

City of Dallas  
Historic Preservation Policy  
**DRAFT**

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# Introduction: Why a Historic Preservation Policy

## City of Dallas – An Innovator in Historic Preservation

Historic preservation in Dallas began with neighborhood self-determination when Swiss Avenue residents advocated for the designation of the City’s first historic district in 1973. For decades, Dallas’ residents have fought massive development pressures for the preservation of their neighborhoods’ histories. The preservation community has built a foundation for progressive work by making Dallas a place where history is recognized as an important asset that contributes to economic development and residents’ quality of life.

However, the field is shifting to recognize that preservation of history and culture requires preservation of communities, not just buildings. Fighting the displacement of historically significant and marginalized communities — is essential if Dallas wants to continue to be at the forefront of neighborhood-driven preservation. Increased access and inclusion in preservation decision making, along with increased diversity in the decision makers, will be essential. This policy aims to build on Dallas’ strong history of neighborhood-based historic preservation, creating opportunities for further innovation, equity, and inclusion that will make Dallas a leader in the field.

## The Role of the Historic Preservation Policy Amidst Shifting City Priorities

Through the adoption of the Racial Equity Plan in August 2022, the City of Dallas demonstrated its commitment to prioritize racial equity and to better serve historically marginalized communities. The City’s commitment to racial equity appears not only in the Racial Equity Plan, but also the Equitable Economic Development Policy. By implementing this Historic Preservation Policy, the City will work towards goals and actions outlined in both the Racial Equity Plan and the Economic Development Plan.

The Racial Equity Plan directly outlines progress measures for the Office of Historic Preservation (outlined below) under the REP’s economic development strategic priority.

### Racial Equity Plan Progress Measures for the Office of Historic Preservation Addressed by this Policy:

1. Recommend amendments to the existing Tax Exemption Program or develop a new incentive program aimed at influencing the likelihood that the percentage of resources allocated to historically disadvantaged communities will increase by October 2024.
2. Make a recommendation to City Council to assess City support for historical homes/structures that are not tied to property value.
3. Increase number of historical preservation pieces of collateral, outreach events, education and awareness presentations/ publications, in historically disadvantaged communities provided in English and Spanish from 0 to 3 by May 2025.
4. Make a recommendation to increase the number of residents from historically disadvantaged communities on the Landmark Commission by October 2026.

The goals and programs outlined in this policy are also aligned with the Racial Equity Plan’s broader goals around community development, housing, environmental justice, and infrastructure. In particular:

### Racial Equity Plan Action Targets Addressed by this Policy:

- **Housing Action Target 3.2:** Deploy anti-displacement strategies in transitioning (e.g. gentrification) to address longstanding inequities by ensuring zoning is inclusive of historically disadvantaged communities to encourage sustainability and thriving opportunities
- **Housing Action Target 3.5:** Address pre-development costs, such as costs of (e.g., rehabilitation) in historically disadvantaged communities.
- **Housing Progress Measure HOU.2:** Develop a strategy for identifying neighborhoods most at risk of gentrification and displacement by December 2023.
- **Community Development Action Target 1.10:** Engage residents through arts and cultural programs funding that fully integrate historically disadvantaged communities into civic life.

- **Environmental Justice Action Target 2.13:** Implement the Brownfield Program to address contaminated sites in historically disadvantaged communities.
- **Infrastructure Action Target 4.2:** Build and improve infrastructure services to support increases in necessary development for residents who have been burdened by floods and high energy utility costs.

This policy reframes the mission and purpose of the Office of Historic Preservation to be proactive, equity-driven, and focused on inclusive historic and cultural preservation. While this policy aligns the Office of Historic Preservation with the City's racial equity priorities and lays the groundwork for progress, the goals outlined within cannot be accomplished without the expertise of the residents living in communities that are at risk of displacement or erasure. Community engagement and empowerment will be an essential part of successful policy implementation.

The implementation of this policy will be followed by a Historic Preservation Strategic Planning process that would likely begin in the Winter of 2023. In that planning process, robust community engagement will be critical to identifying the most effective and innovative solutions to challenges communities face around historic and cultural preservation and displacement.

