used as a way to help homeowners who wish to appropriately improve their historic homes by way of*

*offering grants, establishing a revolving loan fund or creating other incentives. Offering help through funding is a wonderful way to encourage good preservation practices within all of our historic districts.*

#### **14. Tax exemption policies for historic sites**

*The language, specifically qualifying expenditures and eligibility requirements, used within the tax exemption program is in desperate need of change. Homeowners should be receiving a tax exemption for work that is focused on the preservation, restoration and rehabilitation of an existing historic structure. Allowing people to get a tax exemption on items unrelated to the preservation of a historic resource is inappropriate and does not encourage good preservation practices.*

#### **15. Historic Commission**

*I feel the additional suggested language and qualifications under Section. 33-211 (b) is a great way to add credibility and confidence to the commission. By requiring commission members have a “known and demonstrated interest, competence, or knowledge in historic preservation” helps to ensure that members have a true understanding of the inner workings of preservation.*

*A licensed structural engineer can offer a better perspective and knowledge of historic building materials and techniques. Having an expert in this field on the commission can prevent the removal or destruction of important historic elements, such as the removal of shiplap, which is happening too frequently and causing irreparable damage to existing contributing resources.*

*Eliminating term limits allows for more consistency within the HAHC and should be strongly considered by this committee.*

#### **17. The penalty for illegal demolition**

*While illegal demolition is, thankfully, less of a concern today than just a few years ago, it is still an issue that comes up. Penalty for illegal demolition should have more severe consequences than currently states in the ordinance. A two-year prohibition still allows the property owner the right to build and gain value in that property, meanwhile the district has forever lost a valuable asset. If a property owner knowingly allows an historic resource to be demolished (either in part or whole) then that property owner should either pay a hefty fine or pay a fine and forfeit that land depending on the severity of the demolition.*

*I would also like clarification on the definition of ‘demolition’. As defined in the ordinance a demolition is “an act or process that destroys in whole or in part any building, structure, object or site.” The process that many builders take when constructing an addition often includes a very destructive use of bulldozers that simply tear off entire sections of historic homes with no regard to the effect of remaining*

*historic materials. In my opinion, this is a type of demolition that should not be allowed and this method should be discouraged.*

Thank you so much for allowing me the opportunity to ask questions and express my concerns. I want to thank you all for your time and efforts towards creating a better ordinance.

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