

# AUSTIN HISTORIC-AGE HOUSING PRESERVATION

## Preserving Affordability within a Displacement Preservation Framework



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City of Austin Housing and Planning Department –  
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**HOUSING &  
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ON THE COVER: Historic-aged housing in Austin.



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## About the Urban Land Institute

The Urban Land Institute is a global, member-driven organization comprising more than 45,000 real estate and urban development professionals dedicated to advancing the Institute's mission of shaping the future of the built environment for transformative impact in communities worldwide. ULI's interdisciplinary membership represents all aspects of the industry, including developers, property owners, investors, architects, urban planners, public officials, real estate brokers, appraisers, attorneys, engineers, financiers, and academics. Established in 1936, the Institute has a presence in the Americas, Europe, and Asia Pacific region, with members in 81 countries. ULI's extraordinary impact on land use decision-making is based on its members' sharing expertise on a variety of factors affecting the built environment, including urbanization, demographic and population changes, new economic drivers, technology advancements, and environmental concerns. Peer-to-peer learning is achieved through the knowledge shared by members at thousands of convenings each year that reinforce ULI's position as a global authority on land use and real estate. Drawing on its members' work, the Institute recognizes and shares best practices in urban design and development for the benefit of communities around the globe.

More information is available at [uli.org](http://uli.org). Follow ULI on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), [LinkedIn](#), and [Instagram](#).

## About ULI Austin

The ULI Austin District Council brings together real estate professionals, civic leaders, and the Austin community for educational programs, initiatives affecting the region, and networking events, all in the pursuit of advancing responsible and equitable land use throughout the region. With over 1,000 members locally, ULI Austin provides a unique venue to convene and share best practices in the region. ULI Austin believes everyone needs to be at the table when the region's future is at stake, so ULI serves the entire spectrum of land use and real estate development disciplines—from architects to developers, CEOs to analysts, builders, property owners, investors, public officials, and everyone in between. Using this interdisciplinary approach, ULI examines land use issues, impartially reports findings, and convenes forums to find solutions.

### ULI Austin Leadership

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## ULI Advisory Services

Since 1947, the ULI Advisory Services program has assembled well over 700 ULI-member teams to help sponsors find creative, practical solutions for complex land use challenges. A wide variety of public, private, and nonprofit organizations have contracted for ULI's advisory services. National and international panelists are specifically recruited to form a panel of independent and objective volunteer ULI member experts with the skills needed to address the identified land use challenge. The program is designed to help break through obstacles, jump-start conversations, and solve tough challenges that need an outside, independent perspective. Three- and five-day engagements are offered to ensure thorough consideration of relevant topics.

Learn more at [americas.uli.org/programs/advisory-services](https://americas.uli.org/programs/advisory-services).

## Technical Assistance Panels

Urban Land Institute harnesses its members' technical expertise to help communities solve complex land use, development, and redevelopment challenges. Technical assistance panels (TAPs) provide expert, multidisciplinary, unbiased advice to local governments, public agencies, and nonprofit organizations facing complex land use and real estate issues in the Austin region. Drawing from its professional membership base, ULI Austin offers objective and responsible guidance on various land use and real estate issues ranging from site-specific projects to public policy questions. The sponsoring organization is responsible for gathering the background information necessary to understand the project and present it to the panel. TAP panelists spend two days interviewing stakeholders, evaluating the challenges, and ultimately arriving at a set of recommendations that the sponsoring organization can use to guide development going forward.

## The Terwilliger Center for Housing

ULI's Terwilliger Center for Housing was established in 2007 with a gift from longtime ULI member and former chair J. Ronald Terwilliger. The goal of the Terwilliger Center for Housing is to advance best practices in residential development and public policy, and to support ULI members and local communities in creating and sustaining a full spectrum of housing opportunities, particularly for low- and moderate-income households.

The ULI's Terwilliger Center for Housing, through its Attainable Housing for All Initiative, is poised to grow and deepen its housing impact through additional housing-focused Advisory Services and technical assistance panels. This campaign will leverage the breadth of current and future housing-focused work within ULI to inform and advance efforts around the country to enable attainable housing preservation and production. The primary tool of the campaign will be 10 TAPs during the 2022 and 2023 calendar years.

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The Terwilliger Center's participation in and support of this technical assistance panel was made possible by the generous financial contribution of former ULI global chair Thomas Toomey.

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Some historic-aged homes in Austin are being meticulously renovated while still maintaining their affordability.

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ULI



Historic-aged homes can be found near downtown Austin.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The City of Austin is currently developing an equity-based historic preservation plan to protect and preserve the City's historic-age buildings and diverse cultural heritage. The plan envisions an approach to preservation that “uses the past to create a shared sense of belonging and to shape an equitable, inclusive, sustainable, and economically vital future for all.” While in the midst of the planning process, the City of Austin (the City) and Preservation Austin, a citywide nonprofit that exists to empower Austinites to shape a more inclusive, resilient, and meaningful community culture, turned to the Urban Land Institute – Austin District Council (ULI) to help inform the plan's recommendations for preserving historic-age housing, maintaining affordability, and stemming displacement in the City.

Cities across the United States are grappling with how to preserve housing affordability. Many cities have recognized the value of preserving market affordable housing as an important element in the affordability landscape. For Austin, many of these market affordable properties have an added historic element—many are over 50 years old—and represent some of the unique character important to new and long-time Austinites alike, enhancing the pride residents feel for the City. Preserving affordability and supporting the preservation of these historic-age structures is important to City leaders and community members alike.

ULI, leveraging its trusted technical assistance panel (TAP) process, convened a group of local and national experts to study the issue, interview stakeholders, and deliver a set of recommendations that the City and Preservation Austin can pursue to support the development of the City's new equity-based preservation plan, strengthen ongoing preservation efforts, and support displacement prevention initiatives.

## Guiding Principles

The panel detailed a set of guiding principles that should serve as a north star for the City and Preservation Austin in their work.

- Cultural and building preservation must be a part of Austin's housing affordability tool kit. Preservation and affordability are community benefits, and preserving existing units helps ensure longer-term affordability.
- There is no one key to solving the affordability challenge. Support is needed for homeowners and renters in historic-age homes, and existing programs

and tools (*e.g.*, for accessory dwelling units [ADUs], home repair) must become more accessible to low-income households.

- Preservation and maintaining affordability require political will. The City will need to rebuild trust with community members and coalition-building, co-creation, and co-implementation are critical.

## Policies and Regulations

Although the private market largely dictates much of Austin's housing development, the City has an important role to play in the process and can influence how development proceeds. Updating the Land Development Code and revising the policies and regulations that can positively affect preservation efforts and affordability will help support and encourage preservation-focused development.

At present, it is often an easier permitting path and more profitable for developers to tear down existing older homes, making way for new construction. The development process would benefit from the intentional alignment and comprehensive cooperation of the various City departments involved in preservation work, ensuring that the reviews and paperwork needed to support preservation efforts are as easy—if not easier—than demolition.

Local policies addressing ADUs have helped homeowners leverage their property to house extended family members or earn rental income. These options need to be streamlined, be made more affordable, and provide opportunities for leasing or selling a portion of a lot to allow

homeowners, particularly lower-income homeowners, to financially benefit from ADUs without having to assume debt and manage the design and construction personally.

Community land trusts can also provide flexible ownership opportunities, help preserve affordability, and mitigate displacement. By way of example, a nonprofit or a public entity could acquire the property while providing the property owner a life estate, which would allow the homeowner to remain in place.

