

Historic Preservation and the City of Round Rock

The City of Round Rock was founded in the 1840s where the Chisholm Trail crosses Brushy Creek, at the area now known as “Old Town.” In 1876, many of the businesses and residents moved to the current downtown area (“New Town”) when the railroad extended its tracks there.

Since then, the City has grown steadily. As it grows, the City of Round Rock works with owners of older and historic properties to encourage maintenance and upkeep, as well as retention of the historic character of buildings, structures, sites, and districts.

Within the City government, primary responsibility for historic preservation rests with the Department of Planning and Community Development and the Historic Preservation Commission.

Members of the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) are appointed by City Council. The HPC is charged with preserving, protecting, and promoting the City’s historical resources.

The HPC works with the Planning and Community Development Department to administer and enforce the City Ordinances that involve historic preservation.

The Department of Planning and Community Development manages the City’s historic preservation programs. These include:

- Advising property owners who want to renovate historic buildings
- City-wide preservation planning
- Maintaining an inventory of historic properties
- Designating local landmarks and historic districts
- Managing a property tax exemption program available to historic property owners
- Educating the public about Round Rock’s history and the City’s preservation programs

Preserving Historic Properties through Local Landmark Designation

According to the National Trust for Historic Preservation and the Texas Historical Commission, any building that is more than 50 years old is considered “historic.”

The City of Round Rock strives to preserve areas and properties that are architecturally, culturally, or historically significant through historic designation.

The City Code of Ordinances allows for the designation of areas or properties that are architecturally, culturally, or historically significant.

An historic property may be designated either individually, as a local landmark, or as part of an historic district. This is accomplished through the addition of Historic Overlay Zoning to the property.

Benefits of Historic Preservation

The preservation of historic buildings and sites is good for the community as a whole and for individual property owners.

Research studies by numerous states and cities have shown that:

- Fewer resources are typically required to renovate an historic building than to build a new one of comparable quality.
- Improving energy efficiency in an existing building is far less expensive than tearing it down and constructing a new “green” building.
- Historic preservation activities create more jobs and more local economic activity than new construction. (Rehabilitating an historic building is labor-intensive, while new construction is materials-intensive.)
- Historic designations boost and help to support stable property values.

Preserving the character of the historic built environment enhances the quality of life in Round Rock and helps to attract new residents and businesses to the City.

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City of Round Rock

Historic Preservation Programs



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City of Round Rock Historic Preservation Programs

The Department of Planning and Community Development and the Historic Preservation Commission administer a variety of programs and activities to encourage the preservation of the City's historic built environment.

Inventory of Historic Properties

In 1992, the City of Round Rock conducted a survey of historic properties and collected information about the building types, dates of construction, materials used, architectural styles, etc. This inventory of historic properties provides valuable information about neighborhoods and individual buildings and can be used to suggest potential local landmarks or historic districts. The City plans to update this inventory in the future.



Downtown Round Rock, circa 1890

City Preservation Plans and Goals for Historic Preservation

The responsibilities of the Department of Planning and Community Development include planning for both the growth of the City and the preservation of historic buildings and sites.

The Planning and Community Development Department works with the Historic Preservation Commission to achieve the HPC's goals:

- **Preservation:** Continue efforts to increase the number of historic designations within the community and maintain a close watch over the historic integrity of Historic Overlay properties.
- **Public Education:** Increase public awareness of historic preservation and the history of Round Rock.
- **Heritage Tourism:** Work with the Chamber of Commerce and the Convention and Visitors Bureau to improve tourism through historic preservation.
- **Community Partnerships:** Establish partnerships with business and community organizations supporting preservation efforts. Strengthen ties with state and county historical commissions.

Local Landmarks and Historic Districts

The City of Round Rock Code of Ordinances allows for the designation of individual properties as local landmarks or groups of properties as historic districts. These designations are created through the addition of Historic Overlay Zoning.

Historic Overlay Zoning may be added to a building, an entire property (land and buildings), or a portion of the property. The addition of Overlay Zoning does not change the base zoning on the property.

Historic designation of a property or district is voluntary and requires the consent of the property owner(s).

After an application process that includes recommendations by the Historic Preservation Commission and Planning & Zoning Commission and approval by City Council, the Historic Overlay Zoning for that property is adopted as an ordinance.

Once a property becomes a local landmark or part of a designated historic district, its Historic Overlay Zoning transfers with the sale of the property.

If someone is considering buying a property and wants to know if it has Historic Overlay Zoning, they can contact the Planning and Development Services Department to confirm the property's zoning. Only those properties designated with Historic Overlay Zoning are subject to local landmark regulations as specified in the Code of Ordinances.

Buildings that are designated as Recorded Texas Historic Landmarks by the Texas Historical Commission or listed on the National Register of Historic Places are not regulated by the City of Round Rock unless they are also designated with Historic Overlay Zoning.

For more information, please visit the Historic Preservation section of the City website: www.roundrocktexas.gov or call the Department of Planning and Development Services: 512-218-5428.

For information about the National Register or Recorded Texas Historical Landmarks, contact the Texas Historical Commission: www.thc.state.tx.us

Partial Property Tax Exemption for Historically Significant Sites

Owners of historic properties may be eligible for an exemption of City property tax through a special program that offers property owners a savings that they can then use to maintain and repair their historic buildings.

In order to qualify, the property must contain at least one manmade structure (no vacant lots). Properties with Historic Overlay Zoning are automatically eligible to apply to the program, but properties without Historic Overlay Zoning may also qualify.

The structure must either have been constructed before 1900 or be architecturally, historically, or culturally significant. Criteria for documenting a building's significance is available from the Planning and Community Development Department.

Participation in this program does not result in the addition of Historic Overlay Zoning to the property.

Participation in the program requires property owners to apply in April each year. The building is then inspected by the Historic Preservation Commission and Planning staff and any maintenance needs are noted. If an application is approved for the tax exemption, any maintenance needs must be corrected within the next year.

Approved participants receive an exemption of 75% of City property tax. In recent years, the average property tax savings was nearly \$1,000.



I. & G. N. Railroad depot, circa 1900.