

CORPUS CHRISTI PRESERVATION PLAN
Meeting #1 — November 19, 2020
Q&A Summary Report
Steph McDougal, McDoux Preservation LLC

The following questions were received from the community via the City website, email, and Facebook. In some cases, similar questions have been combined. Questions and comments may have been edited for brevity.

1. Does the City know the status of the old Nueces County Courthouse? Is this the City or County's responsibility?

Nueces County owns the 1914 courthouse, and it is their responsibility. The Nueces County Commissioners' Court has just received an updated structural analysis report for the courthouse from Wist Janney Elstner Associates, Inc. County Judge Barbara Canales has recommended that the Court issue a new Request For Information (RFI) or Request For Proposals (RFP) from parties who may be interested in redeveloping the courthouse.

2. Are there any plans to preserve the Galvan Ballroom on Agnes?

The Galvan Ballroom was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2015. This article talks about the building's history and includes a link to the nomination: <https://www.thc.texas.gov/preserve/projects-and-programs/national-register-historic-places/galvan>.

The Ballroom is still owned and operated by the Galvan family.

3. What Black community stakeholders has the City talked to?

So far, Steph McDougal has reached out and talked to community leaders, pastors, historians, and other citizens in the Black community. We are especially sensitive to the history of Black people in Corpus Christi, segregation during the Jim Crow era, the construction of railroads and highways through Black neighborhoods, the impacts of urban renewal, and the ongoing situation with the new Harbor Bridge. One of our primary goals for this preservation plan is that it is inclusive of and equitable for the diverse population of Corpus Christi. That means we need to hear from as many people as possible from all of the different ethnic groups and other different groups that make up the city.

4. Will Black community landmarks in Corpus Christi be protected?

We are certainly looking specifically at potential landmarks, and cultural landscapes, in the Black community. The National Park Service and others recognize four different kinds of cultural landscapes: historic designed landscapes, historic vernacular landscapes, historic sites, and ethnographic landscapes. An explanation of each of those terms, with helpful examples, can be found here: <https://savingplaces.org/stories/preservation-glossary-todays-word-cultural-landscape>.

If anyone would like to recommend places or spaces that have historical or cultural significance to a particular ethnic group, please let us know.

5. Does the City know if there are any plans for the old Ropes Steamboat House sitting in Heritage Park?

According to Nina Nixon-Mendez, the City's Assistant Director of Development Services, the Ropes House was moved to Heritage Park and has remained unrestored for many years. Unfortunately, it has deteriorated over time. The Parks Department was interested in demolishing the structure as it had become a safety hazard and a public nuisance. The Landmark Commission had approved demolition subject to the house being thoroughly documented first; however, now the Parks Department has identified a company that is interested in relocating the house and restoring it. The Parks Department is currently assessing that situation, and the Landmark Commission supports that approach, as long as the building is documented before it is relocated. This would have to be authorized by City Council.

6. I have a home that's been designated as a Potential Landmark. What would I need to do to make it a historic landmark? Also, will this affect what improvements or renovations I can make to my home?

The local historic landmark designation requires an application through Development Services. Under the current historic preservation ordinance, this designation imparts very few restrictions on renovations or improvements. Any proposed alterations must be reviewed by the Landmark Commission in advance, so that the Commission can advise the property owner on ways to preserve the important character-defining features of the building, but ultimately the owner can proceed with their proposed changes.

Generally, although each city's preservation ordinance is a little different, most historic preservation ordinances require that you try to avoid removing or damaging the architectural elements that are particularly noteworthy or that define the character of a particular architectural style. Those character-defining features tend to be on the front of a building. Preservation ordinances almost never restrict changes to the interior of a building and, in some cases, may not regulate changes that cannot be seen from the public right-of-way.

The Preservation Plan will make recommendations for ways in which the City can do a better job of providing information and explaining these processes on their website. It will also include recommendations for how the City's current historic preservation ordinance can be made more clear and easy-to-use.

7. Would Roy Miller High School, along with Buc Stadium, ever be considered as a historic preservation site?

Properties can be considered historically significant, and therefore eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places, if they are associated with an important event or person, architecturally or artistically notable, or potentially important as an archaeological site. (More information about those criteria are available

here: <https://www.thc.texas.gov/preserve/projects-and-programs/national-register-historic-places/national-register-criteria>.)

If a building has been changed a lot, it may no longer be eligible for listing as a result. That is not a maintenance issue; it has to do with the loss of important character-defining features.

