

CITY OF PORT ISABEL

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

PLANNING PERIOD 2005-2015

APRIL, 2005

D. HISTORIC PRESERVATION

The Office of Rural Community Affairs in conjunction with the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development furnished financial support to the Activity described in this publication which does not necessarily indicate the concurrence of the Office of Rural Community Affairs or of the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development with the statements or conclusions contained in this publication

The data, information, analysis, and recommendations presented herein are exclusively for planning and budgeting purposes and do not constitute engineering analysis or detailed cost estimates. Engineering for each of the recommended tasks are beyond the scope of these studies and should be performed in the customary fashion as projects are defined and implemented.

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An Overview of the Historical Elements of Port Isabel, Texas

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January 31, 2005

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D.1 HISTORIC PRESERVATION: Inventory & Analysis

Historic preservation, as a component of economic development, is a strategy that requires much time, effort and adequate financial resources. The tasks involved with this type of assessment require the expert involvement and participation of individuals with a diverse background in architecture, anthropology, history, demographic, planning, urban design and public policy. The required tasks were addressed in an analytical matter within the confines of time and resources. We estimate that a detailed and in-depth architectural-historical assessment would take several months to complete the work to standards, pending available funding. What is evident to CBIRD and to RGA is that this City, through the work and effort of its Director of Historical Preservation and the Historical Advisory Committee, has developed some very focused and appropriate guidelines to guide historical development in this historic community. It is therefore recommended that the City pursue an avenue to develop tasks for a historical study that could be contracted out to a competent entity (s), firm(s) or individual(s) and within the financial ability of the City. In the meantime, *The Design Guidelines for Historic, New Construction and All Properties within Historic Districts* is an excellent starting point for a comprehensive assessment and environmental scan of the historic inventory of Port Isabel.

D.1.a. Survey of potential Historical Landmarks

CBIRD's research team walked the streets and drove through each neighborhood of this community and has the following observations [refer to attached map] to make at this point:

- Although the City has passed an ordinance to create historical districts and has accepted the publication, *The Design Guidelines for Historic, New Construction and All Properties within Historic Districts*, to be used as a guide for its historic district through its Department of Historical Preservation and Historical Advisory Committee, funds and additional qualified staff are needed to implement a comprehensive historical preservation strategic plan.
- While Port Isabel can trace its historical roots to the early 1500's and as such is

replete with properties and sites that may have “potential historical significance”, the operative term here is “potential” because while a property may meet the 50 years of age requirement, it might not have any historic significance. To-date there are only eight properties in Port Isabel that have a historic designation: 1.) The Point Isabel Lighthouse, 2.) The Queen Isabel Inn 3.) The Champion Building, 4.) The Port Isabel Cemetery, 5.) The Alta Vista Apartments, 6.) The Port of Matamoros Historic Site, 7.) City of Port Isabel Historical Marker and 8.) The Queen Isabella Memorial Causeway Historical Marker. Photographs of properties that may be potentially historic are attached. Pictures of these structures are located further in this Chapter.

- The designation of the Port Isabel Merchant Districts may be a good first step in using the current historic district as the nexus for linking certain properties in each district that have historic significance and which could be assessed for such designation.
- The area south of Hickman Avenue, east to include Garcia and south and west to include South Shore Drive, including the Palangana area west of the City has many properties, mostly residential, that have potential historic significance. That these properties are residential should not present a major challenge since any designations of the homestead, is just that, a designation. Structural modifications, on the other hand, might require creative financial resources in order to accomplish the desired effect. This could possible be made available by using local, state and/or federal funded low-interest loans or grants or through private foundations.

A preliminary environmental scan of the City indicates that there are several properties on the following streets in the north and northwest sector of the City that have potential historic significance:

- North Shore Drive
- Polk
- Summit
- Yturria
- Gomez

Submerged land under State Patent #333 in the Laguna Madre off Houston and east of

Maxan and Garcia Street facing east off the Pirates Landing Seafood Restaurant are included in the current historic district.

