



MOVING HISTORIC RESOURCES:  
CONSIDERATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS  
IN THE CITY OF ROUND ROCK, TEXAS

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This report, for Phase III of an Historic Resources Survey project for the Downtown Master Plan area, outlines a program and ordinance that would enable the relocation of designated historic resources within the City of Round Rock as an alternative to demolition or removal.

Relocating historic buildings is considered to be a last resort for their preservation. However, in the recent past, several historic buildings have been moved out of Round Rock to infill neighborhoods in nearby cities, and the Historic Resources Survey project has identified several potential designated historic resources that might be threatened by the redevelopment of West Main Street envisioned in the City's Downtown Master Plan.

A subcommittee of City Council and Historic Preservation Commission members met in February 2012 with historic preservation consultant Steph McDougal; Joelle Jordan, Department of Development and Planning Services; City attorney Charlie Crossfield; and building official Mark Remmert. This group determined that the City should create a program and ordinance to enable and manage the relocation of designated historic resources within Round Rock.

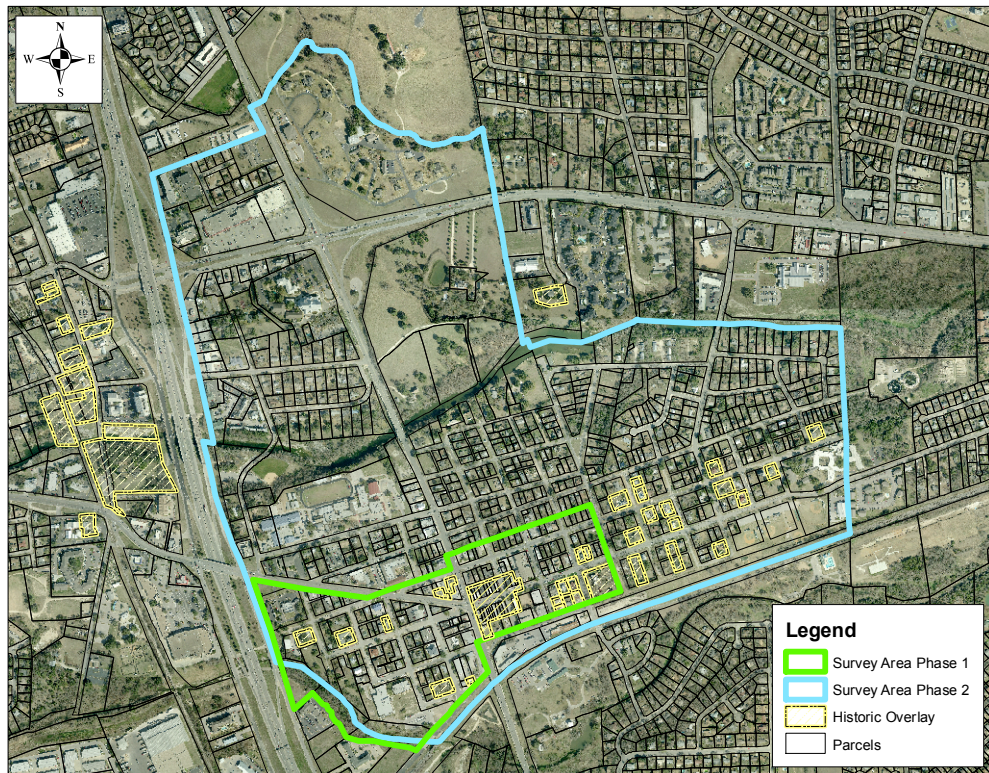
This Phase III report outlines the methodology and outcomes of the subcommittee meetings and the resulting program recommendations, criteria for considering relocation applications, and recommended ordinance amendments.

A separate Resource Document has been prepared with helpful background and reference information, as well as a summary of each of the three subcommittee meetings.

## INTRODUCTION

In 2010, the City of Round Rock commissioned a two-part historic resources survey for the area within the boundaries of its new Downtown Master Plan. The purpose of the survey was to identify those properties eligible to be considered for designation as Local Landmarks or Historic Districts, prior to the City's planned redevelopment of the downtown area.

The map below shows the Downtown Master Plan area outlined in blue. Phase I of the survey focused on the downtown commercial core and Southwest Downtown area.



*Map of Downtown Master Plan Area (outlined in blue) and Phase I Survey area (outlined in green.)*

During the Phase I survey process, seven properties were recommended for designation as Local Landmarks, understanding that, due to their location on West Main Street, they could be moved. These properties are 211, 212, 304, 306, 308, and 403 West Main and 210 Round Rock Ave.

The Downtown Master Plan area, Phase I survey area, and recommended “Preserve and Move” properties are shown on the following page.