The Texas Historical Commission also recognizes Recorded Texas Historic Landmarks (<https://www.thc.texas.gov/preserve/projects-and-programs/recorded-texas-historic-landmarks>) and State Antiquities Landmarks (<https://www.thc.texas.gov/preserve/projects-and-programs/state-antiquities-landmarks>). Buildings and other properties must be listed on the National Register before they can be considered for State Antiquities Landmark status.

The City of Corpus Christi has slightly different criteria for designating a property as a local landmark. Only locally designated landmarks are subject to review by the Landmark Commission.

Without more information, it is difficult to answer this question, but it is possible that the High School/stadium complex could be considered historic and eligible for city, state, or federal designation if it meets the criteria for that particular designation.

8. Besides participating and staying engaged in this Preservation Plan process, what are some other options for residents to get more involved in the City's preservation efforts?

We would encourage people to start taking photos of the buildings and places that are important to you. We may ask you to share those with us later in the development of the Preservation Plan.

Once the Preservation Plan is complete, you will very likely have other ways to continue to be involved in the City's historic preservation efforts. For example, you might be interested in helping the City develop new programs, volunteer to serve on the Landmark Commission, or nominate your property as a landmark or your neighborhood as a historic district. Do you have any preservation-related skills that you'd be willing to share with others, for example, by helping the City put on a workshop? That might include soft skills like genealogy research or more trades-related things like repairing wood windows.

One of the most important elements of a successful local preservation effort is the presence of a nonprofit organization devoted to promoting, celebrating, and educating people about historic preservation. Those organizations act as valuable partners with City governments and other groups. Corpus Christi does not have such a nonprofit, as far as we know, and if anyone is interested in coming together and organizing one of these groups, McDoux would be happy to help you with that, at no charge.

9. Buildings in the Washington Coles area, which are historic and have rich history, are in the process of being torn down. Will these buildings be considered for the Preservation Plan?

The Northside neighborhoods are really important to look at. McDoux wants to talk to the people who grew up in or still live in that neighborhood and find out what you value so we can help you figure out what your options are. We will definitely discuss both Hillcrest and Washington Coles in the Preservation Plan.

10. Is Heritage Park considered a historic district?

The buildings in Heritage Park are all individual local landmarks. The City of Corpus Christi contains no historic districts—either on the National Register or locally designated.

11. Are faith-based communities invited to submit information? For example, the first Spanish-speaking congregation of the Methodist church in our community has a historical marker already.

Absolutely! Faith-based communities are often the stewards of historic buildings, and if churches are also nonprofit organizations, their buildings may be eligible for the state tax credit program, which can return up to 20% of qualifying rehabilitation expenses.

12. How would you describe the benefits of historic preservation to a person who isn't versed in historic preservation? Why should the average citizen care?

For example, we regularly hear from people who don't want a lot of McMansions built in their neighborhood; a historic preservation ordinance is one of the only ways to really prevent that, because you can have specific rules about the character of new construction.

The City could manage some of those things through the Development Code, but when you have a historic district or landmark, design review cases are heard in public meetings in front of the Landmark Commission, and other residents and neighbors get to have their say, instead of all of the decisions being made by City staff. It's a public process designed to be fair, consistent, and transparent.

Historic districts are also unlike Homeowners Associations in that HOAs are usually *much* more strict and picky than historic districts are. And, if an HOA tells you that you can't do something, you don't have a lot of recourse, whereas with a historic district, you have the ability to appeal to the Planning Commission or Zoning Board of Appeals or City Council, depending on how your city's ordinance is written.

We encourage people to look around at the things that they like about their neighborhood. What would you be sorry to lose? A neighborhood or a part of a city might be valued for different reasons by different people. Historic preservation seeks to identify what you want to keep around for future generations and how to do that in a way that doesn't put a glass box over your neighborhood and turn it into a museum. We are not interested in freezing a building in time or telling you what color you can paint your house. Our entire goal is to help you keep

the things that you want to have around for the future, and historic preservation is one of the best tools that we have to make that happen.

13. Once the old harbor bridge frame comes down, how can the City reuse parts of the bridge frame for the new planned bridge, to remain historical and to beautify our City?

