

## TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

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# Texas Public Preservation Survey Results February 27, 2010

## Summary

Every 10 years the Texas Historical Commission (THC), in collaboration with our partners, develops a Statewide Preservation Plan for Texas. It's one of our key responsibilities as a State Historic Preservation Office in accordance with the 1966 National Historic Preservation Act. This new statewide preservation plan is an opportunity to lay a pathway for Texans to preserve, protect and leverage our historic and cultural fabric for the betterment of our communities. It will be a web-based interactive tool with specific goals, resources, best practices and applications for different types of preservationists throughout the state.

The process was launched with an on-line public survey open between December 15, 2009 and February 7, 2010. The survey was released broadly to the public through press releases, direct email invitations, partner distribution and links on the THC website. The goals of the survey were to engage Texans in the planning process and to gauge their opinion on the benefits, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of local preservation efforts. The results of the survey will directly inform the priorities developed for the Statewide Preservation Plan. The following is a summary and highlights of the survey results. Please visit our [website](#) for an illustrated analysis of the survey, or you can directly view the [raw data](#) which includes all the open-ended responses.

## Who took the survey?

- 1,089 people responded
- 64% of Texas counties represented
- 59% of respondents are from urban/suburban areas; 41% are from rural areas/small towns
  
- 77% of respondents are over 45 years old; 23% are under 45 years old
- 64% respondents are female; 36% are male
- 87% of respondents are Anglo; 7% are Hispanic; 3% are African-American
  
- 55% of respondents are interested citizens; 45% are preservation professionals
- Top categories of preservationists: interested citizens, county historical commission members, public agency staff/official, museum professional and preservation organization/advocate
- 30% of respondents are involved in preservation for under 5 years; 32% are involved between 6-15 years; and 38% are involved over 15 years
- 69% of respondents are “very to moderately” active in preservation; 31% are “occasionally or not active at all”

## General Preservation Benefits

98% of people who took the survey believe that there are direct benefits for their community that results from the work of historic preservation. The top three identified community benefits of historic preservation include:

1. Preserve important places and stories
2. Retain a sense of place and identity
3. Develop their economy (downtown revitalization, heritage tourism, job growth, etc.)

# TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

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## Strengths and Weaknesses

Respondents were asked to rank the effectiveness of preservation efforts in their community. The top three strengths of local preservation are:

1. Promoting your community's history
2. Supporting the tourism industry
3. Protecting archeological sites and cemeteries

Conversely, efforts that ranked lowest in the effectiveness of local preservation illustrate weaknesses. The top three weaknesses of all respondents include:

1. Providing affordable housing
2. Stabilizing property values
3. Supporting the owners of historic properties through financial incentives

## Threats and Opportunities

Respondents were asked to identify the top three challenges or threats to local historic and cultural resources, as well as the most threatened types of resources. The top threats are:

1. Lack of financial incentives and economic tools for historic preservation
2. Growth and development pressure (i.e. urban sprawl)
3. Not enough understanding or appreciation of historic preservation by the general public

The most threatened or endangered resources are:

1. Downtowns/Main Streets
2. Neighborhoods/historic districts
3. Homes

When asked what three activities Texas should improve to better preserve its historic and cultural resources, the majority of respondents chose these four:

1. Provide economic development incentives or programs that incorporate historic preservation
2. Enact stronger state and local historic preservation laws
3. Provide education and training for the general public
4. Provide education and training for public officials

Respondents indicated the following three tools as being the most effective for preserving Texas history and places:

1. Economic development tools and programs used in conjunction with historic preservation
2. Local historic preservation ordinances
3. Local, state and federal tax incentives

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### Open-Ended Responses

Respondents were asked how a statewide preservation plan can be a resource in their efforts to preserve historic and cultural resources. 733 people commented and suggestions can be categorized into these primary themes:

- The plan can be a model or framework for communities that do not have the resources or expertise to develop their own plans
- It should be an educational tool in a variety of ways, including educating the general public, outlining benefits of preservation to strengthen local discussions, and serving as a central clearinghouse of information for preservation
- It should set forth consistent standards and guidelines for preservation
- It needs to be implementation-focused; goals and actions need to be implementable and measurable, people at the local level need to be prepared to carry out the plan, and the plan needs to be tied to funding, grants and incentives
- It needs to encourage survey and inventory of historic and cultural resources
- It should focus on financial resources available for preservation
- It should create networks and collaborations, sharing ideas, best practices and what is working/not working for different types of communities

The survey asked if there were local tools and/or incentives in respondents communities that would be beneficial to other communities. 360 people commented and responses included:

- Generous property tax abatements
- Construction waivers and Tax Increment Financing
- Online database of landmarks and districts with accompanying zoning and incentives
- Development of smart code
- County Historical Commission review of new development in county
- Web survey project
- Partnering with local university, library, boy scouts, etc.
- County-based Preservation Trust Fund administered by the County Historical Commission

Lastly, respondents shared what other issues or ideas they recommend be considered in developing a statewide preservation plan. A few examples of the 359 comments include:

- The importance of funding and incentives tied to the plan being implemented
- Strengthen the argument between preservation and economic development
- Connecting historic preservation with green building and sustainability
- Focus on the history and contributions of culturally diverse population
- Importance of educating younger generation, especially in elementary schools
- Regional and/or local representation from the THC; think about THC field offices
- Importance of local surveys and inventories then integrated into statewide database

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### Variations

Respondents generally shared the same perspective throughout the survey, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, age and geography. The biggest variation between geography and demographics occurred when asked what three things should be improved to better preservation efforts. Economic development programs topped the list for all groups and locations. However the second and third spot varied greatly. Urban areas highlighted strengthening local and state laws and providing training for public officials; rural areas highlighted education for the general public and developing heritage tourism; and African-Americans highlighted enforcement of existing laws and ordinances and developing better partnerships. Hispanic respondents were consistent with the average response.

### Conclusion

This public preservation survey launched the process for developing Texas' Statewide Preservation Plan and provided a starting point for understanding local preservation issues and priorities. To learn more about the Statewide Preservation Plan and how to get involved in the process, please visit the THC's [website](#). If you have any questions or comments, please contact Tracey Silverman at [tracey.silverman@thc.state.tx.us](mailto:tracey.silverman@thc.state.tx.us) or 512.936.9615.

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Texas Historical Commission  
P.O. Box 12276  
Austin, TX 78711-2276  
512.463.6100  
fax 512.475.4872  
thc@thc.state.tx.us



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