### **Reimagining Historic Preservation to Advance Racial Equity**

With renewed focus and urgency around equitable economic development, racial equity, and housing affordability, it is imperative that the City once again pioneer a new approach to its historic preservation program, one that takes **a broader and more equitable and inclusive stance on what cultural heritage assets are worthy of preservation.**

An organizational pivot of this magnitude cannot be executed through incremental process reform alone. The City's current historic preservation mechanisms are ill-equipped to navigate non-architectural threats to preservation, such as affordability, gentrification pressures, and limited property owner capacity (fiscal and/or legal) to rehabilitate existing structures. The City needs to reimagine its entire suite of historic preservation systems to ensure alignment with an explicit, equity-centered mission. This policy lays out that mission and specific implementation strategies.

## Mission and Vision

### Policy Goals

- **Equity:** Shift the City's role from only regulating renovation of historic properties to also proactively preserving at-risk cultural heritage and historic resources, particularly in historically marginalized communities.
- **Identify and address barriers to access:**
  - The City of Dallas must be able to formally acknowledge the historical significance of landmarks and districts that gain their significance from a variety of cultures, ethnicities, races, spiritualities, sexual orientations, or other unique identities. Designation criteria must be inclusive.
  - Designation and approvals processes must be accessible and navigable for all residents.
  - Designation as a historically and culturally significant district should not place undue burden on residents in historically marginalized communities. Instead, it should create opportunities for community and cultural development.
- **Inclusion:** Create a variety of vehicles for Dallas residents, particularly those from historically marginalized communities, to weigh in on decisions that impact their lives and neighborhoods.
  - In particular, the identification of historically significant assets and prioritization of features to be preserved should arise out of the broadest possible engagement with stakeholder communities.
  - Provide accessible community education opportunities that allow residents to fully utilize resources offered by the Office of Historic Preservation and partnering departments.
- **Customer Service:** Increase access and efficiency for residents and property owners.

### Historic and Cultural Preservation Mission

Historic preservation is an endeavor to save important parts of communities' pasts in order to enrich their futures. Historic preservation protects places that provide a sense of community and identity through their history and culture.

Dallas' history is more than an asset contained within architecturally significant private properties. The City's history is a dynamic and community-centered public resource that the City has an obligation to protect. The most proactive, equitable way the City can pursue historic preservation is through preserving community, identity, and culture.

# Strategies for Equity and Inclusion

## **Inclusive Landmark and Historic District Designations**

### **Action 1: Develop cultural context statements for historically marginalized communities across Dallas.**

Most of Dallas' current historic districts derive their significance from the "Architecture," "Architect or Master Builder," "Historic Context," and "Unique Visual Feature" characteristics.

Other cities pursuing inclusive historic preservation practices have addressed racial and socioeconomic biases in their designation criteria by adding cultural context statements. Cultural context statements provide additional information from experts (community members, preservationists, and historians) that help historic preservation planners identify important places, events, and other types of heritage that are particularly significant in relation to an important theme.<sup>1</sup>

As part of the Strategic Planning process, the Office of Historic Preservation should commission the development of cultural context statements on, at minimum, the following three themes:

- Xicanx History and Culture in Dallas
- African American History and Culture in Dallas
- LGBTQ+ History and Culture in Dallas

It is imperative that the decision-makers who have the power to designate districts and landmarks are deeply familiar with the context statements above. Many Dallas residents may not have had the opportunity to learn extensively about the history and culture of marginalized groups, contributing to the cycle of those communities' important places, landmarks, and traditions being overlooked and overwritten.

The context statements should be developed in partnership with community organizations in Dallas who represent the population of focus, in addition to academics, authors, or journalists who have extensively studied the population's history in the region. The most effective context statements include both a narrative history of the theme, and guidance for how places of importance to that theme should be identified in the City in the future.

### **Action 2: Ensure that criteria for landmark commissioner appointment and historic district and landmark designation are inclusive and reflective of the City's values as laid out in the Racial Equity Plan.**

Most of Dallas' current historic districts derive their significance from the "Architecture," "Architect or master builder," "Historic Context," and "Unique visual feature" characteristics.