What a good question! That probably depends on how the contract will be written with the company that demolishes the bridge. For example, we worked with the City of Freeport, Union Pacific Railroad, the U.S. Coast Guard, the Port of Freeport, and the Texas Historical Commission on a project to replace a very significant railroad swing bridge in that city. Part of the agreement that we helped write specified that the City would get a few specific parts of the mechanism used to turn the bridge span, for their museum. But that had to be written into the contract with the demolition company, so that they would be required to salvage whatever specific things the City wanted. I would suggest talking with Shelly Rios, the Arts & Cultural Liaison for the City Parks Department, about your ideas. You can find her contact information here: <https://www.cctexas.com/detail/parks-recreation-contact-information>.

14. Is the preservation of local modern structures something we can finally consider?

Yes. We have discussed with the Texas Historical Commission's coordinator for the National Register of Historic Places, Greg Smith, the possibility of looking at Corpus Christi's building stock in different ways that would allow us to do this.

In 2017, the City of Corpus Christi received a Certified Local Government grant from the National Park Service Historic Preservation Fund, as administered by the Texas Historical Commission, for a historic resources survey of the downtown and Upper Broadway area to specifically look at the modern architecture found in that area. Hardy Heck Moore (HHM), the historic preservation consultants who conducted that survey, identified 33 resources as individually eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. HHM also determined that an area of The Bluff would be eligible for the National Register as a historic district. Listing on the National Register makes a property eligible for financial/economic incentives, such as the federal and state historic tax credit programs and the state sales tax exemption for construction labor on historic properties, as well as some state or federal grants. However, the National Register does not regulate properties in any way. More information about the National Register program in Texas is available here: <https://www.thc.texas.gov/preserve/projects-and-programs/national-register-historic-places>.

All of the protections for and restrictions on historic properties take place at the local level, to ensure that control rests with the community. If property owners want to ensure that their buildings or structures are protected for future generations, they should seek local landmark or historic district designations. Because the City's criteria for local landmark designations are slightly different than the criteria used by the National Register, HHM found a few more resources (a total of 37) to be eligible for designation as local landmarks.

Some properties may not be eligible for the National Register of Historic Places in their current condition, due to incompatible past alterations. However, an owner who is willing to reverse or appropriately address those alterations may be able to participate in the historic tax credit programs and receive National Register listing after the project is completed. More information about Preservation Tax Incentives is available

here: <https://www.thc.texas.gov/preserve/projects-and-programs/preservation-tax-incentives>.

15. Will cemeteries in the Hillcrest neighborhood become eligible as historic for the preservation plan being that the neighborhood is now being affected by the new Harbor Bridge Project?

In the Preservation Plan, we will discuss all of the historic cemeteries in Corpus Christi. You may know that Old Bayview Cemetery has recently been listed on the National Register of Historic Places; McDoux worked with the Friends of Old Bayview Cemetery to prepare that nomination.

We have a few different ways to recognize a historic cemetery. It might be considered for listing on the National Register, designated as a local landmark by the City, or recognized by the Texas Historical Commission as a Historic Texas Cemetery. Eligibility requirements are different for each of these options, but we will look at all of them for each cemetery.

Information about listing a cemetery on the National Register is available

here: <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nationalregister/upload/NRB41-Complete.pdf>.

You can learn more about the Historic Texas Cemetery designation

here: <https://www.thc.texas.gov/preserve/projects-and-programs/cemetery-preservation>.

If nothing else, a cemetery can be recognized with a Texas historical marker. The state marker program is managed through the Nueces County Historical Commission, which has placed markers at Banquete Cemetery, Duncan Cemetery, Hebrew Rest Cemetery, Nuecestown Cemetery, Old Bayview Cemetery, and Sunshine Cemetery so far. You can learn more about the state historic marker program, including Undertold Markers, which address historical gaps and promote the diversity of topics, here:

<https://www.thc.texas.gov/preserve/projects-and-programs/state-historical-markers>.

16. I would like to know if the city has any interest in preserving the Ritz Theater and Old Nueces County Courthouse. Both of these landmarks are important pieces of city history but have remained unsightly and in need of repair. I understand that there isn't any money and interest to hire a company to fix them, but I think if the city wanted to, they could pull the community together to volunteer to clean and fix these areas. Now during COVID there has been people who have taken time to take on projects at home. Why not ask the citizens to come by and learn about these landmarks as well as maintaining the properties. There could be a schedule of dates where volunteers can come in and work

with the city to evaluate and fix these areas. I think it will strengthen the community and also make these landmarks more attractive to visitors.

The Ritz Theatre is owned by a nonprofit organization and is raising money for its restoration. You can learn more about that effort, make a donation, and inquire about volunteer opportunities at <https://www.ccritz.com/>.

