



This memorandum summarizes key design and preservation issues observed and documented during a visit to the MacArthur Park Historic District between December 6 and 7, 2023. The recent visit also provided an opportunity to discuss key preservation issues with the Historic District Commission, residents and property owners, and representatives from the MacArthur Museum of Arkansas Military History and the Arkansas Museum of Fine Arts. The stakeholder meetings helped to identify several preservation and design management challenges facing the Historic District.

General Observations

Residents of Little Rock expressed pride in their history and community and a shared commitment to preserving the Historic District's architectural heritage. The Historic District has a distinctive identity, exhibited through almost 200 years of architectural and stylistic expressions and material variety. Along with its stock of historic homes — including representative examples of Victorian and Late Victorian residential design — the Historic District has an impressive collection of religious, educational, and commercial architecture along with well-scaled tree-lined streets and visually appealing streetscape environment.

Most if not all residents and stakeholders that participated in the discussion sessions expressed an understanding that prioritizing the Historic District's preservation and enhancement contributes to the neighborhood's historic identity and livability as an attractive place to live and work. Residents agree that good repair and maintenance practices that retain historic character should serve as key preservation approaches and that the Design Guidelines should provide clear, concise guidance on maintenance and preservation treatments that raise local awareness and understanding of how to care for historic properties. In addition, the Design Guidelines, as well as active public education efforts, can help address public perceptions regarding the costs and benefits of historic building preservation.

Overall, building fabric in the Historic District appears well maintained, demonstrating pride of place and the high value residents place on caring for their properties. The neighborhood and the Historic District Commission now need to address a critical issue: the design management of infill construction given the number of developable lots in the Historic District. Numerous vacant lots, the result of the incremental loss of buildings due to the construction of Interstate 630, the 1999 tornado, and demolition by neglect, are prospects for new housing construction and the community is looking to the Design Guidelines as well as previous infill projects to advise on appropriate design and materials for new construction.

Key Field Observations

The Historic District as a whole is well-maintained and in good to excellent condition with a high level of integrity in terms of design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. Although there have been some changes and alterations to properties, such as the installation of replacement windows and painted brick, it is impressive and notable how prevalent original exterior wall siding is in the Historic District. The predominant residential character is intact with schools and religious buildings included within the mix of historic property types. Historic commercial buildings line the Historic District's edges and perimeter. Stakeholders described out-of-town landlords as a challenge to maintaining rental properties. Providing information on financial incentives and other existing preservation programs may be of assistance to owners of historic properties in need of maintenance or rehabilitation.

More specific observations include:

- **Exterior Wall Surfaces and Materials.** As noted previously, the Historic District features a variety of historic building materials including wood clapboard, brick, and stone that are in good to excellent condition. There are few instances of outright material replacement in exterior wall surfaces, although there are examples of painted brick in the neighborhood, especially among the bungalow property types where porch piers and other walls feature painted surfaces. It may be the case that some properties have historically featured painted surfaces. Most of these changes occurred during the mid-20th century. There are also examples of covering historic wood cladding with substitute materials or adding a stained finish to historic wood surfaces. Determining appropriate approaches for substitute materials for wood clapboard siding, including vinyl, aluminum, fiber cement board siding, synthetic stucco (EIFS), and composite materials, can be a focus of discussion in the Design Guidelines.
- **Duplexes, Four-Flats, and Multi Family Property Types.** The duplexes, four-flats, and multi-family property types found in the Historic District provide distinctive and important architectural variety while documenting the neighborhood's growth and development into the early decades of the 20th century. While many of these property types are in good to excellent condition, there are several that have significant maintenance and repair issues involving wall materials and windows.
- **Windows.** Windows are an important character-defining feature of a historic building and prioritizing their preservation is important. Many properties have retained their original windows while others have replacements. The replacements appear compatible with a dwelling's architectural character and respect the predominate two over two or one over one double-hung configuration. There is no widespread use of storm windows, although those that do exist, are usually of metal or aluminum construction. Encouraging appropriate storm window materials and installation may be one way to facilitate the long-term preservation of existing historic windows. Providing information on wood window repair when it is appropriate to replace historic windows and, if so, what replacement windows should be used is important information. Guidance for storm windows including material, design, and placement is another component of window maintenance.

