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Summary of Comments on HPP-MARKUP.pdf

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HISTORY OF PRESERVATION IN CORPUS CHRISTI

Over the years, Corpus Christi has commissioned numerous plans for the improvement of downtown and the preservation of historic buildings. Few of those plans have been realized. The following timeline attempts to make clear the work that has been done.

- 1963 1963 Corpus Christi Area Heritage Society forms to save the Britton-Evans (Centennial) House.
- 1974 City adopts its first historic preservation ordinance.
- 1975 City seeks public input for “local sites considered worth saving.”
¹~~League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) offers to improve then dilapidated Artesian Park and add a bandstand, fountain, and markers commemorating the contributions of Hispanic citizens. Landmark Commission chair Dr. Richard Marcum opposes that plan, implies that LULAC is trying to destroy (white Anglo) history, and states that “Spanish history” is already well known to everyone in Corpus Christi and LULAC can go build a Mexican museum somewhere else (Caller Times, October 27, 1975). Ultimately, City Council turns down proposal for “LULAC Plaza at Artesian Park” (Caller Times, November 17, 1975). The Landmark Commission then attempts to designate Artesian Park as a local landmark, which the Planning Commission rejects because “the Landmark Commission has been seeking (this) as a way to block a LULAC effort to make improvements in the park” (Caller Times, December 9-10, 1975). No other sites were recommended for designation at this time. Artesian Park was eventually designated as a local landmark in 1999.~~
- 1976 City creates its first Landmark Preservation Plan, which initially attempts to give Landmark Commission the authority to landmark not just buildings but natural resources, open land, and nearly everything in Corpus Christi. Planning Commission refuses to allow Landmark Commission to have the authority to designate a property over the owner’s wishes.
- 1977 County offices move out of the 1914 Nueces County Courthouse, beginning decades of vacancy and deterioration for that building.
- 1979 City agrees to acquire and maintain the Sidbury, Lichtenstein, and Gugenheim Houses on Chaparral Street if private groups will raise the money to restore them.
- 1981 City hires Chicago planner Robert Grossman and local architect James Rome to survey potential historic landmarks and districts. They identify Old Irishtown, containing about 60 “noteworthy” buildings – mostly 19th-century wood-frame houses – as one of three potential historic districts downtown, along with the Blucherville and South Upper Broadway areas. Potential residential historic districts include South Bluff Park, Furman Avenue, and Cole Park/Del Mar, as well as Hispanic neighborhoods on the Westside.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INPUT


This data-driven, community-driven planning process has produced recommendations that reflect the wishes of Corpus Christians who chose to participate in it. We recognize that those nearly 800 individuals, although statistically representative of the larger City population in terms of raw numbers, do not proportionally reflect the diversity of Corpus Christi. Specifically, participation in the community opinion survey was relatively low for people who consider themselves Hispanic/not White, and for African Americans. ~~The City will need to continue to engage with the Black and Mexican American communities to build trust, encourage participation, and demonstrate that diverse voices are being heard and those ideas and opinions incorporated into projects, programs, and solutions.~~ One of the goals identified later in this document is a commitment to ~~seeking equity~~ ¹² historic preservation activities and results for all members of the Corpus Christi community. ~~The City should also acknowledge past actions that have been damaging to African American and Mexican American neighborhoods and take steps toward reconciliation.~~


COMMUNITY OUTREACH


In order to make the community aware of this project and encourage participation, McDoux developed a public engagement plan that included press releases, social media posts, regular information updates on the City's website (including a separate webpage just for this project), and three community meetings. The press release prior to the community opinion survey was translated into Spanish and resulted in a news segment on the local Telemundo Spanish-language television station. Promotion for the community opinion survey also included the use of the City-managed electronic billboard on the Crosstown Highway (SH 286).




Figure 3. Screenshot of Telemundo news segment featuring the Corpus Christi preservation plan (McDoux Preservation)