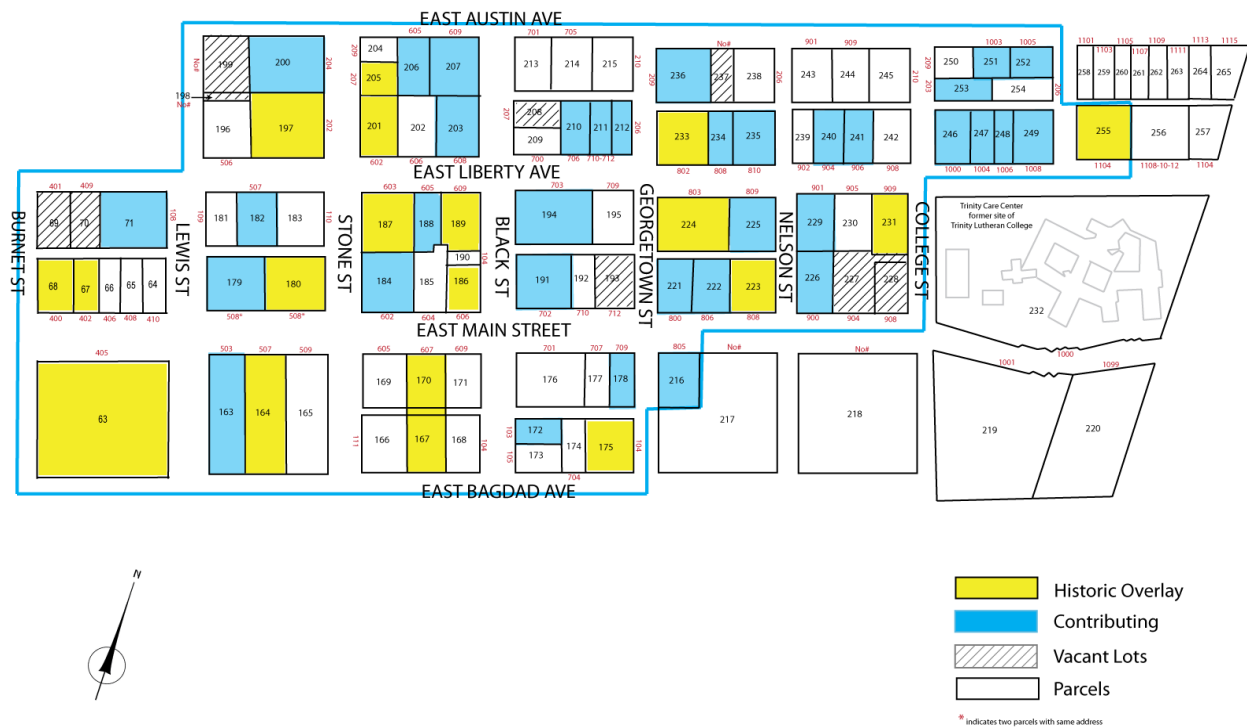


*Map of the Phase I survey area, with seven recommended “Preserve and Move” properties highlighted.*

During Phase II of the survey, the East End neighborhood, which includes many of the City’s existing designated historic resources, was identified as a potential new Historic District and, if designated, would become the City’s first residential historic district. Houses moved out of the Phase I survey area could be relocated to vacant lots in the proposed East End district.

In an historic district, properties are classified as either Contributing or Non-Contributing. “Contributing” properties are those that add to the historical or architectural qualities that make the district, as a whole, significant and therefore worthy of designation. Please note that all properties within an historic district – both Contributing and Non-Contributing – would be regulated by Historic (H) Overlay zoning, in order to preserve the character of the district as a whole.

The map on the following page shows the proposed East End Historic District boundaries. Current designated historic resources are colored yellow, while properties which would be Contributing to the District are shown in blue. Vacant lots, which could serve as potential locations for designated historic resources moved out of the Phase I survey area, are shaded with diagonal lines.



*Proposed East End Historic District.*

The Historic Preservation Commission, Planning & Zoning Commission, and City Council have approved the adoption of the Phase I and Phase II survey reports to be used in the implementation of the Downtown Master Plan. Adopting the reports did not obligate the City to designate properties recommended as potential designated historic resources in the reports, nor did it specifically address whether the City would approve any sort of “Preserve and Move” activity.

The existing Historic Preservation Ordinance includes a process for property owners to apply for a Certificate of Appropriateness for demolition or removal of exterior elements, but no option for relocating a designated historic resource.

In the past, several historic houses have been removed from Round Rock to infill historic neighborhoods in Georgetown and Austin’s Hyde Park neighborhood. Other designated historic resources have been demolished (e.g., the Adams Garage) or have undergone the removal of architecturally significant features (e.g., the Spanish Eclectic house at 106 West Bagdad).

The removal of a designated historic resource from the City is considered a “demolition” for the purposes of the Historic Preservation Ordinance because, once removed, the designated historic resource is no longer affected by the Historic (H) Overlay zoning and the City has no jurisdiction over its preservation.

