

**Preservation is Positive for Austin Today . . . and in the Future**  
**By Mandy Dealey, HSA President**

The City of Austin will soon initiate a review of its existing historic preservation incentive structure. It is important and healthy to periodically review all incentive programs to ensure long-term goals and desired results are being met. There is room for debate about ways to improve the program, but there's no dispute on its impact – the return on investment in historic preservation is a huge economic win for Austin and the region.

A robust historic preservation program is consistent with the policy goals the City has articulated for years. Even when property values and sales tax revenues are down, the bright spots in Austin's budget are preservation-related, such as the revenue generated for our City by high hotel occupancy rates. People are drawn to Austin because of the beauty of its natural and built environment – including the unique and majestic historic resources that contribute to our recognized quality of life. Historic preservation is a necessary component to the economic development strategies for our community and region.

When making public policy decisions, it's helpful to benchmark Austin to comparable peer cities with smaller populations that invest significantly more in their preservation programs, including Portland, Atlanta, Nashville, and Denver. Fort Worth, has a similar population but triple the investment in preservation.

What have these communities recognized? That dollar for dollar, historic preservation is one of the highest job-generating economic development options available, with a significant positive 'churning' effect on our local economy. According to the Texas Historical Commission, preservation generates more than \$1.8 billion of economic activity annually in Texas, and close to \$140 million in the Austin area alone. Texas' unique tax structure also translates to a greater return on investment from preservation efforts to public coffers.

Our City encourages sustainability, energy efficiency and green building, and strives to discourage landfill waste and suburban sprawl. These vital strategies are bolstered by an effective historic preservation program. As an example, when Google decided to locate in Austin, it didn't seek to construct a new suburban campus or to burden sensitive watersheds – it chose the historic Scarborough Building as its home. Retailers and residents are embracing historic resources in our downtown and urban core neighborhoods. Finally, quality urban planning, which is important to long-term economic development, is simply not comprehensive when preservation is given short shrift.

The Heritage Society of Austin has long been engaged in a concerted effort to ensure that the benefits of preservation are available to all geographic areas and economic segments of our community. HSA has also urged transition from a program relying upon individual landmark designations (while still important) to one primarily utilizing the newly available local historic district option,

The best public policy isn't passed in response to a short-term problem, but is crafted to meet the goals of the community by fully considering and contemplating all available options. In light of the positive impacts on our local economy and quality of life, let's work to improve our preservation program. By working together, we can continue preservation's significant returns to our community now, and in years to come.