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<p style="text-align: center;">GOAL 1</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Build City capacity for historic preservation</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">GOAL 2</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Enable community- driven historic preservation</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">GOAL 3</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Support historic preservation as an economic development tool</p>
<p>STRATEGY 1: Hire a full-time historic preservation officer.</p>	<p>STRATEGY 6: Improve the City's historic preservation website to make information easier to find.</p>	<p>STRATEGY 11: Promote historic preservation as an economic development tool.</p>
<p>STRATEGY 2: Update the historic preservation ordinance to add Protected Landmarks and Protected Historic Districts where the Landmark Commission's decision is binding (although appealable).</p>	<p>STRATEGY 7: Improve community outreach and standardize the public engagement process.</p>	<p>STRATEGY 12: Fix the vacant building ordinance, which now encourages demolition instead of adaptive reuse. 1</p>
<p>STRATEGY 3: Update the Landmark Commission bylaws and training requirements.</p>	<p>STRATEGY 8: Support the creation of a local nonprofit organization to partner with the City, individual residents, and other organizations on preservation activities.</p>	<p>STRATEGY 13: Invest in historic resources surveys and multi-property listings to the National Register of Historic Places.</p>
<p>STRATEGY 4: Plan for disasters, including preparation, response, and recovery process, and help individuals develop and implement their own preparedness, resilience, and recovery plans.</p>	<p>STRATEGY 9: Commit to pursuing equity for all neighborhoods (new and existing) and empower residents to define what that means to them. 2</p>	<p>STRATEGY 14: Develop local tax incentive programs to support historic rehabilitation.</p>
<p>STRATEGY 5: Develop walking tours of historic areas in partnership with the City Convention and Visitors Bureau. 3</p>	<p>STRATEGY 10: Work with Nueces County Historical Commission to develop a thematic approach to new historical markers that supports heritage tourism.</p>	<p>STRATEGY 15: Develop facade improvement programs to support historic rehabilitation.</p>
		<p>STRATEGY 16: Support a few select projects to demonstrate preservation's potential to spur economic growth.</p>

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and/or repurposing.

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and Downtown Management District (DMD)

STRATEGY 7: IMPROVE COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND STANDARDIZE THE PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

The Development Services Department would benefit from having a standard process for communicating with and receiving information from the community when the department is considering making changes to historic preservation programs or ordinances. The City must take visible steps to earn and maintain the community's trust if it is to be successful in administering equitable historic preservation programs.

Trust is based on communication, transparency, and accountability, all of which are inextricably intertwined.


- Communication includes providing citizens with meaningful information that helps them make informed decisions and participate actively in policymaking. It also means reaching out to citizens whose participation may not have been welcomed in the past or who have been marginalized in other ways. ~~Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility are critical components of successful local government communication.~~
- Transparency means being responsive to citizen needs and requests, explaining how and why decisions are made, and (importantly) how public funds are being spent.
- Accountability includes being willing to admit mistakes, publicly discuss lessons learned and policy adjustments going forward, and take action to avoid repeating those mistakes in the future.


In many cities, public planning efforts, changes to the Code of Ordinances, the development of new programs, etc., involve meaningful public participation. While the Community Opinion Survey for this project garnered an impressive 752 responses, even more community members might have participated if they were accustomed to being engaged.


All of the activities outlined in this plan should follow a consistent public engagement strategy that both pushes information out to the community and seeks to collect feedback, input, suggestions, concerns, complaints, etc.

For example, whenever the City wishes to start a new program or make changes to the historic preservation ordinance or an existing program, it should employ a robust and transparent community engagement effort that includes:

- Regular meetings with the Landmark Commission, Planning Commission, and City Council to discuss the process and status
- At least three public meetings, livestreamed and recorded for later viewing at citizens' convenience
- If possible, additional meetings with neighborhoods, downtown property owners and businesses, civic groups, etc.
- Letters to property owners in historic areas, explaining the process and how individuals can participate
- A traditional, digital, and social media campaign to make citizens aware of the project and process, and to give them the opportunity to get involved

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included

- Sufficient time for the community to review proposed programs/project deliverables and provide comments; a transparent reporting of all comments (compiled and anonymized) with response or action taken for each comment
- A final report and presentation to the Landmark Commission, Planning Commission, and City Council detailing the community engagement process, general trends in comments received, changes made as a result of citizen comments, etc.

ACTION ITEMS

23. Budget for more community engagement activities when a project will have a direct effect on individual property owners. For example, if the City wants to change an ordinance, as recommended in this plan, that process should be highly community-oriented and give property owners the ability to participate in and shape the results.

24. Seek input from members of diverse communities on how best to reach them.

25. Work with the Corpus Christi Literacy Council to ensure that information is accessible to people who are not functionally literate (able to read at a sixth-grade level or higher).

Historic preservation should be accessible for everyone.

RESPONSIBLE PERSONS

Historic Preservation Officer


RESOURCES REQUIRED


Funding for outreach activities

PRIOR PRESERVATION ACTIVITY REQUIRED

Strategy 6: Improve the City's historic preservation website.