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<sup>1</sup> "A historic context statement is a historic preservation planning tool used by federal, state, and local governments to guide the identification, documentation, and evaluation of historic properties associated with a specific theme. Themes can range from the history of city to a style of architecture to a cultural group. Historic context statements are composed of two primary parts: a narrative discussion of the patterns, events, cultural influences, and individuals or groups relevant to the theme; and technical information that serves as a guide for future identification and analysis of historic properties associated with the theme." [Citywide Historic Context Statement for LGBTQ History in San Francisco](#) (2016)

Similarly, the criteria for Landmark Commissioner selection and appointment prioritizes individuals with “demonstrated knowledge and experience in history, art, architecture, architectural history, urban history, city planning, urban design, historic real estate development, or historic preservation.”<sup>2</sup> Therefore, the majority of appointed landmark commissioners have had significant professional or educational experience in the above fields – many of which have high financial and other barriers to entry. Architecture and urban design, which are known as majority-white and majority-male fields in the United States, are slowly becoming more inclusive; still, recent studies confirm that design education continues to be inaccessible and unwelcoming to Black, Indigenous, and other students, often leading them to ultimately choose other career paths.<sup>3</sup> A community member does not have to have a masters degree in architecture, history, planning, or art, to be a successful steward and protector of Dallas’ historical assets.

It is important to make structural changes that:

- create more opportunities for people of different professional and educational backgrounds to be part of the Landmark Commission
- define “significance” inclusively, to ensure the protection of structures, landmarks, and communities that are deeply significant to historically marginalized peoples

Specific parts of Sections 51A-3.101 and 51A-4.501 that are recommended for amendment are outlined in Appendix B.

**Action 3: Create a new historic district designation better adapted to historically marginalized communities.**

Historic designation by city, state, or national entities has historically been a double-edged sword for many communities. Though designation can preserve the architectural character of an area, increase the appreciation rate of property values, and provide opportunities for economic development, it can also create unnecessary burdens for property owners and community members, especially in low-income communities.<sup>4</sup> Property owners in historically marginalized, typically lower income communities often lack the resources necessary to navigate the lengthy approvals processes for renovations and repairs, and may not be able to afford the materials, designers, lawyers, and other resources necessary to meet standards of appropriateness.

As discussed in Section 3, Action 1: “Develop Cultural Context Statements”, current designation criteria and processes are not designed to work for communities with lesser-known histories, smaller houses, and less expendable income to navigate designation and approval processes.

**The boldest way to ensure that Dallas’ approach to historic preservation is equitable is to create a designation system designed to serve historically marginalized neighborhoods and their needs.** The Legacy Neighborhood designation would honor the cultural and historical importance of the neighborhoods that many historically marginalized communities have called home for decades. Some of Dallas’ strongest stories of

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<sup>2</sup> The Dallas City Code, [Sec. 51A-3.101](#). Landmark Commission.

<sup>3</sup> [NCARB and NOMA Report on Architecture Education Assesses Race-Based Disparities](#), National Council of Architectural Registration Boards, 2022.

<sup>4</sup> [Benefits of Establishing a Historic District](#), National Trust for Historic Preservation, 2015.

community and culture come from formerly segregated neighborhoods such as Freedmen’s towns and barrios, many of which have been lost to urban renewal, redevelopment, and demolition. This designation will ensure that at-risk neighborhoods are prioritized for City resources that can prevent further displacement due to gentrification or disinvestment, in accordance with current federal and state laws. Most importantly, the Legacy Neighborhood designation will not create financial or regulatory burdens for low-income neighborhoods. It will open doors to resources for residents, instead of introducing additional hurdles.

### **Implementation**

The City Manager would be responsible for nominating neighborhoods for the new designation; approval will ultimately fall to City Council. Through their expanded community engagement and empowerment offerings (see Section IV, Action 5), OHP staff will have the opportunity to host workshops and information sessions in potential Legacy Neighborhoods to gauge the community’s interest in designation, and (with community support) can then make recommendations to the City Manager.

