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INTRODUCTION

History of Georgetown & Original Patterns of Development

Georgetown was founded in 1848 and was named the county seat of Williamson County that same year. At that time the “town” was little more than an undeveloped tract overlooking the confluence of the San Gabriel Rivers to the north. George Washington Glasscock and Thomas B. Huling donated 173 acres of land for the new county seat which was quickly surveyed and marked off in a uniform grid of blocks and lots and offered for sale at a public auction on July 4, 1848. This grid system of development, with a central public square donated for governmental purposes, is typical of county seats throughout the state.

New property owners found themselves in possession of attractive sites with abundant trees and foliage and an ample water supply, but few other resources on which to draw. Crude shacks and log buildings initially served as residences and commercial

and governmental establishments. Most early settlers had neither the financial means nor the time to devote to erecting a refined structure. Immediate shelter, in the most basic sense, was a priority so that early residents could go about the business of settling the land and establishing the town.

Farming the surrounding land was the principle endeavor of most Georgetown families at this time, according to census records of 1850. Other occupations listed in the census records were merchant, trader, grocer, hotel keeper, and lawyer. The commercial and mercantile establishments were concentrated in the center of the community around the square. An expanding labor force included a comparatively large number of blacksmiths in addition to a tanner, gunsmith, wheelwright, and millwright, each serving a critical role.

It was not until 1857 that a courthouse stood in its designated central location. Official county business was originally conducted beneath an oak tree two blocks southeast of the square, at the intersection of 9th and Church Streets. A log building located on the east side of Main Street across from the center square, and later a wood frame residence served as the courthouse before a two-story, rubble stone building was erected on the central square in 1857.

As the town prospered, the crudely-constructed early structures were replaced with more finely crafted wood-frame buildings. These early “store houses,” as they were called, were typically one or two story structures with a high false front projecting well

above the gabled roofline. Building components such as finished lumber, doors, sashes, and blinds became available locally, and carpenters and builders established a lively trade in Georgetown. By the late 1860s, limestone was being quarried locally for use in commercial building construction as is evidenced by the Makemson Hotel Complex and the Shaffer Saddlery Building.

The last two decades of the 19th century brought great and lasting changes to the appearance of Georgetown. It was a time of robust economic development activity and physical expansion. Having been established as the home of Southwestern University in the late 1870s and tied into a rapidly

expanding railroad network in 1878, it was apparent to all that the county seat of Williamson County had a promising future.

Early city building codes were established and wood-frame commercial buildings were replaced with more permanent structures constructed of native limestone and materials such as brick, decorative pressed metal, and cast iron, imported by rail.



T-B: Historic photo circa 1900s.



L-R Historic aerial photograph of Georgetown circa 1934.

Reflecting on only their individual prosperity, but also the confidence they had in the future of Georgetown, building owners for the first time concentrated on aesthetic designs embellished with elaborate ornamentation. Limestone, readily available

in abundant supply was commonly used in random, rubble construction on the less important rear façades and party walls between buildings. These party walls can be seen on all sides of the square above the parapets. Dressed limestone, involving more time and labor, was a more expensive material and was reserved for the public façades of the structures. Several excellent examples of dressed limestone masonry can be seen around downtown Georgetown in the Makemson Hotel Complex, the M.E. Lockett Building, the Masonic Lodge, the McDougal-Booty Building, and the Hodges Building. Carved limestone detailing was a very labor intensive process requiring a high degree of skill on the part of the stone mason and was consequently quite expensive. The P.H. Dimmitt & Co. Building and the Evans Building exhibit superb limestone carving and highly skilled stone masonry in their construction.