The Historic Preservation Ordinance enables the City to add Historic (H) Overlay zoning to all or part of a property, including all or part of an historic resource, in order to designate it as a Local Landmark. However, the ordinance does not currently enable the Overlay to transfer with the historic resource if it is relocated to a new site; therefore, any removal of a designated historic resource from its original lot, even if moved within the City, does not move the Overlay with the resource, which removes the City's ability to manage the relocated Landmark's preservation.

Were the City to adopt a program and ordinance to enable the relocation of a designated historic resource along with its Historic (H) Overlay zoning within the City limits, it would then retain the ability to manage that resource for the benefit of the community. During the Phase I survey process, several City officials acknowledged the need to further explore this topic.

In order to assess the potential for a Landmark Relocation program, a subcommittee of City Council and Historic Preservation Commission members met in February 2012. Subcommittee members included Council members John Moman and Kris Whitfield, and Historic Preservation Commission members Jerry Hodges and Billy Huggins. The Phase III subcommittee met three times to discuss this proposed program and the criteria presented below. City Attorney Charlie Crossfield and Building Official Mark Remmert also took part in the meetings. By the end of the third meeting, the group reached consensus regarding:

- The value of such a program for the City of Round Rock
- The need for the City to establish such a program
- The criteria that would be required to be met before a Designated historic resource could be relocated
- How a relocated designated historic resource would be treated for the purposes of zoning in general, and the Historic Overlay specifically
- How the existing Historic Preservation Ordinance would be changed to make the program possible
- What incentives, if any, the City could provide to encourage relocation rather than demolition

Reports summarizing each of the three meetings, and the background information made available to the Phase III subcommittee during their discussions, are provided in the Phase III Resource Document.

## CONCERNS FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION

Historic houses are most commonly relocated:

- When they are threatened. Buildings are moved when they are architecturally or historically significant and also threatened in some way – by development, such as highway construction or the expansion of a hospital complex, or by natural processes, such as flooding or erosion along a riverbank or coastline.

- When the cost to move is less than the cost to build. All around the United States, property owners often offer to transfer ownership of houses for no or low cost if the new owner will move them to another lot. This type of arrangement can result in a significant savings for the buyer and the seller.
- When a vacant lot exists in an historic neighborhood and historically/architecturally appropriate infill is desired. Many cities have used this type of activity to revitalize historic districts, particularly those that previously have been distressed and, as a result, have lost historic building fabric. For example, houses are regularly moved in and out of National Historic Landmark historic districts in Galveston, Texas.

However, the relocation of an historic building should be considered only as a last resort. Moving a building from its original location strips the building of its setting and context, both of which are important elements of historic significance. In addition, original materials are often removed or damaged during a move, and this also adversely affects the building's architectural and historical significance.

This Historic Resources Survey Project is funded in part by a Certified Local Government (CLG) grant. The Texas Historical Commission, which administers CLG grants, has expressed strong reservations about using this funding to create a program that makes possible the relocation of historic buildings.

To address the State's concerns regarding these issues, City staff determined that any preservation ordinance language that deals with moving designated historic resources, or relocating buildings into or out of a designated historic district, should specify:

- The circumstances under which such relocations would and would not be allowed.
- Whether existing designations would or would not apply after a move.
- Any documentation of the building/property that would be required before, during, and after the move, such as Historic American Building Survey (HABS) Level III. (See the Phase III Resource Document for more information about HABS documentation.)
- How other parts of the preservation ordinance would be applied to the building. For example, a building moved into an historic district would be required to meet existing historic design guidelines.
- How a relocated building will be identified so that its previous location and reason for relocation are made known, such as through interpretive signage and information in City or County records.

## PROPOSED CRITERIA FOR RELOCATING A DESIGNATED HISTORIC RESOURCE

Although Phase III was triggered by the identification of potential designated historic resources in the Phase I Survey Area, which could be designated and then relocated, any program or ordinance resulting from Phase III would be enacted City-wide.

The following criteria for relocation were developed for the purposes of inclusion in an ordinance that would allow a Certificate of Appropriateness for relocation. An amendment to the existing historic preservation ordinance would be required in order to incorporate a relocation process and criteria for consideration.

These criteria are based on common methods used in the historic preservation community to mitigate the potential for adverse effects when historic resources are threatened. They were initially compiled by Ms. McDougal, then revised by the subcommittee after lengthy discussion.