Additional policies, such as entitlement bonuses, tax abatement based on historic preservation, SMART Housing with preservation features, and small-lot amnesty tools can also assist homeowners and developers in preserving historic-age homes.

## Processes and Programs

The City has a number of programs in place to assist homeowners in pursuing preservation opportunities, yet additional marketing and education are needed. Messaging could be facilitated through neighborhood resource centers, enhanced or new community development organizations, and community residents hired to assist with outreach.

Navigating City departments and processes could be facilitated through the use of an ombudsman and made easier through one suite of affordability and preservation incentives. There is also room for improvement in the navigation of the City's digital presence as municipal websites are notoriously overwhelming.

The City's current home repair program is drastically underfunded and therefore able to reach only a small number of homeowners each year. Expanding this program while instituting educational programs in basic home maintenance will support residents' ability to remain in their homes and assist in preventing displacement. Additional trades education, specifically addressing repairs of older homes, would expand the pool of contractors able to support homeowners in maintaining their homes and staying in place.

A host of alternative ownership structures also might increase homeownership, help maintain affordability, and preserve historic-age homes. Community land trusts lower the barriers to homeownership for some and life estates can help current homeowners remain in place. There may also

be opportunities for the City to acquire affordable housing units.

## Beyond the City

Housing affordability for residents is often tied to property taxes, and efforts to affect tax policy at the county and state levels are worth exploring as well as coordinating with other taxing entities. From tax abatement based on income to tax ceilings for homeowners aged 65 and older, slight modifications to these taxing structures can have an important positive impact on older and income-restricted residents' ability to remain in their homes in a rapidly gentrifying market.

## Measuring Success

City departments and preservation advocates will need to establish baseline measurements and identify goals for housing preservation and affordability. A proactive comprehensive, city-wide survey of affordable historic-age housing would provide a data foundation and, when combined with the recommendations of recent reports like [\*Uprooted: Residential Displacement in Austin's Gentrifying Neighborhoods and What Can Be Done About It\*](#), this data will help the City better identify progress towards its preservation goals and understand where improvements remain.

A chart of these recommendations and associated timelines may be found on page 25.

## Conclusion

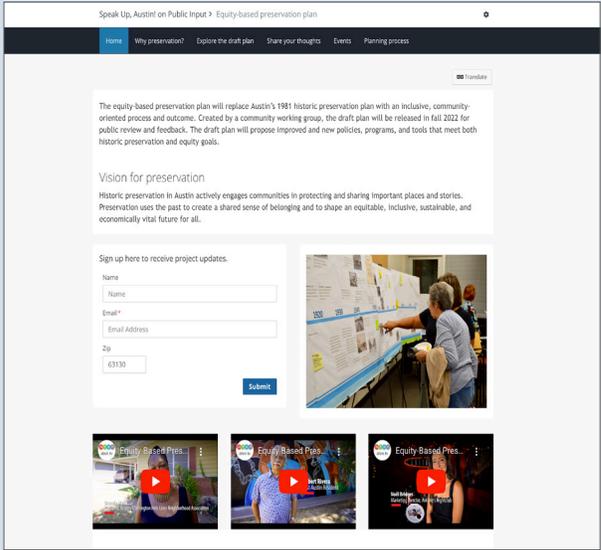
Austin is a densifying city in the midst of exponential growth. Market forces are pushing developers to purchase older, modest homes to make way for bigger, newer, sometimes denser and frequently market-rate housing. Current City processes make demolition the easier, most cost-effective, and time-efficient path. However, the demolition of existing market-affordable housing adds to displacement pressures on residents and community culture. The City must prioritize housing affordability and cultural and building preservation, and help keep residents in their homes. Preservation can help decrease economic segregation, increase equity, and keep Austin weird—and it starts with political will.

# INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Austin is booming. Residential and commercial development is occurring across the city, and few neighborhoods are free from development pressure. To meet the demands of new homeowners and new businesses, developers are purchasing and demolishing modest historic-age homes to clear the sites and make way for new, bigger, sometimes denser housing. With the potential for larger homes, the easier “scrape/build” approach is compelling. This approach is chasing market demand, yet it is further significantly limiting housing affordability by stripping the city of its historic-age housing, the very housing that draws people to Austin’s neighborhoods and gives neighborhoods their character.

Recognizing this trend and the associated impacts on the City, the neighborhoods, and Austin residents, the City of Austin recently launched the development of the Equity-Based Preservation Plan. The multiyear process the City is using to inform and develop the plan is guided by a working group appointed by the Historic Landmark Commission. To further inform recommendations in the draft plan, the City of Austin Housing & Planning Department’s Displacement Prevention Office and Historic Preservation Office, together with Preservation Austin, Austin’s citywide preservation nonprofit, turned to ULI Austin and the Terwilliger Center for Housing for insights relating to the specific challenges of preserving historic-age homes, maintaining housing affordability, and preventing future displacement of Austin residents. The recommendations from the ULI Austin technical assistance panel will inform the plan as the working group begins community outreach and engagement around the current draft.

The ULI TAP process, designed to be objective and instructive in its process, brings together unbiased real estate industry professionals equipped with experience directly related to the challenge at hand to serve as panelists, providing actionable recommendations and guidance. Equipped with extensive briefing materials before the TAP work sessions, the panelists spent the TAP workdays meeting with the sponsoring organizations and toured a sampling of local neighborhoods, which provided the panel with deeper insights into the challenge. Following the tour, the panel conducted interviews over of two days, meeting with more than 40 stakeholders representing



**Equity-Based Preservation Plan**

The working group set a vision for the plan and historic preservation: “Historic preservation in Austin actively engages communities in protecting and sharing important places and stories. Preservation uses the past to create a shared sense of belonging and to shape an equitable, inclusive, sustainable, and economically vital future for all.”

[www.publicinput.com/ATXpresplan](http://www.publicinput.com/ATXpresplan)

City staff, business owners, property owners, developers, architects, preservationists, other real estate industry representatives, and leaders of community organizations. The insights from these interviews further informed the panelists’

understanding of Austin's housing preservation and affordability issues and illuminated potential gaps in existing programs and processes.

The wide variety of professional and personal perspectives shared in the stakeholder interviews covered significant ground, yet common themes began to emerge. The following key takeaways were noted by the panel:

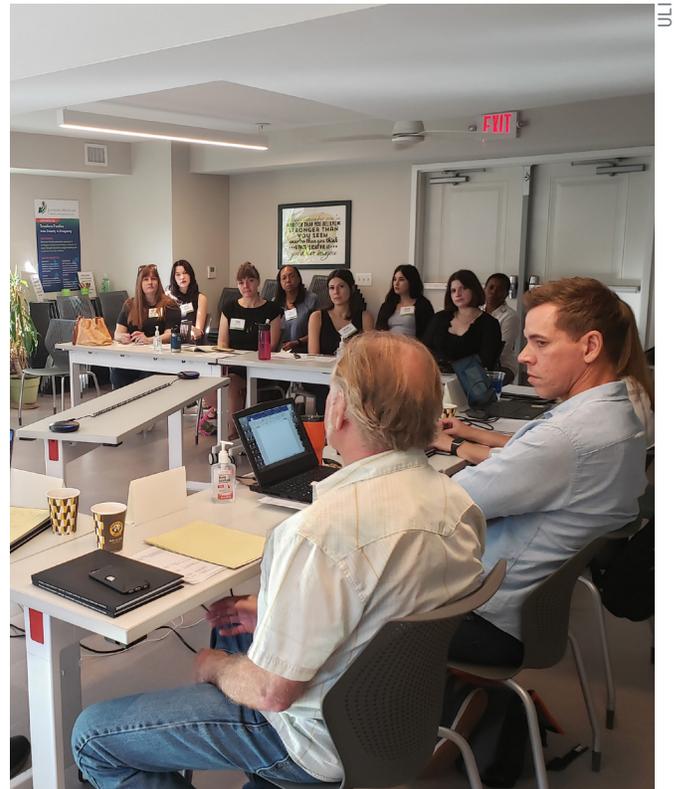
- Austin is losing its character. Preserving it takes political will.
- It is easier to demolish and build new housing than preserve older homes. (There are higher fees and too many hoops to jump through.)
- Preservation but for whom and to what end? Preservation can and should support everyone, including those most directly impacted by the housing affordability crisis.
- Preservation should intentionally support not just the buildings but also the people and community institutions and businesses that enliven them.
- Preservation is a fancy word for maintenance. Use less preservation jargon and more language that is accessible to homeowners and renters.
- Stacking/integrating preservation into existing programs could increase impact.
- The City needs more place-based organizations and neighborhood capacity. It should invest in capacity building for these organizations, which have community trust and can serve as liaisons in navigating City processes.
- ADUs hold promise but can be overwhelming to build and manage profitably.
- New approaches are needed to address inexpensively subdividing existing lots for multiple housing units.
- Affordability is tied to real estate taxation, and predictability through improved assessment timing is needed.
- The City's approach to housing and preservation needs to move from being reactive to being proactive through incentives and low-cost, easy-to-use programs and policies.



Touring Austin neighborhoods with historic-aged housing provided the panel with additional insights into the challenge at hand.

- Many of the tools already exist in Austin (e.g., community land trusts, home repair and maintenance programs, and small lot amnesty). What is needed is more awareness and better/more coordinated execution.
- More predictability is needed in the permitting development process.
- Homeowners need more trusted intermediaries to help them navigate the available programs.
- The home repair program is helpful but complex and limited in scale in its current form.
- The building codes are not always reasonable for repairing historic-age homes.
- We need to reimagine what trust-building looks like.

With this information in hand and with the professional expertise represented by the individual panelists, the TAP panel drafted a set of recommendations that can help the City begin addressing preservation, affordability, and displacement challenges today while shaping more efficient and effective processes for continued improvement into the future.



The TAP panel interviewed a wide variety of public and private sector stakeholders.

## TAP Panel Scope

What policies, programs, and tools could be implemented to preserve historic-age housing (50 years old and older) while supporting affordability and preventing displacement?

## Guiding Questions

How can the City support homeowners (especially low and moderate income) to stay long term?

How can the City support property owners who offer market-affordable rental housing?

How can the City help owners access the wealth in their property assets to prevent displacement while preserving historic-age housing?

How can the City support low- and moderate-income households in generational transfers of homestead property, particularly with regard to retention?

How can the City support low- and moderate-income property owners in historically sensitive rehabilitations and additions?

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Through the course of the TAP, the panel recognized the challenges Austin faces with respect to its preservation and affordable housing goals. With a market that often wants more, bigger, and newer and a host of neighborhoods seeking to preserve buildings, culture, and affordability, the City must take a strong stand in its approach to preserving housing, promoting housing affordability, and supporting displacement prevention initiatives. The following guiding principles may help the City—both elected leadership and professional staff—navigate these at-times competing agendas.

**Preservation, both of buildings and culture, must be a part of Austin's housing affordability toolkit.** Historic significance needs to extend beyond the architecture of the building. Who built it? What happened there? How is it important to the community? Do current preservation practices preserve buildings and architecture or people and community? For Austin, the choice should not be one or the other. If emphasis is equally placed on the building and the community fabric, personal investments in and attachments to the community may produce more sustainable preservation outcomes organically. Conversations with neighbors and the keepers of neighborhood histories will shine additional light on the people who called that house “home” and the role they played in shaping the history of Austin, thereby deepening the preservation story.

*“The buildings are the evidence of the people and the community. Preservation starts with organizing the community around saving their oral history, identifying timelines, historic documents, and more.”*

–Community stakeholder

**Preservation and affordability are community benefits.**

Preservation helps retain and even strengthen the community fabric. Buildings are tangible evidence of people’s shared history and the value they provide to the larger city. Similarly, affordable housing units provide opportunities for all people to participate in a community. With ranges of price points, housing can draw people from all stages and walks of life to participate in and add to the community fabric.

**Preserving existing units and working to ensure longer-term affordability can help make Austin a more equitable place to live.**

Policies that support affordability long into the future will be important to help lessen the impact of continually rising housing costs and allow more current Austin residents to continue to call the city home.

**There is no one way to solve the affordability question; there is no silver bullet.** Addressing affordability challenges and putting in place policies and regulations that support the development, maintenance, and sustainability of affordable housing require an all-hands-on-deck approach, with multiple public- and private-sector partners playing a role.

**Many homeowners and renters need assistance in repairing, maintaining, and preserving their home so that they remain safe and habitable today and into the future.** Whether the support comes in the form of large-scale interventions such as financial assistance to address critical repairs (e.g., roof or foundation) or smaller interventions such as community education programs to help residents understand basic home maintenance

(e.g., air filter replacement or caulking), these support mechanisms can help keep residents in their homes and help maintain the structures well into the future.

While some homeowners are already accessing a variety of programs and incentives available in the market, **many low-income residents are not aware of the programs or do not know how they work.** The complexity of the City's home repair process is overwhelming for some, as is the concept of leveraging the equity of an existing home to finance the construction of an accessory dwelling unit (ADU) to serve as a rental property. The programs in place are a great start, but they must become more accessible to low-income households.

**Preserving buildings and maintaining affordability require political will.** The City needs to articulate a cohesive and consistent vision of what it seeks to preserve and what it is willing to give up in pursuit of development and preservation.

**Building trust is critical.** In a rapidly changing environment with potentially competing agendas, those who have been historically left out of the decision-making process may not trust those seeking to engage with them in preservation conversations. Although trust cannot be built overnight, intentional and authentic coalition-building, co-creation, and co-implementation can aid the City in improving relationships with community members and neighborhood representatives while simultaneously yielding a more holistic, equitable, transformative, and sustainable product. In addition, by employing community-based contacts to work with and in the community, sharing updates and important information, and using a common language about options for homeowners, a more trustful relationship can gather strength.

These guiding principles provided the foundation upon which the following recommendations were built. Going forward, the panel encourages the sponsors of this report to likewise adopt these principles in the pursuit of preservation, affordability, and displacement prevention measures.

## Definitions

Throughout the course of its work, the panel operated with the following understanding of certain key terms.

**Affordability:** A single person living in Austin making \$44,000 earns less than 60 percent median family income (MFI). The 60 percent MFI threshold for a family of four is \$66,180. At present, City ordinances are tied to 80 percent area median income (AMI), yet the pursuit of additional units at 30, 40, and 50 percent of AMI will require deep subsidies.