Pressed metal and cast iron became important building materials in turn-of-the-century Georgetown. Decorative components could be mass produced in major manufacturing centers and shipped by rail,

offering building owners an affordable option for achieving the high degree of ornamentation favored in the Victorian era. Building owners were able to order decorative elements from catalogues at the local lumber yards, which would arrive by rail. The sheets of metal and cast iron columns were then transported to the building and nailed to wooden frames. One company in particular was a major supplier of metal components to Downtown Georgetown. Metal work on the M.E. Lockett Building, the H.C. Craig Building, the Dimmitt Building, and the Mileham Building can all be attributed to the Mesker Brothers of St. Louis. Similarities in details on these buildings with others around the square suggest that several more may represent the work of Mesker Brothers as well.



Mesker Brothers began their manufacture and catalogue marketing of metal storefronts in 1884 and achieved remarkable success nationwide, selling over 5,000 storefronts in a twenty-three year period. The Williamson County Sun buildings and the Hodges Building bear the mark of F. Heireman of Austin on cast iron columns. The popularity of pressed metal as a decorative element is evidenced by the fact that virtually every turn-of-the-century building in Downtown Georgetown features some degree of pressed metal ornamentation on the front façade. Arrival of the railroad facilitated expanded retail as well. Local merchants could stock their stores with products from regional and national manufacturing centers. Downtown Georgetown became an important commercial center for the surrounding area, which supported widespread agricultural and ranching pursuits. First floor storefronts were devoted primarily to retail activities with the second floors utilized for professional occupation. Attorneys were particularly attracted to available spaces with close proximity to the courthouse.



*T-B
Historic photos circa 1900s.*

The construction boom swept throughout the central business district and lasted into the early 20th century. The Williamson County constructed its fourth courthouse in 1879, a stylized example of the French Second Empire style designed by architects Preston and Ruffini. This high Victorian structure was deemed too small in the early 1900s and demolished to allow construction of the present structure in 1910. The current courthouse, visible for miles in all directions, is a restrained example of Beaux Arts Classicism, designed by Austin architect Charles Hall Page. When completed, the imposing structure featured terracotta pediments with bas relief carving and a terracotta balustrade encircling the roof. These decorative elements were removed from the structure in 1965 to relieve fears of potential safety hazards. Though the boom period ended in the early 20th century as the population declined slightly between 1910 and 1920, this robust Victorian era left its mark on the city. The growth trend resumed in 1930, but setbacks from the Depression, World Wars, and a regional drought weighed heavily on the local economy. Financial activities in this agricultural region became decidedly conservative and the face of Downtown Georgetown changed very little throughout the mid-20th century.

The advent of the automobile and resulting increased mobility of the local population coupled with the development of regional shopping centers and malls in nearby Austin caused a tremendous decline in Downtown Georgetown retailing. As sales declined and businesses closed, repair and maintenance of commercial buildings relaxed substantially. Professionals abandoned the second floors for modern offices in outlying commercial areas and the vacant spaces were boarded up. Downtown Georgetown joined a national trend and took on a shabby, neglected appearance. Folding to the pressures of the 1960s and 1970s, many small towns across the country essentially died, but the determined spirit that founded Georgetown was rekindled and the city began a major revitalization which ensured the future of this pioneer Texas town.

*Historic photo: Williamson County
Courthouse circa 1910s.*



In the 1980s, Georgetown joined the Main Street Program, a downtown revitalization effort conceived by the National Trust for Historic Preservation and implemented by the Texas Historical Commission. These efforts, coupled with growth in the county, helped revitalize the Downtown core.

However, at the beginning of the twenty first century, the Downtown faced yet another challenge with “big box” retailers locating along Interstate 35. These new, out-of-town businesses—including retail stores, restaurants, and hotels—competed for both the local consumer’s and tourist’s dollar.



Historic Georgetown photograph circa 1848.



Historic photo circa 1900s.

Why Preserve Historic Resources?

Across the nation, thousands of communities promote historic preservation because doing so contributes to neighborhood livability and quality of life, minimizes negative impacts on the environment, and yields economic rewards.