- **Additions.** The neighborhood's predominate small lot development pattern will serve as a constraint to adding new additions on most side elevations, although there are properties with larger lots in the district. Therefore, the design guidelines could focus on dormer additions, detached accessory dwellings, and those planned for the rear facades.
- **Landscape Features.** MacArthur Park includes a variety of landscape elements from historic fences, paths, walks, retaining walls, brick sidewalks, mature trees, and other vegetation and plantings. These elements contribute significantly to the neighborhood's visual qualities. Given that some are public right-of-way elements, the Design Guidelines can devote narratives to their proper care, maintenance, and rehabilitation as part of neighborhood capital improvements planning.
- **Infill Construction.** As noted previously, infill construction presents a significant design challenge for the Historic District. However, there are appropriate and well-designed infill examples already in the neighborhood that should serve as good models for further discussion and elaboration in the Design Guidelines. However, additional discussion may be warranted to determine the general parameters of acceptable and unacceptable infill construction in the Historic District.
- **Non-Historic Features.** The Design Guidelines should include a discussion on the removal of non-historic features where they exist in the Historic District to avoid further non-conformance with the Design Guidelines.
- **Paint.** Paint color is a topic that draws conflicting opinions, and the Design Guidelines should provide information on selecting appropriate colors and how they are applied to the building rather than mandating the use of a particular color palette.
- **Non-Contributing Buildings.** The Design Guidelines should clarify treatment options for non-contributing buildings and additions in the Historic District to avoid further non-conformance with the Design Guidelines.
- **Accessory Buildings.** The Design Guidelines should include information on existing and new accessory buildings and their design considerations. Accessory buildings include detached accessory dwellings, carriage houses, garages, and sheds.
- **Infrastructure and Placemaking.** Street infrastructure is an important historic feature in MacArthur Park. The Design Guidelines should include narratives on retaining historic stone curbs, stone or brick sidewalks, and light standards that contribute to the Historic District's character. While public art is a popular expression of community identity in many places that can beautify and enliven streetscapes, providing features that help to aesthetically minimize the gap created by Interstate 630, such as streetscape and right-of-way improvements, may have a greater impact within the Historic District.
- **Other Features.** Along with windows, include information regarding the repair and maintenance of architectural features including porches, foundations, walls, cornices,

doors, commercial storefronts, roofs, dormers, fences, signage, and lighting. When historic features are missing the Design Guidelines should provide guidance on reintroducing those features.

Community Feedback Summary

As noted previously, meetings with MacArthur Park stakeholders over the two-day visit help identify issues and needs related to design management in the Historic District and the role of the Historic District Commission in that management. Participants raised several key issues including incorporating clear and concise language in the design review process, the importance of detailed guidelines on the maintenance of historic materials, effective standards for new construction and their design and materials, streetscape and right-of-way improvements, and the broad need for education about historic preservation in the neighborhood.

More specifically, the issues included:

- **Commission Design Review Process.** The Historic District Commission is a critical player in promoting historic preservation in Little Rock and has a positive reputation in the neighborhood. The Commission also seeks to engender public understanding of the Commission's design review process as well as encourage property owners to consult with the Commission to promote higher quality preservation and rehabilitation projects in the Historic District. However, the Design Guidelines should clarify and highlight the Historic District Commission's design review process, historic preservation terminology, and what constitutes appropriate work for a historic building.
- **Design Guidelines Education Topics.** Public education and outreach are important needs in Little Rock and MacArthur Park and contribute to positive community relationships with the Historic District Commission. Education reinforces the value of preserving MacArthur Park's irreplaceable heritage. The Design Guidelines could incorporate the following topics within the Design Guidelines to elevate the neighborhood's understanding of the local history, architecture, and historic preservation's benefits.

These topics can include:

- The value of historic preservation and its role in retaining the neighborhood's unique identity and sense of place.
- Information on historic building types and architectural styles.
- Defining and differentiating the Local Ordinance Historic District and the National Register of Historic Places programs.
- Defining contributing and non-contributing properties in the district and how to treat properties to prevent further non-conformance.
- Financial benefits of historic preservation.
- The opportunities for using rehabilitation tax credits and other incentives.
- The concept of historic integrity and the importance of original building materials.
- Appropriate maintenance and repair, and the benefits of retaining historic materials.

- Benefits of excluding inappropriate materials to preserve the historic integrity of the Historic District and,
- Guidance on new design within a historic context and the importance of using high-quality natural materials for repair or new construction in the Historic District.

These topic narratives should also help property owners gain an understanding of the cost benefits of maintenance and using appropriate materials. Stakeholders also reinforced the need for identifying sources for historic materials and windows, for identifying skilled contractors, and for engaging realtors who market and sell homes in the Historic District.

The Design Guidelines will facilitate a broader understanding of historic preservation in the MacArthur Park neighborhood and explain a variety of topics related to historic preservation best practices. These explanations provide a framework for the consistent application of recommended treatments and preferred materials.

Other Issues and Needs

Residents expressed the desire for consideration of demolition by neglect provisions typically addressed through amendments to the local ordinance. Local ordinance review and updating is not a central focus of this design guidelines assignment; however, these topics do affect the relationship to design review so are mentioned here.

Residents expressed interest in clarifications to the Historic Preservation Ordinance including:

- A definition of demolition by neglect, preventative measures, and enforcement specifications.
- Opportunities for salvaging historic materials during demolition.

We look forward to the next phase of the project!