**Cultural Heritage Preservation:** Cultural heritage preservation means keeping the artifacts and traditions of a community intact against factors trying to change them or wear them away. Some common examples are restoring historical buildings, passing on an ancient craft or recording traditional tales. Cultural heritage is crucial for communities. It gives them a way to look back on their history in a way that informs their present-day identity. It also provides the communities with new chances to thrive. (Mikayla Burton, The Borgen Project)

**Life Estate:** A life estate provides a person, for the person's lifetime, certain rights in a property, while transferring ownership of the property to another person. The duration of a life estate is measured by the lifetime of the owner of the life estate, or by the occurrence of some event. The contract establishing a life estate, however, may restrict one or more rights of the owner of the life estate. The owner of a life estate does not have fee simple title to the property nor the right to sell the entire property. (Texas Administrative Code. [https://texreg.sos.state.tx.us/public/readtac\\$ext.TacPage?sl=R&app=9&p\\_dir=&p\\_rloc=&p\\_tloc=&p\\_ploc=&pg=1&p\\_tac=&ti=1&pt=15&ch=358&rl=350](https://texreg.sos.state.tx.us/public/readtac$ext.TacPage?sl=R&app=9&p_dir=&p_rloc=&p_tloc=&p_ploc=&pg=1&p_tac=&ti=1&pt=15&ch=358&rl=350))

**Preservation:** Preservation of historic buildings, structures, sites, and districts; awareness of our cultural and architectural heritage; part of a more sustainable, equitable, and livable city. (City of Austin, Equity-Based Preservation Plan)

# POLICY AND REGULATION RECOMMENDATIONS

The private market largely dictates where, when, and how housing is built in Austin. The City has an important role to play in the development process and can influence and impact how development proceeds. The City's Land Development Code determines what can be built, and working collaboratively, changes can be implemented in the Code to reflect the recommendations included in this report. Identifying and leveraging these functions are key to the City's pursuit of preserving historic-age housing, maintaining housing affordability, and helping residents remain in place.

**Coordination and Collaboration.** Different aspects of housing preservation, affordability, and displacement prevention efforts involve a wide variety of City departments. It is not uncommon for the policies of one department to work counter to, or not fully support, the policies of another. City departments must dissolve their silos and actively coordinate with one another to co-create and co-implement effective programs that will promote affordability, displacement prevention, and cost-effective preservation across Austin. The uncertainty that exists today about administrative approvals in City departments is positioning preservation as a barrier to development and progress. Through an interdepartmental approach to development and preservation, homeowners and developers alike can better access existing programs and be confident that the steps taken under City guidance today will not fall under different rules or guidance tomorrow. The result is a system that functions with greater certainty and provides greater efficiencies for developers and homeowners navigating the preservation process.

**ADU Flexibility.** The current policies governing Austin's ADUs provide homeowners with means, and those who have experience with or comfort in dealing with the building process ready access to add an additional unit on a lot. However, for those who may need to access additional financing for the first time or who may not have the capacity to manage the permitting and construction processes, ADUs are rarely an option. Nevertheless, low- and moderate-income property owners could benefit financially from having an ADU on their property. By expanding the

*“Providing a clear and simple pathway for builders who want to preserve housing would be appealing.”*

—Real estate developer

ways that homeowners can add an ADU to their property, a greater number of homeowners, particularly lower-income homeowners who are currently residing in and maintaining critical pieces of the affordable housing ecosystem, could access the benefits of ADU policies. Homeowners of older houses could benefit significantly from a more effective system for financing and developing ADUs, including the ability to designate the older home at the front of the lot as the ADU. In some cases, by simplifying the process and lowering the cost of subdividing single-family lots, long-time homeowners could benefit by selling portions of their land for new-home construction.

**Land Lease.** For many homeowners, the idea of pursuing financing to build an ADU on their property is daunting. They may possess the equity in their property and the financing might be available, but a lack of experience with the process and concern about taking on debt may prevent them from accessing the financial benefits that can come from the construction of an ADU. In such instances, it might make sense for the homeowners to instead lease a portion of their lot to a developer to construct and rent an ADU. The

## Community Land Trusts

Community land trusts (CLTs) are a form of shared-equity ownership. CLTs use public and private investment funds to acquire land on behalf of a specific community. The CLT owns the land in perpetuity (that is, forever).

Community residents can purchase their homes, but not the land on which the houses sit. Instead, residents enter into low-cost, long-term property leases with the CLT, known as ground leases, typically for a 99-year period. Monthly charges for the ground lease can be as low as \$25 and are usually less than \$100 per month.

Although CLT homeowners can never sell the land their home is on, they usually gain some degree of appreciation on the home in addition to the equity they achieve by paying down the principal in their mortgage. Otherwise, CLT homeowners have the same rights as other homeowners. During the term of the ground lease, they enjoy full and exclusive use of the property, as well as common privacy rights associated with homeownership.

CLT residents also have many of the same obligations as other homeowners, including liability for property taxes. Fortunately, Texas has one of the clearest and best laws governing how appraisal districts must assign values to CLT properties. This provides CLT homeowners stability with very manageable property taxes.

The CLT often has a right of first refusal for every sale, and there is a cap on resale price so that the housing remains affordable for the next owner.

CLT leases typically include an occupancy requirement that the property must serve as the owner's primary residence. Critically, most CLTs allow owners to pass ownership of the home to their children, which promotes generational wealth-building and neighborhood stability.

homeowner benefits from the proceeds of the land lease, and the developer retains the rental income from the unit. This type of arrangement may be confusing to homeowners at first and would best be framed by an educational program hosted by the City or another unbiased third party without a financial stake in the arrangement.

**Expand Community Land Trusts.** Tools such as CLTs can protect historic-age housing and preserve affordability. Through an ownership structure that retains the land on which a home sits, a homebuyer can access housing at a lower cost (*i.e.*, a home with no land cost) while still realizing the wealth-generating benefits of homeownership (although the home's appreciation and future sales price are typically limited to maintain long-term affordability). Place-based nonprofit organizations, like community development corporations, would be excellent partners in CLTs, providing stable landownership management and working in neighborhoods with residents to help ensure that the process is understandable and predictable and operating with the neighborhood's best interests in mind. The CLT operated by the Guadalupe Neighborhood Development Corporation is a good example and could be a model for other CLTs.

**Expedient and Cost-effective Preservation.** At present, the approvals, permits, and fees required to preserve and renovate historic-age homes in Austin take longer and are more expensive than those required for the demolition of an existing home and new construction. If the City wants to preserve its historic-age housing stock, it must take steps to make preservation as expedient and cost-efficient as new construction. Developers are interested in pursuing a process that is predictable, cost-effective, and time-efficient. Until preservation and renovation can meet or exceed the timeliness and cost-efficiencies of new construction, most developers will pursue the new construction path. The City cannot control the private market, but it can control the time it takes for permits to issue and approvals to process. It can also control the fees it charges for items relating to renovation and preservation.

**Tax Benefits.** The City can establish a property tax ceiling on homestead properties for homeowners over age 65 similar to the state requirement on school district taxes. While the City offers an over 65 tax exemption, providing a tax ceiling provides homeowners with future budgeting certainty. The tax ceiling is different from deferring taxes, which delays the tax payment and simply transfers the financial burden to the next generation.

It is also worth noting that the homestead exemption is an underused financial tool to reduce the tax burden for homeowners. This is another opportunity for increased messaging by the housing navigators and neighborhood resource centers.

The City should work with other taxing entities to craft additional tax abatement opportunities for developers and homeowners who retain older and historic buildings and for homeowners over age 65, a population often at most risk for displacement as property values and related tax burdens rise and their incomes do not.

**Preservation Bonus.** The City is presently drafting a preservation bonus, which would provide homeowners and developers with additional entitlements and density options when preserving historic-age homes. This is a tool that holds great promise for housing preservation and affordability and should be made available as soon as possible.