Because Georgetown is rich in resources and offers an outstanding quality of life, it continues to attract development that challenges the community to seek creative ways of protecting its character. Preserving historic resources is part of an overall strategy of maintaining community identity and livability. As Georgetown continues to grow, the goal is to maintain its ties to the past through the preservation of its architectural heritage as reflected in its historic resources.

From the 1980s, community planning efforts in Georgetown emphasized citizen concerns about the need to preserve the scale and character of the older commercial and residential neighborhoods. Preserving historic resources helps maintain the character that makes Georgetown attractive.

Preservation of the built environment provides a fundamental link to the past. Many of the buildings tell the story of Georgetown's unique historical development. Keeping these resources creates a sense of place for those who live here and provides visitors a connection with this unique heritage.



Hugh Roy and Lillie Cullen Building.



Detail of cornice.

Construction quality

Many of the historic structures in the city were constructed with high quality materials and craftsmanship. Other buildings were more modest, but even so may have used lumber from mature trees that were properly seasoned and typically sawed or milled to full dimension, which yielded stronger framing. Masonry walls were carefully crafted to support structural loads, resulting in buildings with considerable stability. These structures were thoughtfully detailed, and the material finishes, including fixtures, wood floors, and trim, were generally high-quality features that owners today appreciate and value.



Local commerce.

Economic benefits

Nationwide studies demonstrate that preservation projects contribute more to the local economy than do new building programs because each dollar spent on a preservation project has a higher percentage devoted to labor and to the purchase of locally available materials. By contrast, new construction typically has a higher percentage of each dollar spent devoted to materials that are produced outside of the local economy and to special construction skills that may be imported. Therefore, when money is spent on rehabilitating a building, it has a higher “multiplier effect,” keeping more money circulating in the community.

Historic preservation efforts also foster a charm and character that attracts visitors. Many small towns throughout the country have made tourism, based on their historic resources, a profitable and effective economic development strategy.



Public gathering area on Courthouse Lawn.

Livability and quality of life

When older buildings occur in groups, they create a street scene that is “pedestrian friendly,” and encourages walking and neighborly interaction. Mature trees and decorative architectural features also contribute to a sense of identity that is not found in newer areas. These historic buildings therefore help create desirable places to live and work.



Detail of Entrance Century 21 Hellmann Stribling.



Clouds over Georgetown.



Aerial of Williamson County Historical Courthouse.

Adaptability

Owners frequently find that the floor plans of historic buildings easily accommodate modern lifestyles and support a diversity of uses. Many rooms are large, permitting a variety of uses while retaining the overall historic character of the structure. Even historic buildings that are smaller in scale are often on sites that can accommodate additions, if needed.

Environmental benefits

Preserving an historic structure is a sound environmental conservation policy because preservation and reuse saves energy and reduces the need for producing new construction materials.

Four types of energy savings occur:

- 1 Energy is not consumed to demolish a building, dispose of the resulting debris, or use more land fill space.
- 2 Energy is not used to create new building materials, transport them and assemble them on site.
- 3 The “embodied” energy that was used to create the original building and its components is preserved.
- 4 By “reusing” older buildings, or their salvaged materials, pressure is also reduced to harvest new lumber and other materials that may have negative effects on the environment of other locales where these materials are produced.

Responsibility of ownership

Preservation of the built environment provides a fundamental link to the past. Many of the buildings tell the story of Georgetown’s unique historical development. Keeping these resources creates a sense of place for those who live here and provides visitors a connection with this unique heritage.

While this responsibility does exist, it does not automatically translate into higher construction or maintenance costs. Ultimately, residents and property owners should recognize that historic preservation is a long-range community policy that promotes economic well-being and overall viability of the city. In addition, residents and owners play a vital role in helping to implement this policy through careful stewardship of the area’s historic resources.