The designation criteria for legacy neighborhoods and the full outline of the program will be determined through the strategic planning and community engagement process slated for 2023.

## **Preventing Cultural Displacement**

The “Legacy Neighborhood” program would utilize partnerships with other City agencies to help residents in legacy neighborhoods access specific City programs that can help them remain in their communities, while supporting the equitable growth of their neighborhoods.

### **Action 4: Give residents of “Legacy Neighborhoods” aid in accessing existing City programs that:**

- allow residents to remain in place
- support the economic vitality of their communities
- preserve culture and support creative placemaking
- leverage environmental sustainability initiatives for affordability, health, and longevity

Existing programs within HOU (the Targeted Rehab Program and ARPA program) already prioritize or are exclusive to several legacy neighborhoods. The Targeted Rehab Program serves West Dallas and Tenth Street, while the ARPA repair funding is reserved for property owners in Joppa, Five Mile, and Tenth Street.

### **Implementation**

OHP should strengthen partnerships with the Office of Economic Development, the Office of Cultural Affairs, the Department of Housing and Neighborhood Revitalization, and the Office of Environmental Quality – all of which have programs (see table below) that can serve as cultural preservation and anti-displacement tools. OHP should work with the above departments to develop systems for legacy neighborhood (LN) residents to be prioritized, in accordance with current federal and state laws, for the programs below through:

1. Expedited application processing for LN residents.
2. A portion of the program budget earmarked for LN residents.
3. Specialized outreach to LN residents.

OHP Staff should develop a Legacy Neighborhoods website page, including a form where residents can answer a few simple questions to determine eligibility and be directed to applicable programs. Ideally, OHP could partner with the above departments to develop a common application that residents could fill out to be approved for multiple programs concurrently.

Successful implementation will require the City to build the Office of Historic Preservation’s capacity to undertake interdepartmental collaboration, new program implementation, and community engagement.

Program design, partnerships, and application criteria would be refined through the strategic planning and community engagement process slated for 2023.

| <b>Existing Resources for Legacy Neighborhoods</b>  |   |  |  |  |
|---|---|--|--|--|
|   | <b>OED</b>  | <b>OCA</b>   | <b>HOU</b>   | <b>OEQS</b>  |
| <b>Anti-Displacement</b>                            | Food Access Program<br><br>Infrastructure Improvement Program/Fund                |  | Home Improvement and Preservation Program (HIPP)<br><br>Community Land Trust<br><br>Dallas Homebuyers Assistance Program (DHAP)<br><br><u>ARPA Repair Funds</u> (only Freedmen’s Towns are eligible: Tenth Street, Joppa, Five Mile)<br><br>Title and Property Assistance (TAPA) | Minor Plumbing Repair Program (with Dallas Water Utilities)<br><br>Weatherization Assistance Program (with DCHHS)<br><br>Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP with DCHHS)<br><br>Environmental Justice Fund |
| <b>Equitable Economic Development</b>               | Community Development Program/Fund<br><br>Infrastructure Improvement Program/Fund | Public Art Program<br><br>Arts Activate                        | Mixed-Income Housing Development Bonus (MIHDB)   |  |
| <b>Cultural Preservation + Creative Placemaking</b> |   | Community Artist Program<br><br>Cultural Organizations Program |  |  |
| <b>Sustainability</b>                               |   |  |  | Brownfields Program<br><br>Solar Residential Program (with ONCOR)<br><br>Building Materials Recycling (with DSS)   |

**Action 5: Use data to drive efficiency and impact.**

Use indicators such as vacancy rates, demolition rates, property value increases, and rent increases in Legacy Neighborhoods to determine which of the above City programs residents of the community should be prioritized for, in accordance with federal and state laws.

**Example:** OHP would collaborate with the Office of Housing and Neighborhood Revitalization to ensure that all applicants from Legacy Neighborhoods with vacancy rates over 15% would be prioritized for the Home Improvement and Preservation Program and the Community Development Program/Fund. Further, neighborhood and household metrics could determine if that applicant and their neighborhood should also be prioritized for the Infrastructure Improvement Fund, Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program, etc.