**SMART Housing Program Alignment.** The City's SMART Housing program, which stands for safe, mixed-income, accessible, reasonably priced, transit-oriented housing, provides fee waivers for development permits in exchange for on-site housing affordability. The program is regaining momentum and more mainstream developers and homeowners are pursuing the SMART Housing certification in order to realize the associated savings, which can be in the tens of thousands of dollars. By using the SMART program as a model and creating a pilot program to support



This home in East Austin is a good example of housing preservation, providing a safe and affordable home and adding character to the neighborhood.

preservation efforts or by layering preservation elements into the existing SMART Housing program, the City might be able to gain preservation traction through an existing successful program.

**Small Lot Amnesty.** Some neighborhoods have adopted a tool to allow property owners to build on lots that do not meet the City's minimum lot size. The City should consider adopting a small lot amnesty policy that provides greater flexibility with the smaller-than-minimum lots if there is an associated commitment to preservation of the other existing home on the lot.

# PROCESS AND PROGRAM RECOMMENDATIONS

US cities are facing challenges as the private market pursues the purchase of older housing stock to access the property parcel, tear down the older home, and build new structures. The private market is nimble, aggressive, and multilayered. In order to preserve historic-age homes, maintain affordability, and push back against the tide of displacement, the City should also take an aggressive approach to preservation, using all of the tools in its toolbox and perhaps creating a few more.

## **Promote Programs and the Value of Preservation.**

Homeowners are barraged by messages from entities who will “Sell Your House Fast–For Cash!” The City can take a cue from this marketing playbook and likewise market to the public the benefits of and resources available to support housing preservation. Through increased proactive education efforts and marketing and communication of existing programs, a broader population of homeowners may begin to better understand the options available for preserving their homes and remaining in place.

Advertisements promoting ADU development, for example, might proclaim, “Stay in your home. Make money! Save money!”

Thoughtful and intentional culturally dynamic education can also expand the messaging reach of the City, and leveraging trusted community organizations and entities like existing community development organizations and neighborhood-based can help ease homeowners into the conversation. It may also be beneficial to incorporate language that is more relevant to diverse neighborhoods, whereas typical preservation messaging may bring to mind issues like a loss of control, loss of agency, and exclusivity.

The messaging delivery also presents opportunities for expansion and improvement. The City may have the programs in place, but without easy access to relevant information, the programs will remain underused. Younger residents may turn to digital resources for information, yet older homeowners and those more financially vulnerable may not have ready access to online tools or may find the City website difficult to navigate or even dizzying. Posting information in the spaces that community members frequent and sending trained community members out

into the neighborhoods to share information personally with residents will go a long way toward ensuring good information access and messaging coverage.

**Information and Access.** Clearly the City has a good deal of information to share with residents, both homeowners and renters. Digital access to and navigation within this information needs improvement. Municipal websites are notoriously difficult to navigate; Austin’s site is no different and is ripe for improvement.

**One-point Application.** The City should strive for a one-suite approach to affordability and preservation incentives. A one-point application process, such as the process used for the home repair program, integrating all program information gathering into one interface, would ease the burden homeowners face when trying to understand which programs apply to their situation and where/how they should submit information.

**Program Co-development.** In much the same way City departments are noted as operating in silos, stakeholders expressed concerns that programs are being developed

*“Policies are great, but we need infrastructure and intermediaries to help folks through policies.”*

– Community Stakeholder

similarly, without cross-departmental input. A review of potential drafts by applicants who will be trying to use the programs or leverage the incentives could prove instructive in program development. Co-developing incentive or bonus programs with the development community, informed by their insights and practices, will help create programs with real practical application.

**Trusted Ombudsman.** Anyone who has navigated city departments, seeking and paying for permits, reviews, and the like, will share stories of multiple trips, multiple floors or buildings, and delays as departments each provide separate reviews. The City should establish a one-stop, multipurpose assistance center for developers and homeowners seeking approvals to develop or redevelop on a lot. Using a one-stop shop or establishing an ombudsman program to help shepherd plans through the City's approvals would alleviate much of the confusion and reduce some of the delays experienced in renovation and preservation projects. This ombudsman program could launch as a pilot program with a project manager in place to help applicants navigate the system and then scale more broadly as efficiencies and processes are identified and refined. It is worth noting that the SMART Housing program has an ombudsman program in place as of 2022 that could serve as a model.

**Place-based Capacity.** Many of the challenges identified by stakeholders involved issues relating to education, communication, and the need to purchase housing to preserve affordability. Neighborhood and place-based organizations and community development corporations (CDCs) could meet these needs. The City is currently home to fewer than 10 viable CDCs. Building the number and capacity of CDCs and other neighborhood-based organizations could amplify the City's efforts, and information about available resources and programs to support preservation, affordability, and displacement prevention could be more easily shared and explained. In the area of property purchase and development, the City is limited in its ability to purchase homes priced above appraised rates; CDCs have greater flexibility on purchase price and can also guide development and manage properties to preserve affordability into the future.

*Resources instead of regulations.*

–Community Stakeholder

**CLTs through CDCs.** Community development corporations can also play an important role in helping homeowners establish community land trusts to support the long-term affordability of the neighborhood. Through the CLT law, which guarantees the ownership structure, valuation, taxation, and so on, homeowners in a CDC footprint can work with the CDC to identify parcels for CLT inclusion, and the CDC can acquire the land and develop the property, holding the asset (land) for long-term affordability while allowing resident investment in the home and generational wealth-building at its sale. At the sale, the homeowner benefits from the sale of the structure and the CLT retains ownership of the land. The City should support capacity-building within CDCs to assist with their pursuit of establishing and maintaining community land trusts in their geographies.

**Life Estate.** The ability to live in one's home for the duration of one's life can be ensured through the establishment of a life estate. Used most often when a homeowner has financial challenges, the life estate structure allows ownership of the home to transfer to a new owner while the previous owner remains an occupant. In many instances the homeowner's heirs are beneficiaries of the life estate, which provides opportunities for generational wealth building or transfer. This tool, while not uncommon, is relatively underused and could provide a wide population of homeowners with the option to remain in their homes long after their ability to maintain the home has passed.

**Home Repair.** The City has an established home repair program and Austin is home to the Home Repair Coalition. Yet many homes remain unimproved and in poor condition. The City's home rehabilitation loan program, funded by Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding, completes an average of nine home improvement projects

each year. The Home Repair Coalition, an affiliated network of Meals on Wheels, Habitat for Humanity, and the Urban League, reaches several more, but the need remains vast and acute. As it is far cheaper to repair an existing affordable home than construct new affordable housing, the City should direct additional resources to bolster these vital repair programs. Homes in need of repair are often not as energy efficient as homes in good repair and thus affect the environment through excess energy use. Similarly, occupant health and well-being are directly affected by the condition of the home, and the removal or encapsulation of outdated building materials (e.g., lead, asbestos) and repairs to the structure or the addition of accessible components (e.g., grab bars in bathrooms) can increase the likelihood that an occupant will be able to remain in the home safely and live with relative independence.