Preservation Principles

Policies Underlying the Guidelines

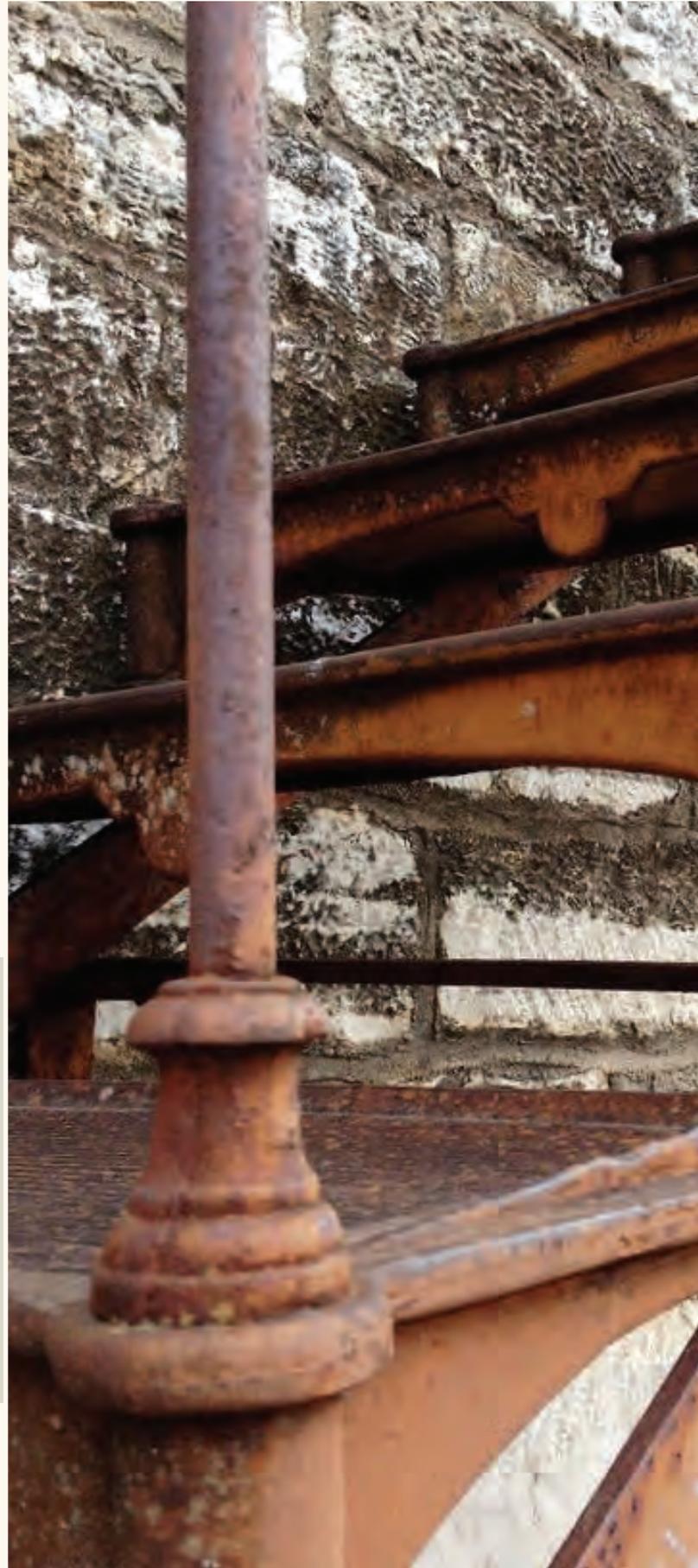
The Design Guidelines in this document incorporate principles set forth in The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties — a widely accepted set of preservation design principles. This document is compatible with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards, while expanding on how those preservation principles apply in Georgetown. See Appendix B for the Secretary of Interior's Standards.

The concept of historic significance

What makes a property historically significant? It is generally recognized that a certain amount of time must pass before the historical significance of a property can be evaluated. The National Register, for example, suggests that a property be at least 50 years old and/or have extraordinary importance before it may be considered. Georgetown employs the "50-year" guideline; however, structures that are more recent may be considered significant if they are found to have special architectural or historical merit. In the future, other events, time periods, areas or districts may become historically significant to the city and could be designated as an historic structure, landmark or district.