Strategy 9: Pursue equity ¹ for underrepresented communities. ²

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areas

STRATEGY 9: PURSUE EQUITY FOR UNDERREPRESENTED COMMUNITIES

Historic preservation has traditionally focused on high-style architecture associated with wealthy White/Anglo men. In recent years, preservation professionals have increasingly sought to rectify that imbalance and Tell the Full Story of our nation, states, and cities. In Corpus Christi today, only five of the city's 40 designated properties are associated with Mexican Americans, and only one (the Littles-Martin House) is associated with African Americans. No landmarks associated with Native American or Asian resources have been designated. In part, this is due to the redevelopment of non-White/Anglo neighborhoods during the past century.

- Corpus Christi's early Mexican American buildings were largely replaced during the mid-1900s by architecture in styles popular with "Anglo" (English-speaking European) Texans. Many working-class Hispanic people today are concentrated in Westside neighborhoods that lack the same level of public amenities and infrastructure improvements found in newer Southside subdivisions.
- The City's African American residents were first segregated in the Northside neighborhoods of Hillcrest and Washington Coles, and then systematically displaced from those communities by transportation projects (ship channel, railroads, highways, the Harbor Bridge) and industrial expansion. Hillcrest has since been further decimated by the location of the New Harbor Bridge through that area and new refinery expansion.

Corpus Christi certainly is not alone in this; nationally, only 8% of 95,000 sites on the National Register of Historic Places focus on women or non-White/Anglo people, and only 2% focus on African American sites. The historic preservation profession is also predominantly White/Anglo.

As the City of Corpus Christi considers how historic preservation can benefit all of its citizens, it must ensure that its policies and programs do not perpetuate inequities experienced by lower income neighborhoods and/or non-White/Anglo individuals. It is incumbent upon the City and Landmark Commission to ask those neighborhoods and individuals what equity means to them.

In addition, the City should identify current inequitable conditions and make it a priority to resolve those inequities. Fortunately, several other cities are paving the way for Corpus Christi and offer excellent models. These include:

- Madison, Wisconsin
- San Francisco, California
- Miami Dade County, Florida
- San Antonio, Texas

Many more cities are adopting this approach to begin addressing our nation's long history of prioritizing White/Anglo male history at the exclusion of other people.

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ACTION ITEMS


27. Add the pursuit of equity to the role of the Landmark Commission.


- **Provide equity training for City staff and Commission members.** City governments often start by holding an equity training workshop.
- **Actively pursue opportunities to document underrepresented historic resources** at the federal, state, and local levels, such as local designations, cultural landscapes, Recorded Texas Historic Landmarks or State Antiquities Landmarks, individual National Register listings, National Register historic districts, National Register Multiple Property Submissions, and National Historic Landmarks.
- **Make the process accessible to people regardless of language, literacy, or ability.** Translating information into Spanish and having translators available at public meetings, whenever possible, as well as American Sign Language interpreters, not only makes it possible for everyone to participate in the process, it also makes a statement that everyone is welcome.
- **Listen to stakeholders.** Encourage people in non-White/Anglo communities to tell the City what equity means to them and what they value and prioritize. White/Anglo people, no matter how well intentioned, should not presume to know what other people want or need. The Council itself should decide what it wants to work on, such as geographic or thematic focus areas, with the City providing support in service of their goals.
- When the City pursues multiple-property nominations to the National Register of Historic Places, **community stakeholders should have input to prioritized focus areas**, such as:
 - Long-standing Hispanic or Black businesses
 - Archaeological sites, cultural landscapes, and extant historic resources associated with Native American people
 - Sites associated with the Civil Rights Movement
 - African American churches





Figure 10. Accordion player (Sergio Cruz Pérez/Restafoto, iStock 505910728)


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including underrepresented areas


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to underrepresented areas.

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- **Focus on a story-based approach to preservation**, rather than the high-style architecture ~~focus that often marginalizes or excludes people associated with non-White/Anglo or vernacular building traditions~~. In some situations, a cultural landscapes approach or foregoing a strict adherence to National Register criteria for the evaluation of significance can expand the possibilities for historic preservation at the local level.
- **Don't just listen ... take action.** When community members ~~identify inequitable conditions in their neighborhoods, preconceived notions about who preservation represents, and~~ what is historically and culturally significant *to them*, the City needs to create a plan for addressing those issues. If nothing happens, it is likely that community members will not trust the City to take action in the future, and they may not be willing to get involved in anything else.


28. Be prepared to make specific suggestions to help illustrate examples of types of local designations, Recorded Texas Historic Landmarks or State Antiquities Landmarks, individual National Register listings, National Register historic districts, National Register Multiple Property Submissions, and National Historic Landmarks. Rather than use a single property for multiple examples, identify different properties associated with various groups in geographically distributed areas of the city to be as inclusive as possible.