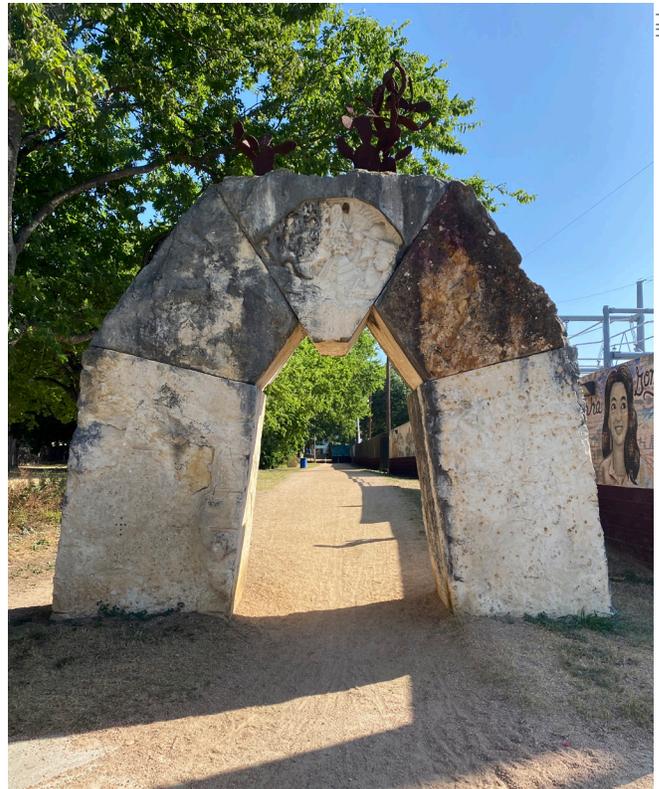
**Neighborhood Resource Centers.** Not every resident is comfortable going to city hall for information; others might be more inclined to visit a center in their neighborhood or access a nearby library for information related to their community. The City should identify opportunities to establish neighborhood resource centers—whether as a stand-alone facility or as a part of an existing public building (e.g., library, school, etc.)—to provide residents with easier access to information, programs, assistance with bills, and resources to assist with preservation, renovation, affordability, and displacement prevention. Travis County has established roughly 15 community centers to serve its unincorporated residents in this manner and could be a good model for similar services in Austin.

The City has plans to hire community members as displacement prevention navigators to connect individual homeowners with the resources they need. Inviting those navigators to co-create the messaging and outreach for the City's programs and resources could help ensure that the information is created and delivered in a manner that is optimal for community reception. The neighborhood resource centers, approved by city resolution in 2021, could provide easy connection points to these navigators and could serve as communication hubs between the City and residents.

### *Historic Preservation For Whom and to What End? Who Benefits?*

#### **How can the City build trust in a short period of time?**

Building trust between the City and community members is key, and Austin needs to reimagine what trust-building looks like. It is important to take the time to build trust right. The needs are pressing and time is of the essence. The City can start by funding quantifiable commitments. Expand efforts to involve and hire people who have already established meaningful and trusting ties to historically marginalized communities, and pay them for their time, helping better connect the City to the community. The Preservation Plan Working Group as an example of the City inviting community members in and compensating them to help meaningfully shape policy.



The Big Arch, spanning a trail near the Holly Street Power Plant, provides placemaking for the neighborhood.

**Training for Homeowners.** Perhaps hosted in the neighborhood resource centers, the City should endeavor to provide regular training and home maintenance education for homeowners. Home maintenance activities are not always intuitive, and new homeowners may not have experience with simple home maintenance items like filter replacement, duct cleaning, or scheduling HVAC maintenance. Educational opportunities to alert homeowners to these practices will help keep homes safe and in good repair. It may also be helpful to consider these educational classes on a continuum of preservation activities—today a homeowner may need assistance with property taxes; next year it may be maintenance questions or small repairs; in five years they may be ready to add an additional dwelling unit; perhaps then the homeowner is ready to apply for historic designation.

**Preservation trades education.** Education in the building trades tends to center around work in new construction environments and in typical home repairs. By focusing a greater degree of trades education around the value of and intricacies of working in historic-age structures, more homeowners will have access to the trained professionals they need to help properly repair, maintain, or renovate their older homes. San Antonio, facing a similar challenge, established a paid apprenticeship program for those pursuing preservation-related work. In Austin, American Youth Works is a program that can help build the trades workforce to meet this and the broader construction industry’s increasing demand for skilled tradespeople. Austin Community College may also be a good partner in this focus on increased and expanded trades education.

**Programs Specific to Older Homes.** A host of opportunities exist to establish specific programs that support the maintenance, improvement, and preservation of historic-age homes. From small repair programs to paint-a-block neighborhood events to programs structured to assist in the purchasing of rental homes, the City can play an active and direct role in supporting housing preservation.

**Tenant Purchase Programs.** The City should identify potential property to use as a demonstration project for a tenant purchase scenario. Small multifamily developments

## Existing Programs of Note

### Ownership and Maintenance

- Homeownership Assistance Program: Austin is my Home
- Home Repair Programs
- Neighborhood Centers (approved by city resolution in 2021)

### Taxation

- Tax deferral for homeowners aged 65 and older
- Tax exemptions for homeowners aged 65 and older
- Homestead exemption
- County volunteer-in-lieu-of-tax-payment program

### Land Use

- SMART Housing Program
- Small Lot Amnesty
- Accessory Dwelling Unit allowed by code. § 25-2-774 - TWO-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL USE
- Community Land Trust
- Land Development Code
- Preservation Bonus (in draft form)

may have renters who are interested in purchasing their residence after a certain period of time. The 2020 tenant purchase of the North Lamar Mobile Home Park is a good example of such a tenant purchase program.

Through the course of evaluating existing programs and designing new programs to support preservation and affordability, it is critical to consider potential unintended consequences in program formation. What are the unintended consequences of the policies used today to save a house, and what is the result 20 years into the future? Posing the question should help uncover important issues that should be considered.

# REGIONAL TAXATION RECOMMENDATIONS

The City can control levers to influence preservation and affordability. There are also levers and programs beyond the City’s control that should be explored by the TAP sponsors as potential areas for collaboration and partnership to support preservation, housing affordability, and displacement prevention.

Looking at the tax policies of Travis County, several good places exist where small revisions could have a positive and lasting impact on residents.

- Residents would benefit from a shift in the reassessment procedures, moving from an annual assessment cycle to once every four years. This shift would provide predictability for homeowners with budgeting. Meanwhile, landlords could negotiate more gradual and predictable increases in rents over time.
- In addition, the county is encouraged to provide tax abatement options based on property rental income, which would encourage affordable rental rates.
- The existing tax exemption for residents age 65 and older (by other taxing entities) is underutilized but would go a long way in supporting older homeowners as they age in place by lessening their tax burden as their incomes become fixed. The program needs to be promoted more actively to homeowners.
- Travis County has a volunteer-in-lieu-of-tax-payment program which allows property owners to volunteer their time and have that time, and an associated hourly pay rate, applied to their property tax bill. Although this volunteer-in-lieu-of-tax-payment program has been in place for years, the current pay rate is so low that homeowners must work a very high number of hours to meaningfully reduce or eliminate their tax liability. The program holds great promise and should be revised to reflect current wage rates in the area.

As one stakeholder noted, Texas tax policy, in general, puts too much pressure on property taxes, which is not an equitable framework for taxing residents. While it may be difficult to change the state’s income tax policy, modifying the county’s policies is much more achievable and could provide lasting benefits for housing preservation and affordability.



This mural along the Holly Street Power Plant celebrates the culture of the Holly neighborhood.

