

## **Downtown Historic Preservation Task Force Meeting Minutes**

March 4, 2015

8:30 AM

South Side on Lamar Leasing Office Conference Room

1409 South Lamar St.

Dallas TX, 75215

### **Task Force Members Present:**

Mitch Paradise, Paradise Development Partners; Connie Cooper, Cooper Consulting; David Preziosi, Preservation Dallas; Brian Keith, JHP Architecture/Urban Design; Larry Hamilton, Hamilton Properties; Robert Meckfessel, DSGN; Katherine D. Seale, Task Force Chair

### **Task Force Members Absent:**

Jack Matthews, Matthews Southwest; Brian Adams, Callison; Scott Remphrey, Brytar; Todd Watson, Hunt Consolidated

### **City Staff Present:**

Mark Doty, Sr. Historic Preservation Planner

Katherine Seale called the meeting to order at 8:40 am with a quorum present.

### Overview – Katherine Seale

Katherine Seale briefly reviewed handouts that were passed out to Task Force Members, and introduced the topics for the day's meeting. One Task Force member had asked that the proposed Harwood Park be discussed as a possible case study as to whether or not the Recommendations provide a role for preservation.

### Discussion: Identification of Critical Issues and Possible Recommendations

Before the Issues and Recommendations were discussed, Brian Keith suggested that the recommendations include a three part action plan where immediate, intermediate, and long-term actions are proposed to begin a change in mentality regarding preservation.

Mitch Paradise asked about the final results of the Task Force recommendations and how it will be shepherded through the approval process. Katherine answered that the task force would be invited to present its recommendations to the mayor.

Katherine briefly reviewed seven issues and recommendations for the purpose of discussion. One task force member suggested that additional Historic Preservation staff should not be the first recommendation, stating that too much time is being spent on details such as fences, and not enough time on the "big picture." Staff requirements should not necessarily be a recommendation, but should be an outcome. Another member suggested that a visual timeline be produced to provide a framework and hierarchy to the recommendations with benchmarks for measuring progress.

Katherine introduced the first issue: the lack of capacity in the current Historic Preservation Program. The purpose of the Dallas Landmarks Program, per the Dallas Development Code, SEC 51A-4.501, is to utilize preservation to accomplish larger goals for the city. During the early years of the program, preservation was used to assist with the economic revitalization of east Dallas, to increase visitor and convention traffic in downtown, to guide a land use plan for Uptown, to instill pride among the local citizenry, among other important city undertakings. Today, the program focuses exclusively on landmark designation, and is seen as regulatory, and often restrictive. The program needs to shift away from a designation-based one towards a more integrated approach where preservation is used to influence and facilitate change for a better city.

Katherine pointed out that as the Preservation program currently stands, there is no way to address the majority of the buildings in Harwood Park because these buildings would not be considered “landmarks” due to alterations and the perception of what constitutes a landmark. She also brought up Deep Ellum, where few buildings would be considered typical “landmarks” yet people do recognize that the context and essence of the place should be preserved. The historic preservation program should be able to preserve not only recognizable landmark buildings but also the historic urban fabric. One Task Force member suggested that there be a category of building called “heritage” for buildings that are over a certain age that would have a demolition delay, which would apply to private property as well as city owned buildings.

Katherine proposed that the recommendation to address the first issue of the lack of capacity of the current program is to broaden the preservation program to include planning as a main activity through strategic interdepartmental partnerships and broader preservation staff capabilities. New partnerships are needed so that preservation may influence existing and future planning efforts, particularly those conducted by the city. Partners might include: Urban Design Studio, Public Works, Streets, Parks and Recreation, Code Enforcement, and Economic Development. In addition, staff capabilities must be broadened to include programmatic solutions so that the past can be a part of downtown’s future.

Nicky DeFreece Emery introduced the second part of the recommendation: to hire a director or equivalent for the historic preservation program. The director’s responsibilities should include: restructuring of the program to include planning as the main activity, re-allocation of staff duties, broaden staff capabilities, establish inter-departmental communication, prioritize goals, and over-see any new initiatives passed by council.

Katherine introduced the second issue: insufficient advocacy within the historic preservation program. The earlier program was strongly supported by community advocates from all sectors of the city (including developers). This wider perspective pushed preservation to solve broader problems and achieved broader goals. Overtime, the advocacy “arm” has been lost.