29. Create a Preservation Grant program to help pay for the historical research needed to designate or nominate underrepresented properties and to help fund repairs or disaster resilience measures. Even small grants can make a big difference, and by making that program open to the public, the City will have more opportunities for meaningful outreach.

30. Develop new programs or opportunities for local designation, such as Cultural Heritage Districts, Legacy Business Landmarks, Conservation Districts, and Cultural Landscapes that can be used to identify, recognize, and protect a more diverse range of historic resources. For example:

- The City of Denver, Colorado, created the Five Points Cultural Historic District to preserve both buildings and the cultural identity of the previously segregated African American neighborhood. Design guidelines for the district now include character-defining features related to Culture, not just architecture, such as the district's history as a hub for jazz music, African American-owned businesses and African American-serving organizations and institutions.
- The City of Dallas, Texas, has made possible the designation of Conservation Districts since 1988. This tool differs from historic district designation in that conservation districts seek to maintain certain standards, established in collaboration with the community, rather than preserving architectural features of buildings. Applications for alterations in Dallas conservation districts are administratively reviewed by City staff, rather than a commission.
- The City of San Antonio's Office of Historic Preservation maintains a Legacy Business program to recognize and promote businesses that have been in operation for at least 20 years. A StoryMap showcases businesses in 16 different categories, including art, banking, fashion, florists, food, hotels, industry, military, mortuaries, museums, music, press, radio stations, ranching, theaters, and "traditions" (such as specialty stores and a miniature golf course dating back to 1929).

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of underrepresented areas

- History Colorado has recently prioritized cultural resources and cultural landscapes in its statewide preservation planning efforts through *The Power of Heritage and Place: A 2020 Action Plan to Advance Preservation in Colorado*. It looks beyond built heritage to consider “social history, ethnic and racial heritage, and gender relationships to historic preservation, and the fostering of public memory.”

~~1 The City of Corpus Christi has the opportunity to take a leadership role among Texas cities on this topic. Good press about inclusion and equity, topics about which young people especially are very concerned, can attract more businesses and give young people more of a reason to stay in Corpus Christi after completing school, instead of moving to Houston, Austin, or San Antonio.~~

RESPONSIBLE PERSONS

Historic Preservation Officer

RESOURCES REQUIRED

Meeting spaces

Funding for a Preservation Grant program

PRIOR PRESERVATION ACTIVITY REQUIRED

None

1 CASE STUDY: MADISON, WISCONSIN

Madison adopted its original historic preservation ordinance in 1971, but only recently developed the city's first preservation plan. In doing so, they began by considering whose history has been preserved in Madison over the past 50 years and found that, overwhelmingly, the historic resources designated in their city were associated with wealthy white men. To address that lack of equity in their preservation plan, they implemented Madison's Racial Equity and Social Justice Initiative, including:

- Equity training for city staff involved in the project and the consultant team
- 11 meetings of the diverse Historic Preservation Plan Advisory Committee
- 20 other community meetings
- Outreach including media interviews, short videos, a selfie contest, and a community survey with 755 respondents
- Specific outreach to stakeholder groups that serve Madison's underrepresented communities
- A historic resources survey focused on underrepresented communities that identified 117 resources of historical interest, with 98 currently eligible as Madison Landmarks and nine individually eligible to the State and National Registers of Historic Places. Another 39 properties with significant histories related to these underrepresented communities were not designated landmarks.






1. CASE STUDY: MIAMI-DADE COUNTY, FLORIDA


Although its population is almost 70% Hispanic/Latino and nearly 17% Black/African American, Miami-Dade County (like the rest of Florida) has designated historic resources associated almost exclusively with White/Anglo men. Even sites that could be associated with Black Bahamian construction techniques and materials often fail to mention Ethnic Heritage as a criteria for evaluating significance. The County is now working with municipal preservation officers and commissions to start conversations around this topic. They "are just at the beginning of our journey to build a more equitable historic preservation program."



2. CASE STUDY: SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA

The City of San Francisco has adopted a resolution centering its preservation planning on racial and social equity. Specifically, "The Resolution directs the Planning Department to center its historic preservation work program and resource allocation on racial and social equity; acknowledges and apologizes for the history of racist, discriminatory and inequitable historic preservation policies that have resulted in racial disparities; recommends that the Department develop proactive strategies to address and redress structural and institutional racism in collaboration with Black and American Indian communities and communities of color; recommends that the Department amend its hiring and promotion practices to ensure that the Department's staff reflects the diversity and demographics of the community at all staff levels." Some of the programs that they will use to recognize and protect underrepresented community resources include a Cultural Heritage District designation and a registry of legacy businesses.

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