# MEASURING SUCCESS

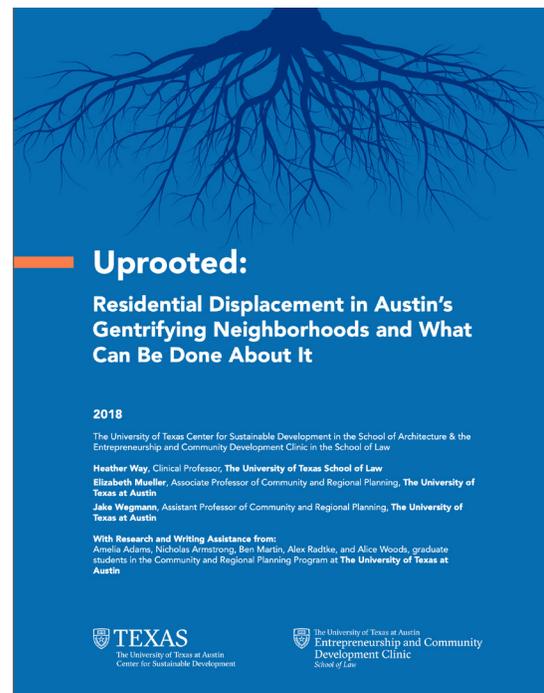
As the City works to preserve historic-age housing and preserve housing affordability, it will be important to understand the metrics of the current environment—the number of historic-age homes and percentage of affordable housing (in both historic and more modern structures)—and use this as a baseline against which to measure advances and identify areas that need improvement.

As part of the City of Austin Strategic Housing Blueprint, which calls for the preservation of 1,000 affordable units annually, the City currently maintains data relating to existing affordable housing and associated affordability expiration dates. However, the City is not tracking information relating to the age of single family homes in Austin. To do this, the City needs to conduct a proactive, comprehensive, citywide survey of existing affordable historic-age housing—including information about building condition, property values, and rents—and then work to identify the data gaps in tracking preservation going forward.

Ongoing data collection is critical for understanding current and future affordability and preservation opportunities. Layering this information together provides a more robust picture of market-affordable older units, units at risk due to condition and/or development pressures, and residents served. This can also serve as a foundation for a continuing dialogue with communities around what, within their neighborhood, needs to be preserved, and what warrants expansion (e.g., the addition of more affordable units), and where and how to tell the history of the community.

The 2018 University of Texas report *Uprooted: Residential Displacement in Austin's Gentrifying Neighborhoods and What Can Be Done about It* is serving as a framework for discussions focused on displacement prevention within Austin's neighborhoods.

Much of the data has been gathered and policy recommendations already exist. They must be used to actively inform the conversations, policies, and practices that will help prevent further residential displacement.



Uprooted: Residential Displacement in Austin's Gentrifying Neighborhoods and What Can Be Done About It <https://sites.utexas.edu/gentrificationproject/..austin-uprooted-report-maps/>

	<b>Incorporate Immediately.</b> <i>City has direct control/influence to make progress.</i>	<b>Start Now. Long-term Implementation.</b> <i>City has influence/control but the improvement will take time.</i>	<b>Incorporate in the Future.</b> <i>More complex processes that require time and collaboration.</i>
<b>Policies</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Ensure preservation bonus is in place and accessible</li> <li>› Acquire and preserve historic-aged housing stock (e.g., expand Community Land Trusts as a tool for preserving affordability)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Coordinate City departments to create and implement effective joint programs</li> <li>› Make preservation as expedient and cost-efficient as demo/build</li> <li>› Develop programs and tools to make ADUs are more affordable with no negative constraints</li> <li>› Use SMART Housing program features or pilot SMART Housing with preservation features</li> <li>› Create a small lot amnesty tool with front house preservation</li> <li>› Allow and assist homeowners in the lease or sale of rear portion of lot/land</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Provide further tax abatement based on historic preservation</li> </ul>
<b>Regulations and Data</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Leverage <i>Uprooted</i> report for data</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Conduct a comprehensive, citywide survey of historic-age housing; identify data gaps</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Lobby the state to provide tax abatement based on personal income</li> <li>› Consider rental income for tax assessment (county)</li> <li>› Provide a four-year reassessment (county)</li> <li>› Encourage other taxing authorities to provide a tax exemption for 65+</li> </ul>
<b>Processes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Promote programs and the value of preservation</li> <li>› Improve digital access to and navigation of City's website, especially pages with information about preservation and affordability programs</li> <li>› Establish trusted ombudsman program (in place at the City to help residents navigate process)</li> <li>› Increase awareness of life estate as tool to remain in place</li> <li>› Provide training and maintenance education for homeowners</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Create one suite of affordability and preservation incentives</li> <li>› Build number and capacity of place-based organizations</li> <li>› Create programs (small repairs, paint a block, rental purchases, etc.) to help preserve historic-age housing</li> <li>› Identify City-owned property to use as a demonstration project for tenant right to purchase small multifamily developments (e.g., North Lamar mobile homes)</li> <li>› Increase capacity of the home repair program</li> <li>› Bolster preservation trades education</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Create neighborhood preservation resource centers</li> <li>› Help homeowners establish community land trusts through community development corporations for long-term affordability</li> <li>› Modify volunteer-in-lieu of tax payment program to better support homeowners</li> </ul>

## NEXT STEPS

Leaders within the City of Austin's Housing & Planning Department and Preservation Austin are demonstrating their commitment to housing preservation, are working to maintain affordability in an increasingly expensive market, and are leading the way with the equity-based preservation plan now under development. However, the tide of displacement is pushing residents further out of the metro area, demolition is more frequent than preservation, and new homes are unaffordable to the average resident. If the City wants to preserve housing affordable to a range of income levels, it will have to level the playing field.

The benefits of historic preservation are numerous, from supporting the preservation of culture and neighborhood character to supporting sustainability with the preservation of the original building materials. The same homes that create the authentic character of Austin's neighborhoods and draw new residents are the very structures that are today easier to demolish and replace than to restore.

The real estate development process is complex. The City's complex building and permitting requirements could be improved to make the redevelopment process easier for developers and homeowners. Until redevelopment is as easy, if not easier, than demolition and new construction, preservation will be an uphill battle and historic-age houses will continue to be demolished.

City leadership and the organizations related to housing affordability and preservation need to be intentional in their preservation approach to build/rebuild trust with residents who have historically been marginalized. Working neighborhood-based organizations to co-design preservation programs will help ensure program success.

Hiring community members to work as preservation advocates and intermediaries can also begin to restore the trust that has been lost over the years and help ensure that community preservation—of structures, people, and culture—occurs thoughtfully.

Preservation and/or affordability programs must rely on data and research to understand what has occurred in the past, to assess the current state of housing, and to begin to identify trajectories that need policy or programmatic support. Measuring progress against these metrics will help City leadership, neighborhood organizations, and individual residents better understand what needs to be done to preserve Austin's history and the stories of its communities.

This is a long road for the City and its residents. Progress will happen slowly over time, but every step taken today is one step further on the path toward housing and affordability preservation. Working to actively promote, support, and incentivize cultural and building preservation, Austin can celebrate the very treasures that make it the authentically unique and culturally rich city it is today.



This home on Inks Avenue is one of the oldest in the city.

## ABOUT THE PANEL



**David Steinwedell**  
**Panel Chair**  
**CEO and Founder**  
**Affordable Central Texas -**  
**Austin Housing**

A 34-year veteran in real estate and investment and an 11-year Austinite, David Steinwedell applies the best practices of private equity and asset management to the city's moderate- and middle-income affordability challenges.

