



RECOMMENDATION RESOLUTION

Historic Preservation Commission

Recommendation Number: (2021-01RR): Recommending that specific guidelines for accessory dwelling units and other such outbuildings be added to the Historic District Design Guidelines in Appendix C of the San Marcos Design Manual.

WHEREAS, the City's Comprehensive Plan, "Vision San Marcos: A River Runs Through Us," recognizes that the citizens of San Marcos "are conscious of preserving our rich historical past and will pursue future cultural enrichment"; and

WHEREAS, toward that end, the City boasts seven locally designated historic districts and eight locally designated landmarks while other structures and sites have been recognized at the national and state levels for their historical or cultural significance; and

WHEREAS, the Historic Preservation Commission has seen an increase in the amount of requests for Certificates of Appropriateness to construct accessory dwelling units within the historic districts; and

WHEREAS, to uphold the goals of the Comprehensive Plan, and to preserve the City's historical and cultural resources for future generations, the Historic Preservation Commission has explored including specific guidelines for accessory dwelling units and other such outbuildings in the Historic District Design Guidelines to ensure that such buildings, when constructed or altered, are compatible with the character of historic districts in which they are situated.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Historic Preservation Commission recommends that the San Marcos City Council consider the initial authorization of a text amendment, per Section 2.4.1.2 of the San Marcos Development Code, to Appendix C of the San Marcos Design Manual, the Historic Design Guidelines, to include specific guidelines for accessory dwelling units and other such outbuildings.

Date of Approval: February 4, 2021

Record of the vote:

Attest: _____


Ryan Patrick Perkins, Chair, Historic Preservation Commission



PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

TO: Historic Preservation Commission
FROM: Alison Brake, CNU-A, Historic Preservation Officer
DATE: December 15, 2020
RE: **AGENDA ITEM 4: ACCESSORY BUILDINGS & OTHER SUCH OUTBUILDINGS**

Background

The Commission has held discussions regarding accessory buildings in the historic district, specifically Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs). The San Marcos Development Code allows for accessory dwelling units as a limited use within single-family zoning districts subject to the standards within Section 5.1.3.1(c)(2). All accessory dwelling units must meet these standards. The Historic District Design Guidelines are silent on recommendations for ADUs as they were originally drafted in 1997 and ADUs were not generally a topic of discussion at that time. Staff does utilize the Construction and Repair Standards found in Section 4.5.2.1(l)(1) of the San Marcos Development Code when reviewing Certificate of Appropriateness requests for ADUs.

Staff utilized the listservs for both the Texas Historical Commission Certified Local Government Program and the National Alliance of Preservation Commissions and sent a question out to see how other municipalities tend to regulate accessory buildings, including ADUs, within their historic districts. Many of the communities who responded made staff aware that they are facing the same issue and are looking at updating their current historic guidelines to better serve staff and Commissions in making decisions. Below is a summary of those who responded that do have some historic standards or guidelines that pertain to ADUs or other outbuildings.

1. **Austin, Texas:** Is in the process of drafting new Historic Design Standards; their locally designated historic landmarks and contributing properties in a historic district must follow these regulations. The draft Historic Design Standards integrate guidelines for accessory buildings into a chapter on residential new construction standards. This particular chapter speaks to the scale and massing of a new building and how those design elements are essential to maintaining the character of the property or a historic district. This chapter has been included to help facilitate discussion within the regulatory document, the following chart is included which helps the reader to identify which type of historic property is regulated by the standards:

When the standards apply to residential new construction	
Three types of historic properties are regulated through the City of Austin historic review process.	
Do they need to follow these design standards?	
Historic landmarks	✓
Historic districts	✓ Contributing properties
	✓ Noncontributing properties
National Register districts	👉 Recommended, not required

2. **Houston, Texas:** Houston’s historic preservation ordinance also emphasizes that new construction be compatible with contributing buildings in the context area in terms of massing, form, scale, and proportions. Steph McDougal, a Principal Consultant with McDoux Preservation LLC, worked for the City of Houston when the Houston Heights Design Guidelines were created. Within this document both measurable standards, minimum or maximum standards (or a range) which must be met in order to obtain a COA, and qualitative guidelines, which encompass the more aesthetic elements of design, are included. The particular design guidelines can be found here:

https://www.houstontx.gov/planning/HistoricPres/Design_Guide_Heights_District/july2018/Houston-Heights-Design-Guidelines-July2018.pdf

3. **Grand Rapids, Michigan:** Currently in the process of updating their guidelines, but both current and new have sections on treatment of existing historic out buildings/accessory buildings as well as new ones proposed to be built. The excerpt below is from their new guidelines book, a working draft.