A property may be significant for one or more of the following reasons:

- ◆ Association with events that contributed to the broad patterns of history, the lives of significant people, or the understanding of Georgetown's prehistory or history.
- ◆ Construction and design associated with distinctive characteristics of a building type, period, or construction method.
- ◆ An example of an architect or master craftsman or an expression of particularly high artistic values.





Period of significance

Historic districts also have a period of significance. For example the four National Register Historic Districts located within the Downtown and Old Town Districts:(Williamson County Courthouse Historic District, the Belford Historic District, the University Avenue and Elm Street Historic District and the Olive Street Historic District) have periods of significance which span from 1850 - 1949. Buildings built within this 99 year span are considered significant. Conversely, structures constructed after this period are not considered as significant, although some may contribute to the overall character, or ambience, of the district.

The Town Square Historic District, which is the Courthouse Square and the blocks surrounding it, has a period of significance which spans approximately 45 years (1885 to 1930). Throughout this period, the city witnessed construction of a number of buildings and alterations that have become significant. Conversely, structures built after this period are not considered as significant, although some may contribute to the overall character, or ambience, of the district.

Concept of “integrity”

In addition to being historically significant, a property has integrity—a sufficient portion of the structure must date from the period of significance. The majority of the building's structural system and its materials should date from that time and its key character-defining features also should remain intact. These may include architectural details such as dormers, porches, ornamental brackets, moldings, and materials, as well as the overall mass and form of the building. Buildings should also retain integrity of site and setting; consequently, thoughtful design of new construction within a historic district helps to preserve the integrity of setting for existing historic buildings on adjacent blocks. It is these elements that allow a building to be recognized as a product of its time.

Basic Preservation Principles for Georgetown

While the Guidelines provide direction for specific design issues, some basic principles of preservation form the foundation for them.

The following preservation principles apply in Georgetown:

01

Respect the historic design character of the building.

Do not try to change a building's style or make it look older than it really is. Confusing the character by mixing elements of different styles is not appropriate.

02

Seek uses that are compatible with the historic character of the building.

Although use is not reviewed by the Historic and Architectural Review Commission, uses that do not require radical alteration of the original architecture are preferred. Every reasonable effort should be made to provide a compatible use for the building that will require minimal alteration to it or its site. An example of an appropriate adaptive use is converting a residence into a bed and breakfast establishment (when zoning regulations permit).

03

Protect and maintain significant features and stylistic elements.

Distinctive stylistic features or examples of skilled craftsmanship should be treated with sensitivity. The best preservation procedure is to maintain historic features through proper maintenance from the outset so that intervention is not required. This includes rust removal, caulking, limited paint removal, and reapplication of paint.





04

Preserve key, character-defining features of the property.

Key features are those that help convey the character of the resource as it appeared during its period of historic significance. These may include the basic structural system and building materials, as well as windows, doors, porches, and ornamentation. Typically, those features that are on the front of a building or that are highly visible from a public way will be most important.

05

Repair deteriorated historic features, and replace only those elements that cannot be repaired.

Maintain the existing material, using recognized preservation methods whenever possible. If disassembly is necessary for repair or restoration, use methods that minimize damage to original materials and replace the existing configuration.

06

New construction should respect the scale of neighboring structures.

Maintain the existing material, using recognized preservation methods whenever possible. If disassembly is necessary for repair or restoration, use methods that minimize damage to original materials and replace the existing configuration.

Façade detail on Williamson County Sun Building.

Developing a Preservation Strategy

Each preservation project is unique. A project may include a variety of treatment techniques, including the repair and replacement of features and maintenance of those already in good condition. In order to define the range of preservation treatments that may be needed in a project, consider these steps:

RESEARCH THE HISTORY OF THE PROPERTY

This analysis should begin with an investigation of the history of the property. This may identify design alterations that have occurred and may help in developing an understanding of the significance of the building as a whole as well as its individual components.