David has worked at fund advisers, REITs and real estate investment banks, and has led teams in acquisitions, asset management, and debt and property management. He has been involved in over \$15 billion in financial transactions across several REITs and high-net-worth investment funds, and was the executive director of the ULI Austin for four years until transitioning full time to his current role as president and CEO of Affordable Central Texas.

His experience across all property types and various investment vehicles provides the background to make flexible investments and create innovative transaction structures to address Austin's rapidly changing marketplace. David is a graduate of Hamilton College and has served on the boards of NAREIM, ULI - Austin and Atlanta, and the Tritt Foundation. He and his wife, Patty, reside in Austin and have three grown children.



**David Carroll**  
**Partner, and Director of**  
**Multifamily**  
**Urban Foundry Architecture**

David Carroll is a Partner, and Director of Multifamily, at Urban Foundry Architecture in Austin. He has an expertise in work-

ing in the urban environment and has served on the City of Austin Design Commission for the last seven years. In this capacity, he is currently leading the effort to rewrite the city's Urban Design Guidelines. In 2019 the City Council also appointed Mr. Carroll to the Joint Sustainability Committee to oversee the development of the new Climate Equity Plan. For his work in advocacy and urban design related issues, Mr. Carroll was awarded the AIA Austin President's Award in 2016 and in 2018 received the AIA Austin John Nyfeler Award for Community Service for his work with Austin's Land Development Code Revision. For his continual efforts in local advocacy, AIA National recognized Mr. Carroll as one of their Citizen Architects for 2021. Throughout his career, Mr. Carroll has been a leader in Multifamily Architecture and affordable housing. To this end, he also serves on the Board of the Chestnut Neighborhood Revitalization Corporation, a non-profit dedicated to developing affordable housing. In 2021, they received the AIA Community Vision Award for their work in bringing affordable homes to east Austin.



**Ashton Cumberbatch, Jr.**  
**President and Co-founder**  
**Equidad ATX**

Ashton Cumberbatch, Jr. is President and co-founder of Equidad ATX, a catalyst of

holistic, equitable, and transformative neighborhood revitalization and the disruption of systemic poverty in Austin's Eastern Crescent. Equidad, the Spanish word for "equity", was founded in 2018 and envisions an Eastern Crescent full of thriving communities. To achieve its vision, Equidad utilizes world-class education—cradle to career; mixed-income housing; and community health and wellness. In addition to equity, Equidad also values placed-based planning, strengths-based focus, cultural competency and preservation,

listening to learning from and co-creating with neighborhood residents.

Ashton also serves as Special Counsel at McGinnis Lochridge, LLP (ML), where he focuses on representing employers and resolving commercial disputes. He was a partner at ML prior to his service as the Austin Police Monitor; the Vice-President of Advocacy and Community Engagement at Ascension Health; and as a volunteer Policy Advisor for Austin Mayor Steve Adler. At Ascension Health (f/k/a the Seton Healthcare Family), he built strategic partnerships that addressed health and wellness for underserved populations and communities. And as a volunteer Policy Advisor to Mayor Adler, he co-led an initiative to spur equitable and holistic development in the Eastern Crescent--Austin's historically underserved region, and was a co-project manager for the Mayor's Task Force on Institutional Racism and Systemic Inequities, which eventually led to his role as a co-founder of the Central Texas Collective for Racial Equity.

Other examples of his commitment to the well-being of the Central Texas region, includes Ashton's past work as Chair of the Austin Area Research Organization (AARO); Chair of the Board of Directors of the Greater Austin Black Chamber of Commerce; Executive Board of 100 Black Men of Austin; Co-Chair of the AISD Bond Oversight Committee; Board of Directors of the Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce and Co-Chair of the Education Committee; an advisory board member of the Austin Young Chamber of Commerce; board and advisory board member of I Live Here, I Give Here; steering committee member of the Austin/Travis County Sobering Center; a member of the Travis County District Attorney's Civil Rights Advisory Council; and board member for Transit for Austin.

Currently, he is a member of AARO; a board member of HousingWorks Austin and E3 Alliance (a regional, data-driven education collaborative); and he serves on the University of Texas Dell Medical School's Admissions Committee. And for the past several years, he has operated as the executive pastor for Agape Christian Ministries.

Ashton has an A.B. in Economics from Brown University and a law degree from The University

of Texas School of Law. He and his anointed wife, Jennifer—a biblical counselor, preacher, teacher, playwright, actress, vocalist and baker--have been married for 42 years and are blessed with four children: A. Graham, Virginia, Benjamin (deceased) and Elizabeth.



**Di Gao**

**Senior Director of Research & Development  
National Trust for Historic Preservation**

Di combines experience in real estate, economic development, and historic preservation to advise and provide analytical support on a variety of initiatives centering on equitable development at the National Trust. Di serves as the Senior Director of Research & Development, a department that provides technical support to programmatic work across the National Trust in the areas of research, economic and financial feasibility analysis, GIS analysis, business planning, and strategy. Recent work has focused on the intersection of preservation and equity, inclusion, and social justice.

Prior to joining the Trust, Di worked at a real estate and economic development consulting firm based out of New York City, where she conducted economic, financial, and policy analysis to inform implementation strategies for public, private, and institutional clients impacting cities around the United States. Di has an M.S. in Historic Preservation specializing in planning and attained a certificate in real estate development from the University of Pennsylvania.



**Shanon Shea Miller**

**Director/Historic Preservation Officer  
City of San Antonio Office of Historic Preservation**

Shanon Shea Miller, AICP, became the City's Historic Preservation Officer and Director of the Office of Historic Preservation (OHP) in November 2008. Under Shanon's leadership, OHP implements an award-win-

ning program that includes extensive education and outreach, technical training, a comprehensive designation initiative, design and development review, and the City's Vacant Building Program. OHP also operates the Legacy Business program, the Living Heritage Trades Academy, and the Living Heritage Symposium. Shanon worked with a volunteer committee in 2012 to form the Power of Preservation (PoP) Foundation. PoP hosts the annual PROM fundraising event which raises funds for hands on programs of OHP such as S.T.A.R. (Students Together Achieving Revitalization), window restoration workshops, REHABARAMA, and two learning labs for trades education. Shanon co-chairs the Big Cities Preservation Network of the HPOs in the country's 21 largest cities. Shanon is a member of the first Climate Heritage Network Steering Committee and was appointed as the Co-Chair for the North America Region of the CHN in November 2021. Also in 2021, Shanon was presented with the Outstanding Alumni Award from the Bush School of Government and Public Service. Ms. Miller came to San Antonio from the City of Franklin, Tennessee, where she served as the Historic Preservation Officer. She was involved in the designation of many new historic districts, the purchase and planning for the largest battlefield reclamation in the US, the purchase and rehabilitation of a 200-acre National Register horse farm to be opened as a City park, and the design of a comprehensive heritage tourism wayfinding system. Prior to Franklin, Shanon served as the Historic Preservation Officer in Fort Worth, Texas.



**Mark Rogers**  
**Executive Director**  
**Guadalupe Neighborhood**  
**Development Corporation**

Mark has been the Executive Director at the Guadalupe Neighborhood Development Corporation since 1994. He oversees all development projects, supervises development staff regarding grant and financing applications, manages the design and programming of new properties, and oversees compliance and funding requirements for various projects. Mark has a doctorate in Art History from the University of Texas Austin and serves on the HousingWorks Advisory Committee, Austin Housing Coalition, and Guadalupe Association for an Improved Neighborhood



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# Austin

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