Guidelines for Constructing New Garages or Carriage Houses (detached accessory structure larger than a shed.

The construction of new garages and carriage houses will follow the New Construction Guidelines (pages 85-88) as well as the guidelines below. In evaluating the appropriateness of proposed new garages and carriage house, the HPC will review the project to determine if it is subservient to the primary building and is compatible with the character-defining qualities of the site, primary building, and neighborhood.

- Design new garages and carriage houses to be compatible with the primary building on the lot, as well as the adjacent environment and neighborhood.
- Design new garages and carriage houses to be visually compatible with the property and the district in terms of massing (square footage, width, depth and height) and materials. Noting the massing is to be subservient to (smaller than) the primary building on the lot.

- Utilize roof shapes and pitches that are consistent with the primary building or with contributing accessory structures historically found in the adjacent neighborhood.
- Select exterior materials that are visually compatible with historic contributing materials found on the primary building in finishes, features, dimensions, and design.
- Choose windows and doors that are proportionately consistent with the size of the garage or carriage house and which draw from the design of the contributing historic windows and doors on the primary building.
- Garages and carriage houses will not overpower or detract from the primary building, adjacent primary structures, or environment.
- Massing (combination of square footage, width, depth and height) and scale will be compatible with the historic character of contributing accessory buildings in the immediate historic district while remaining historic district subservient to the primary structure on the site.
- Retain historic relationships between the primary building, open space, and landscape features when siting a new garage or carriage house.
- New garages and carriage houses will be located in the far back of the rear yard and be fully detached from all existing structures. In the instance of a corner lot, a garage or carriage house will receive consideration for placement well behind street facing façades when all other guidelines and standards are met.

4. **Little Rock, Arkansas:** Their guidelines cover secondary structures twice – once in the Rehabilitation Standards, and then again under New Construction Standards; they’re shown below. According to the Director of Little Rock’s Capitol Zoning District Commission, they’re written broadly and allow for a great deal of flexibility. He stated that they generally approve accessory structures / outbuildings at the staff level when they appear to meet all the criteria and will be negligibly visible from the street. This means that a prefab Lowes storage shed with a gable roof set all the way behind a house typically gets a staff stamp whereas a new ADU with driveway access will usually be reviewed by the Commission.

R9.1 The preservation of an existing secondary structure is encouraged.

- When treating a historic secondary building, respect its character-defining features such as primary materials, roof materials, roof form, historic windows, historic doors and architectural details.
- Avoid moving a historic secondary structure from its original location.
- If the secondary structure does not date from the period of significance, then its preservation is optional.

R9.2 If an existing secondary structure is beyond repair, then replacing it in-kind is encouraged.

R9.3 A new secondary structure should be in character with those seen traditionally.

- The building should be subordinate in scale to the primary structure.
- It should be located to the side or rear of the primary structure.
- See also the standards for new construction and for site design.

M30. A secondary structure should be compatible with the primary building.

- While the roof line does not have to match the house, it is best that it not vary significantly.

M31. A secondary structure should be similar in character to those seen traditionally.

- Basic rectangular forms, with hip, gable or shed roofs, are appropriate.
- Contemporary interpretations of traditional secondary structures should be permitted when they are compatible with the historic context.

M32. In general, garages should be unobtrusive and not compete visually with the house.

- A detached garage is preferred. This will help reduce the perceived mass of the overall development.
- When the garage must be attached, the percentage of building front allocated to it should be minimized.

M33. Locating a garage such that its visual impacts will be minimized is encouraged.

- Provide access to parking from an alley.
- Locating a garage in the front yard is discouraged.
- If a garage must be accessed from the street, set it back at least ten feet behind the primary building facade.

Next Steps

Amendments to Appendix C of the San Marcos Design Manual, the Historic District Design Guidelines, will require final approval by City Council following public hearings on the proposed amendments at the Historic Preservation Commission and the Planning and Zoning Commission. It is a similar process to text amendments of the San Marcos Development Code.

The Commission's bylaws state that the Commission is encouraged to provide City Council with advisory recommendations on matters of city policy within their purpose and duties as necessary. Following the January meeting, staff would place a Recommendation Resolution, which outlined the Commission's discussion, on a future agenda for the Commission to take formal action on. It would then be forwarded to the City Clerk and the City Manager for distribution to the City Council who would then choose to put the item on a future agenda.