ASSESS EXISTING CONDITIONS

Historical research should be combined with an on-site assessment of existing conditions. In this inspection, identify those elements that are original and those that have been altered. Also determine the condition of individual building components.

LIST USE REQUIREMENTS

Finally, list the requirements for continued use of the property. Is additional space needed? Or should the work focus on preserving and maintaining the existing configuration?

SUMMARIZE A PRESERVATION STRATEGY

By combining an understanding of the history of the building, its present condition, and the need for action, one can then develop a preservation approach.

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Defining Preservation Treatments

When developing a preservation strategy, consider the application of these terms:

Maintenance

Work that often focuses on keeping the property in good working condition by repairing features as deterioration becomes apparent and using procedures that retain the original character and finish of the features is considered maintenance. In some cases, preventive maintenance is executed prior to noticeable deterioration. No alteration or reconstruction is involved. Property owners are strongly encouraged to maintain their property in good condition so that more aggressive measures of rehabilitation, restoration, or reconstruction are not needed. See maintenance guide in Appendix B.

Preservation

Keeping an existing building in its current state by a careful program of maintenance and repair is preservation. It will often include repair and stabilization of materials and features in addition to regularly scheduled maintenance. Essentially, the property is kept in its current good condition.

Rehabilitation

Rehabilitation is the process of returning a property to a condition which makes a contemporary use possible while still preserving those portions or features of the property which are significant to its historic, architectural, and cultural value. Rehabilitation may include the adaptive use of the building and constructing additions. Most good preservation projects in Georgetown may be considered rehabilitation projects.

Restoration

To restore, one reproduces the appearance of a building exactly as it looked at a particular moment in time; to reproduce a pure style - either interior or exterior. This process may include the removal of later work or the replacement of missing historic features. A restoration approach is used on missing details or features of an historic building when the features are determined to be particularly significant to the character of the structure and when the original configuration is accurately documented.

Renovation

To renovate means to improve by repair, to revive. Renovation is similar to rehabilitation, although it includes the use of some new materials and elements. The basic character and significant details are respected and preserved, but some sympathetic alterations may also occur. Alterations that are made are generally reversible, should future owners wish to restore the building to its original design.

Adaptive Reuse

Converting a building to a new use that is different from its original purpose is considered to be adaptive reuse. For example, converting a residential structure to offices is adaptive reuse. A good adaptive reuse project retains the historic character of the building while accommodating new functions. While adaptive reuse allows the building owner to convert the building to a purpose other than that for which it was designed, it should be done with respect to the original building form. For example, it would be inappropriate to turn the living room of an historic building into a bathroom. The reason for this is that when the programmatic uses of a building are drastically altered, this often results in a major change to the original floor plan as well as to the exterior appearance of the building. When adaptive reuse is the preferred preservation alternative, the proposed design should make use of the original building function as closely as possible.

Remodeling / Renovating

To remake or to make over the design image of a building is to remodel it. The appearance is changed by removing original detail and by adding new features that are out of character with the original. Remodeling is inappropriate for most historic buildings in Georgetown.

Preferred Sequence of Preservation Actions

Once the basic approach to a project has been defined, it is important to assess the property and to identify any significant, character-defining features and materials. Retaining these elements, and using the Guidelines to select an appropriate treatment will greatly enhance the overall quality of the preservation project. In making the selection follow this sequence:

- 1** If a feature is intact and in good condition, maintain it.
- 2** If the feature is deteriorated or damaged, repair it to its original condition.
- 3** If it is not feasible to repair the feature, replace it with one that is the same or similar in character (materials, detail, finish) to the original one. Replace only that portion which is beyond repair.
- 4** If a feature is missing entirely, reconstruct it from evidence.
- 5** If a new feature or addition is necessary, design it to minimize the impact to original features.