Cultural organizations and artists located in and serving Legacy Neighborhoods could receive special consideration for funding through the Office of Cultural Affairs' existing programs, as cultural preservation is a primary goal of the policy and the Legacy Neighborhood designation.

**Implementation:**

Develop an easy-to-use matrix that can take data inputs based on property location and return recommendations on which partner programs a resident should be prioritized for.

The matrix can be refined through the strategic planning and community engagement process slated for 2023.

## Strategies for Accessible, Efficient, and Effective Service

### Improving Efficiency

#### **Action 6: Revise the ordinances governing the Certificates of Appropriateness process to improve efficiency and customer service.**

The current Certificates of Appropriateness review process prevents both the Landmark Commission and Office of Historic Preservation staff from being as proactive, innovative, or impactful as they have the potential to be. Currently, OHP staff work exclusively on preparing materials for Landmark Commission hearings, primarily on applications for Certificates of Appropriateness. This leaves the department with no capacity to administer education and empowerment programming, community engagement, or strategic planning that would proactively preserve cultural resources and best serve communities.

Existing ordinances are due for review to ensure that the processes they create are effectively serving today's residents of Dallas. Current processes have led to long wait times and frustration for residents of Landmark Historic Districts, while also preventing the Office from serving Dallas residents that live outside of those districts.

The first step in addressing this issue is modifying the City ordinance language to clearly define the parameters of an efficient review process and the roles of landmark commissioners and OHP Staff in that process.

#### **Implementation**

The City Manager must direct OHP Staff to begin the code amendment process, conducting necessary best-practice research on ordinances governing historic preservation in other cities to draft proposed changes to relevant sections of the Development Code. Particular attention should be given to the ordinances outlining the purview of the Landmark Commission and processes governing Historic Overlay Districts.

To address the urgent need for improved efficiency, these draft changes should complete the City Plan Commission (CPC) and Landmark Commission (LMC) public hearing, review, and recommendation process by Spring of 2023, so that they may come before City Council for approval by Summer of 2023.

#### **Action 7: Conduct updated Citywide historic resources surveys, with particular attention to rapidly changing neighborhoods.**

OHP staff encounter continuous efficiency and efficacy challenges due to the lack of up-to-date data on the City's historic resources.

Updated data on historic resources in rapidly changing neighborhoods will improve the efficacy of the demolition delay program in identifying at-risk properties and neighborhoods, ensuring that assets of exceptional significance are preserved.

**Implementation:**

Solicitation for proposals for survey work should occur *after* full implementation of this policy, including the recommended ordinance changes above. The City should seek vendors with a demonstrated commitment to equity and inclusion in their research and documentation of historic resources.

**Action 8: Write a strategic plan for Historic and Cultural Preservation in the City of Dallas.**

The Strategic Plan should be focused on the long-term implementation of the mission and goals laid out in this policy.

The Strategic Plan should have a strong focus on:

- A comprehensive community engagement process focused on Legacy Neighborhoods’ residents’ needs.
  - This should be conducted in collaboration with community engagement for ForwardDallas, to maximize resources, plan alignment, and data collected, while minimizing engagement fatigue.
- Alignment with other City plans and policies, including the Economic Development Policy, Incentives Policy, the Racial Equity Plan, and the Comprehensive Land Use Plan (ForwardDallas).
- New program development aligned with OHP’s mission and residents’ needs.
- Opportunities for economic development that utilize and preserve cultural capital and historic assets.

**Implementation:**

Solicitation for proposals for survey work should occur *after* full implementation of this policy, including the recommended ordinance changes above. The City should seek vendors with a strong focus on community engagement, education, and empowerment, and attention to the preservation of culturally and ethnically diverse resources.

**Improving Accessibility**

**Action 9: Develop a streamlined, user-friendly digital platform that increases process transparency and automation.**

A crucial first step in clarifying the role of the Office of Historic Preservation to the public and making the Office’s services more accessible is establishing a strong web presence. The Office’s website should allow users to quickly navigate to the Office’s programmatic offerings (Legacy Neighborhoods Resources, Public Workshops, etc.) and regulatory services (certificate of appropriateness application, etc.) Having this information easily accessible and available in multiple languages will increase efficiency by reducing the amount of staff time spent on customer service and resource navigation.

