

Minutes, HNA/Local Historic District Meeting, March 7, 2019, 7 p.m., Hyde Park Presbyterian Church Parish Hall

After closure of the HNA meeting on Mar 7, 2019, the Local Historic District (LHD) Special meeting of the Hancock Neighborhood Association was called to order. The purpose of the meeting was to provide information from the City about LHDs in general and to update HNA members and residents of the Hancock area on progress made on the LHD initiative. Jetta Todaro, member of the LHD Subcommittee, facilitated the meeting.

Ms Todaro welcomed attendees, introduced LHD Subcommittee members, and reminded attendees of the purpose of the initiative: to explore the feasibility of an historic district within the neighborhood; and to gauge interest in an LHD among residents and property owners. Ms. Todaro reviewed activities of the subcommittee over the last year since the subcommittee's formation:

A letter from Mark Harkrider, HNA president, about the LHD initiative was mailed to all property owners within the boundaries of the Hancock neighborhood in early 2018 informing them about the initiative. Those boundaries are Duval St on the west to frontage road of IH 35 on the east; E. 45th St on the north to E. 32nd St on the south.

A website devoted to the initiative and relevant information was created last year by volunteers. A reconnaissance survey combined with a windshield survey have been ongoing by volunteers under the supervision of a qualified preservation specialist since last summer. Such initial survey work serves to identify concentrations of historic buildings within a neighborhood and gather information about periods of development of the neighborhood and the range of architectural styles present in the area. Ms Todaro invited attendees to fill out Interest Cards placed on chairs to volunteer for the proposed LHD initiative, she reminded all to watch the LHD website and she called attention to the website section for photographs and house histories, urging attendees to add the stories of their homes to the growing list.

Ms Todaro recognized Jen and Coan Dillahunty, members of the subcommittee, for creating the LHD website, Terri Myers, member of the subcommittee, for heading up the initial survey work, and volunteers for performing it.

Ms Todaro introduced speakers for the program:

Cara Bertron, Deputy Preservation Officer of the COA and Terri Myers, Hancock resident, member of the LHD subcommittee and of the COA Historic Landmark Commission.

Cara Bertron gave a 15-minute presentation via Power Point. Readers are encouraged to view the program at www.hancocklhd.com

Cara concluded her presentation stating that the City is working with a group of citizens to create citywide design standards for future LHDs in Austin. She added that the City also will hire a consultant to perform a survey of several areas in Austin including the Hancock area. The survey is called the North Loop-Hancock-Upper Boggy Creek Survey Area. Completion date of the survey is currently unknown but the City will keep us informed of progress.

Terri Myers then presented preliminary findings of the reconnaissance and windshield surveys.

The team looked at age (50 years or older?) of the main buildings (or bridges, landscape elements, sites) and some secondary resources (garage apartments) visible from the right-of-way. The team also looked at architectural integrity for each resource. The National Park Service identifies seven aspects of integrity that should be present for a resource (bridge landscape element or site) to be considered "contributing" to a district. The seven are:

Integrity of location: is the resource in its original or historic-period location or has it been moved to the site since 1969?

Of setting: does the resource lie in a setting similar to that of the historic period? Still in the same neighborhood? Has the original neighborhood been redeveloped as a commercial or industrial zone?

Of design: does it retain all or most of its original design and character-defining features (roof form and pitch, porch, window and door patterns, etc)?

Of materials: does it retain all or most of its original materials, whether wood, brick, stucco, etc., or have they been replaced with modern materials?

Of workmanship: does it retain its original or historic level of quality of workmanship?

Of association: does it still convey its residential character?

Of feeling: does it still convey a good sense of history?

Preliminary survey results:

Ms Myers said that results show the neighborhood is overwhelmingly residential in character and has much historic fabric dating from multiple decades of the 20th century. Commercial redevelopment is occurring along some boundaries of the neighborhood. The neighborhood exhibits a variety of architectural styles and likely could meet the required 51% contributing houses to qualify for application as a local historic district. She also pointed out several areas within the neighborhood where concentrations of historic buildings exist. There is much history here, she concluded, also emphasizing that the survey results are preliminary.

Questions following the presentations:

Question: Could the Hancock Golf Course be part of a local historic district if it has historic components (like the recreation center)?

Answer: Yes. It would be counted as a contributing property and can be included in a district. When it comes to voting whether to support the district, Per City Code, the "amount of property to be calculated as supporting (a local historic district) shall not exceed one-third of 51% of land in the proposed district." Any area within the neighborhood applying for district status must be adjacent to the golf course in order to claim it as part of its district.

Question: If surveys do not find that 51% of buildings are considered contributing, can an application for district status later be appealed?

Answer: The City does not accept an application that lacks 51% contributing houses.

Question: How does one decide whether to go for smaller sections of an area for district status, or for larger sections?

Answer: The decision is neighborhood-driven. From the professional perspective, some recommend a small-parcel approach while others recommend a larger-parcel approach. For this neighborhood, a case could be made for tackling a larger area. The decision comes down to property owners' desires.

Question: What about non-resident property owners?

Answer: Non-resident property owners must be contacted about a potential district. There may be concern on their part about an LHD which is why it is important to provide information and education

about the impact of a district. The LHD design standards will make it very difficult to demolish contributing buildings in a district. And, in general ways, the Standards will impact design for new construction. (ADUs can still be constructed in LHDs, as under current code, but, the Standards, for example, would require placement at back or rear-back of contributing properties, back from the street view of the house.)

Question: If 51% sign on in favor of a district, do others in same area have to be included?

Answer: Yes. A historic district must be contiguous with no “donut hole” cutouts. There will be public hearings for any district application after the application is accepted by the City with multiple opportunities to make one's voice heard at the Historic Landmark Commission, Planning Commission, and Council. Notification by the City is required to all property owners before each hearing.

Question: Can non-contributing property owners vote FOR a local historic district?

Answer: Yes, and many have done so in other Austin LHDs.

Question: A lot of historical research must be done for the local historic district application. Who does this?

Answer: A consultant can be hired to do it. Volunteers can do it, or the two can collaborate on the research.

Question: What next?

Answer: The LHD Committee is developing a plan of action.

We will continue to assess interest in the neighborhood and to talk to neighbors. Considerations:

- how to approach design standards relative to the City's effort to create citywide standards;
- determine whether and, if so, how to mesh with the City's plan to hire a consultant to survey the North-Loop-Hancock-Upper Boggy Creek Survey Area;
- determine whether to start with a small area and expand to others if there is interest;
- decide what communication materials to prepare to make residents and non-resident property owners aware of the effort and what opportunities to provide for participation.

These and additional questions will be added to the HNA developing FAQ.

Submitted by the Hancock Local Historic District Committee. 3.18.2019