If an ordinance creating a process for the relocation of a designated historic resource were to be adopted, relocation would be considered when:

- There is a compelling reason for the proposed relocation, such as infrastructure improvements, and in situations where relocation of a designated historic resource is determined to be the best option, instead of demolition or removal.
- The project that would cause the proposed relocation of a designated historic resource primarily and directly benefits the City of Round Rock and its residents. The preservation of Round Rock's historic resources constitutes a public benefit, so any threat to those resources should only be permitted for the purpose of other public projects, rather than a project that primarily benefits a private individual(s).
- All reasonable alternatives have been explored to mitigate the threat to the historic resource, and no other option is viable.
- The public has been given the opportunity to comment on the proposed relocation project, and their input has been considered and, to the extent possible, incorporated into the proposed relocation project plan.
- The designated historic resource would be kept within the City of Round Rock. (In order for the City to continue to regulate the designated historic resource, it must remain within the City and protected by Historic (H) Overlay zoning.)

Any approved relocation of a designated historic resource would require the following conditions:

- The building would be sited in its new location in a way that reflects its original setting and is compatible with the density and setback of the neighborhood into which it is being moved.



- The building would be interpreted with a permanent sign or plaque that documents its original location, the date of its relocation, and the purpose for the relocation.
- The building and the originating property would be documented before, during, and after the move and that documentation placed in permanent City records.
- The building owner agrees to maintain liability insurance for the building while it is vacant prior to and following the move. The owner would also secure the building against vandalism, theft, fire, inclement weather, etc. as soon as it becomes vacant and following the moving process until it is once again occupied.

Should all of these conditions be met and approval be granted to relocate a designated historic resource, the following would apply:

- The Historic (H) Overlay would convey with the resource to its new location.
- If a designated historic resource is relocated and that relocation has not been approved in advance, it would be treated as a demolition for the purposes of the Historic Preservation Ordinance, and all applicable regulations and penalties shall apply.
- The relocated designated historic resource would be required to meet all applicable historic design guidelines and building codes. The historic resource should fit within the context of its destination area and not require exterior alteration. One or more exemptions to building siting or building design standards in the zoning code may be required in order to preserve character-defining features of the resource and the area into which the resource is being relocated. These may include, but are not limited to, setback requirements, structural alteration requirements (such as enclosed parking), and architectural requirements (such as exterior finishes and orientation). In order to exempt these requirements, the relocated designated historic resource would need to be identified as a legally non-conforming structure. These exemptions would only apply to the relocated resource and not to any zoning use restrictions associated with the lot on which the resource is relocated.
- Information regarding the relocation would be filed in the appropriate City and County records.

## INCENTIVES

The City may elect to provide incentives and/or assistance to encourage the relocation of Designated historic resources that are threatened with demolition. The subcommittee agreed that, if an ordinance permitting the relocation of designated historic resources is adopted, the City should offer incentives including:



- Waiver of City moving permit fees and/or building permit fees.
- Payment of the cost of public notice signs and mailings associated with a relocation Certificate of Appropriateness application.
- Payment of the cost of the required interpretive sign or plaque.
- Assistance to market a Landmark that is available for relocation.

Other incentives were discussed by the subcommittee but are not currently proposed for inclusion in an ordinance amendment at this time. These are:

- **Redirected demolition costs.** If the City purchased a property in order to redevelop it — for example, along Main Street — and wished to encourage the relocation of a house on that property as an alternative to demolition, the City might offer to apply the cost of demolition to the relocation instead, providing an incentive for buyers or developers. (The cost to demolish a building is approximately \$6–15 per square foot, depending on the presence of asbestos.)
- **Financing options.** Many cities provide low-interest loans or grants to assist in the rehabilitation of historic properties. This approach could be applied to relocation-and-rehab as well.
- **Assistance with applications for Federal historic tax incentives.** These incentives, which are only available for properties that have been listed on the National Register of Historic Places, provide an income tax credit of up to 20% of the cost of rehab for income-producing properties or affordable housing.
- **Providing for architectural salvage.** Houses that are slated for demolition could be made available for salvage by a reputable contractor. The City, a non-profit, or an entrepreneur could open a temporary salvage warehouse in order to make irreplaceable materials from demolished houses available for rehabbers. This could also provide a stream of revenue to offset some of the costs of demolition and/or relocation.
- **Partnership with a non-profit.** Local governments often partner with non-profit organizations to facilitate a housing relocation and rehab project. If property owners donate their houses to a non-profit organization, the IRS recommends that a gift worth more than \$5,000 by the owner's valuation should have a third party appraisal by object/art appraiser, not a real estate appraiser, in order to generate a correct Fair Market Value that will be accepted by the IRS.

## CONCLUSION

To complete Phase III, the Round Rock Historic Preservation Commission, Planning and Zoning Commission, and City Council will consider the following recommendations in Spring 2012:

- Adopt the Phase III Report and Resource Document.
- Amend the Historic Preservation Ordinance to include a section on relocation, similar to the existing section for Certificates of Appropriateness for demolition.
- Include in the amended Historic Preservation Ordinance a provision to offer financial incentives and assistance as described in this report.