**Implementation:**

The following changes should be prioritized:

- Update the Office of Historic Preservation’s website with new language consistent with the Office’s mission and role in the larger equitable development and growth of Dallas.
- Develop a page for the Legacy Neighborhoods Program that includes:
  - Information on how to pursue designation for your neighborhood
  - A form to request an information session for community organizations and groups to learn about the program
  - A form for Legacy Neighborhood residents to access resources
- Launch an online application portal that improves processing efficiency for staff and applicants, including automatically generated milestone tracking, status change email updates, and required attachments.

**Action 10: Improve public education and empowerment offerings.**

Partner with community-based organizations in historic districts and legacy neighborhoods to host regular “Preservation Academy” workshops that provide residents with the tools, trust, and comfort they need to navigate approvals processes and utilize resources that OHP offers. Similar planning Academies and Preservation Academies hosted by City departments have had great success in cities such as San Antonio and Baltimore.<sup>5</sup>

Produce all materials in English and Spanish and have translation services available at all events.

**Implementation:**

- OHP Staff should convene community engagement counterparts in the Office of Cultural Affairs, the Office of Equity and Inclusion, and Planning and Urban Design to create a list of relevant community-based organizations, with a focus on those located in Legacy Neighborhoods.
- OHP Leadership should create a plan for developing relationships with these new preservation stakeholders in preparation for upcoming planning processes.
- OHP Staff should produce an engaging short Preservation Academy curriculum that can be easily integrated into existing community meetings.
  - All materials, presentations, and brochures should be available in English, Spanish, and any other relevant languages.
  - Translation services should be available at all events.

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<sup>5</sup> [Baltimore Planning Academy](#)

## Appendices

### Appendix A:

Relevant Ordinance Language for Action 2: Ensure that criteria for landmark commissioner appointment and historic district and landmark designation are inclusive and reflective of the City's values as laid out in the Racial Equity Plan.

#### **Current Landmark Commissioner Criteria, [Sec. 51A-3.101](#):**

"All members must have demonstrated experience in historic preservation and outstanding interest in the historic traditions of the city and have knowledge and demonstrated experience in the fields of history, art, architecture, architectural history, urban history, city planning, urban design, historic real estate development, or historic preservation."<sup>6</sup>

#### **Current Historic District Criteria, [Sec. 51A-4.501](#):**

Establishment of historic overlay districts. A historic overlay district may be established to preserve places and areas of historical, cultural, or architectural importance and significance if the place or area has three or more of the following characteristics:

- (1) History, heritage and culture: Represents the historical development, ethnic heritage or cultural characteristics of the city, state, or country.
- (2) Historic event: Location as or association with the site of a significant historic event.
- (3) Significant persons: Identification with a person or persons who significantly contributed to the culture and development of the city, state, or country.
- (4) Architecture: Embodiment of distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style, landscape design, method of construction, exceptional craftsmanship, architectural innovation, or contains details which represent folk or ethnic art.
- (5) Architect or master builder: Represents the work of an architect, designer or master builder whose individual work has influenced the development of the city, state, or country.
- (6) Historic context: Relationship to other distinctive buildings, sites, or areas which are eligible for preservation based on historic, cultural, or architectural characteristics.
- (7) Unique visual feature: Unique location of singular physical characteristics representing an established and familiar visual feature of a neighborhood, community or the city that is a source of pride or cultural significance.

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<sup>6</sup> Dallas City Code, [Section 51A-3.101](#). Landmark Commission.

(8) Archaeological: Archaeological or paleontological value in that it has produced or can be expected to produce data affecting theories of historic or prehistoric interest.

(9) National and state recognition: Eligible for or designated as a National Historic Landmark, Recorded Texas Historic Landmark, State Archeological Landmark, American Civil Engineering Landmark, or eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places.

(10) Historic education: Represents an era of architectural, social, or economic history that allows an understanding of how the place or area was used by past generations.”