The 1914 Nueces County Courthouse is owned by the County. Currently, due to the instability of the façade, we are told that site is not safe for members of the public. We will ask the County if they might have opportunities for volunteers to help clean up that building; for example, in preparation for showing it to developers.

17. I am interested in getting at least parts of Delmar into a historic neighborhood. Have you had any other Del Mar residents that are also interested in becoming a historic district?

We have not heard from Del Mar residents, but we will include information in the Preservation Plan about how to organize a new historic district designation, including providing accurate information to neighbors and addressing common misperceptions.

18. Old Bayview Cemetery is the oldest Federal military cemetery in Texas. It is 175 years old this past September. The cemetery has approximately 600 interred. It is not segregated. We would love to see a comprehensive plan from the City of Corpus Christi to protect, preserve and restore this treasure. We will be glad to help in any way.

McDoux was privileged to help the Friends of Old Bayview Cemetery obtain a National Register nomination for the cemetery this year. We also migrated 2003 and 2017 data about cemetery markers and unmarked graves into the City's Geographic Information System (GIS). These two activities provide a strong foundation for a future Cemetery Master Plan. However, such a plan will probably be funded through the Hotel Occupancy Tax, and those funds have been limited this year due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

19. This video about the Santa Barbara (California) airport renovation provides a good example of what can happen when you get a big buy-in from the community. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0IZ27WZsAQA>

Thanks for sharing this!

20. Preservation of our history is important especially during these times. Maintaining and reaching out to save our history will leave a reminder to those who follow us. Reflection is important to understand our past and what we need to focus on in the future. Save our history. Comments need to be shared as to what has been accomplished since 1992 in those areas designated as historical zones.

Thank you for this question. The 1976 Preservation Plan identified individual sites, rather than areas or neighborhoods, for potential designation. The Landmark Commission in 1988 identified a list of 66 individual properties to be investigated for potential designation; many of those were in the Beach Addition, with a few in the Bluff Addition, Blucher Tract, Blucher Arroyo

Tract, Chamberlain Addition, and Rayne Tract. The Cross Roads Shopping Center and the “Northeast corner of Carancahua and Coleman Streets” were also included. It is not clear what action (if any) was taken following the list’s development. Again, no historic districts were identified or designated.

In 1991, historian Sally Victor was commissioned by the City in 1991 to conduct a historic resources survey of 1,145 pre-1945 properties within the city limits and the extra-territorial jurisdiction (ETJ). Both phases of the survey were funded by the NPS/THC Certified Local Government program. The survey focused on Blucherville, the South Bluff area, Furman Avenue, the Leopard Street Corridor, Irish Town, and Saxet Heights. The results of the survey were intended to complement the City’s South Central Area Development Plan, adopted by Council on May 21, 1991. Victor’s recommendations included:

- Rehabilitate the Old Nueces County Courthouse
- Create a computerized database for information about historic properties
- Continue to document, designate, and educate the community about historic landmarks and historic districts (including the South Central area, which Victor identified as containing the most historically significant resources in the city)
- Work with the Convention and Visitor’s Bureau to promote heritage tourism
- Expand the local and state marker programs
- Assist property owners who wish to seek National Register listings

Victor also recommended creating historic districts in Blucherville, the north half of Furman Avenue, and Upper Broadway near Park Street. She also noted that the Texas legislature had just established a statute allowing municipalities to seek redress against property owners who demolish historic structures without a permit.

The 1992 Preservation Plan identified the following areas for further investigation; some of these had already been surveyed by Victor in 1991, so we conclude that “further investigation” in these cases meant considering the possibility of National Register nominations for historic districts or individual properties. However, no historic districts were designated.

- Blucher Park Area
- Old Irish Town
- Furman Street
- South Bluff
- Saxet Heights
- Hillcrest
- South Upper Broadway
- Up River Road/Longview/Oak Park
- Cole/Del Mar/Atlantic Areas
- Morgan Area/Port Corridor
- Downtown Area

Other City plans mentioned historic preservation in general ways. We believe that Sally Victor's recommendations probably were not implemented for several reasons: first, because no one developed a step-by-step guide to implementing them; second, because no one figured out how to pay for these activities; and third, because the City had no private nonprofit partner to help, unlike most other cities that have successful preservation programs.

Our preservation plan will include an implementation guide with financial strategy, and a recommendation to support the establishment of a local preservation nonprofit organization with which the City can collaborate.