The recommendation to address insufficient advocacy is to establish a Preservation Issues committee under the City Manager’s Office. It might be comprised of 3 department heads (or their designee) from Parks and Recreation, Public Works, Office of Economic Development as well as representatives from the Urban Design Studio, downtown stake holders and organizational appointments from the preservation, planning, design, and development community. The committee would prioritize and work to implement the recommendations of the Downtown Historic Preservation Task Force. This committee might also develop new ordinances, tools that address preserving downtown’s historic fabric, produce a “Preservation Progress Report” for city departments working on downtown planning activities and offering assistance to those seeking improvement; review existing ordinances for their effectiveness. The committee would not be council appointed, and would be distinguished from the Landmark Commission.

The Task Force recommended that the newly formed committee be named so that it would be considered a positive force for preservation.

Nicky introduced the third issue: a lengthy designation process and the lack of education for downtown historic property owners and representatives. Landmark designation is a vital component of the Historic Preservation Program. Presently, the process to landmark a building takes approximately 12-15 months from initiation to council approval of the landmark. The lengthy process is burdensome for most applicants, and has no specific timeline, where it is a “deal-killer” for the development community, where time is money. Additionally, the program’s financial incentive, a tax abatement on the city portion of the taxes, is on-hold.

Education has always been of primary importance to the Program. Especially in Dallas, a modern city characterized by opportunity and entrepreneurship not its historic legacy. By broadening an understanding of the program’s goals and its accomplishments, we encourage cooperation and communication. And by providing information and resources to historic owners, we reduce frustration and discouragement. Existing resources on the city’s website are buried and out-of-date. The task force suggested that the recommendation to address this issue is streamlining of the designation report, as well as the introduction of a timeline for individual steps in the designation process which may then justify the hiring of more staff since deadlines would then need to be met.

One member suggested that to streamline the process, an owner who wants a designation would get it automatically if a building is over 50 years old. Another member suggested that this could be the definition of “heritage” status. The Task Force discussed the possibility of two tiers of designation: landmark and heritage buildings, with different levels of benefit.

The task force then discussed whether some routine maintenance applications could be off-loaded to another department. Katherine suggested that the proposed Preservation Issues committee could look at ordinances to see if there could be ways to loosen criteria in some cases where very strict criteria are not needed. There was concern expressed that offloading work could result only in a reallocation of resources and whether the required expertise was available in other departments to address certain nuanced criteria for historic buildings, where every case is different.

Katherine introduced the fourth issue: that the existing surveys do not identify historic urban context, or “fabric” needed to preserve the continuity of downtown. Surveys provide a base-layer for direction, help establish preservation priorities, and become a tool for existing and future planning initiatives. Previous downtown surveys have identified historic buildings. The last survey may date to the mid-1990s. An updated survey is needed, one which takes a broader view of our city’s urban context beyond buildings, to identify remnants of disappearing urban fabric, thematic structures that define an area’s character, prominent built features of the city, or an urban point. The use of new technology provides new opportunities to capture the larger street fabric.

The Task Force recommended that the survey address the street grid. The survey could be used as a tool to broaden the scope of preservation, and assist the goals of the 360 Plan. The Task Force suggested partnering with private foundations or local universities to fund and complete the survey. Partnering with other fields and organizations could also help bring attention to the idea that preservation is an important part of all city departments and interests.

The fifth issue is that there is no effective demolition delay of historic buildings to explore alternative solutions. Preservation of historic resources should be given the same consideration as streets and sewers and treated as existing and important infrastructure.

The Task Force discussed the idea of a demolition delay, and emphasized that if one is recommended, that it should be effective and appropriate for Dallas, and should be combined with other proactive approaches like advocacy and better communication among city departments and a possible “early warning system.” The Task Force expressed two approaches to address demolitions. The first approach is an immediate vehicle to address demolitions, which could be a non-discretionary method that would allow for automatic notification for stakeholders and a dialogue with property owners. A second approach could be a temporary demolition delay until the new Preservation Issues committee then makes a recommendation for further delay; the committee could also be the group that advises on each demolition case.

It was suggested that more time is needed to investigate and discuss the potential recommendation for a demolition delay so that it is effective and addresses the needs of Dallas. The task force could take additional time to thoroughly review the recommendations, or suggest that the newly formed preservation issues committee take it on as a consideration. One task force member expressed that if a demolition delay is in place, the development community will adapt and incorporate it into their due diligence and timeline for their project. Various building ages and the lengths of possible demolition delays were suggested, and the public posting of demolition permits was also suggested. Due to time constraints, the discussion of a possible demolition delay was halted, and will be taken up again at the next meeting.

Katherine briefly introduced issues six and seven, which are existing incentives, and the need for an updated preservation plan. These issues will be further discussed in the next meeting.

#### Approval of February 18 Minutes

Bob Meckfessel moved to approve the minutes from the February 18 meeting as amended. Brian Keith seconded the motion. The motion passed with no opposition.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:12 am.

Minutes by Nicky DeFreece Emery