The process by undertaking the type of assessment that is being considered is both rigorous and policy driven by the due diligence requirements of the Texas Historical Commission [THC][see <http://www.thc.state.tx/historicprop/hpcodes.html> for guidelines, policies and procedures.] The *Design Guidelines for the Historic Districts* which was adopted by the Port Isabel City Commission and developed by the City of Port Isabel's Department of Historical Preservation is a good starting point for evaluating structure which could result in the structure or site being designated through various programs including the *National Register of Historic Places*, *State Archeological Landmarks*, *Historic Texas Cemetery Designation*, and *Recorded Texas Historic Landmarks*. *National Register of Historic Places* which is a federal program administered in Texas by the THC in conjunction with the National Park Service. According to THC's website the following are the general guidelines which make a distinction between the different types of historic designation for properties under review:

- *The National Register of Historic Places* is a federal program administered in our state by the THC in coordination with the National Park Service. Listing in the National Register provides national recognition of a property's historical or architectural significance and denotes that it is worthy of preservation. Buildings, sites, objects, structures and districts are eligible for this designation if they are at least 50 years old and meet established criteria. Plaques are available, but not required, for this designation. Recorded Texas Historic Landmarks (RTHLs) are properties judged to be historically and architecturally significant. The THC awards RTHL designation to buildings and structures at least 50 years old that are judged worthy of preservation for their architectural and historical associations. Participation in the Official Texas Historical Marker process is an integral part of the RTHL designation.
- State Archeological Landmarks are designated by the THC and receive legal protection under the Antiquities Code of Texas. Listing in the National Register is a

prerequisite for State Archeological Landmark designation of a building.

- Historic Texas Cemetery designations are issued by the THC. Cemeteries or burial sites that are at least 50 years old and worthy of preservation for their historical associations can receive this designation. A special medallion and marker are available, but not required, for this designation.

D.1.b. Criteria Classification Standards

Classification Basis

The existing structure inventory can be ranked on a three (3) level classification. The three (3) classifications are defined as follows:

- 1) **Standard (STD)**—no significant defects in primary, secondary, or major structural components;
- 2) **Deteriorating (DT)**—additional repairs not normally covered during routine maintenance are needed.
- 3) **Dilapidated (DL)**—not safe or adequate shelter that may endanger health and safety to its occupants.

The above categories closely follow the standards promulgated by the Office of Rural Community Affairs (ORCA), the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs (TDHCA)¹ and the International Building Codes.² It should be noted that when the term Sub-Standard is used in this Plan, it is to describe *both* the Deteriorating and Dilapidated units, as opposed to Standard units.

Of the structures identified by the drive-by survey with potential historical significance, there were no structures meeting the dilapidated criteria. Of the twenty-eight (28) structures identified, twenty-five (25) were classified as Standard and three (3) were classified as Deteriorating. The three (3) are located at 206 Adams, 322 W. Madison, and 113 E. Adams

¹ Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs Handbook, The Conditions of Structures and Land Use Surveying, 2nd issue, January 2001, page 2.

² International Building Codes, 2000 Edition.

D.2 Applicable Regulations:

- National Register designation imposes no restrictions on property owners. Those receiving grant assistance or federal tax credits for rehabilitation projects, however, must adhere to certain standards. With a National Register designation, the property receives extra consideration before any federal projects, such as highway construction, are undertaken. To nominate a property, the owner's consent is required.
- Recorded Texas Historic Landmark designation helps preserve the State's historically and architecturally significant resources. Property owners planning exterior changes to these buildings must notify the THC 60 days in advance of changes to allow time for consultation with THC. Unsympathetic changes to these properties may result in removal of the designation and historical marker. To nominate a property, the owner's consent is required.
- State Archeological Landmark designation stipulates the property cannot be removed, altered, damaged, salvaged or excavated without a permit from the THC. This designation encourages preservation and ensures that resources that cannot be preserved are at least properly documented. The designation of State Archeological Landmarks on private land is recorded in the county deed records and is conveyed with the property when sold. To nominate a site or building on private property, the owner's consent is required.
- Historic Texas Cemetery designation is an official recognition of family and community graveyards and encourages preservation of historic cemeteries. The designation imposes no restrictions on private owners' use of the land adjacent to the cemetery but provides for the recording of the cemetery into the county deed records as a historically dedicated property worthy of preservation. To nominate a cemetery, the owner, who is considered a trustee of the land dedicated for cemetery purposes, will be notified, although the owner's consent is not required.

As evidenced by large number of potential historical sites, the lack of adequate resources and by public comments received from private individual through mutual discussions an at a public meeting held with the Historical Advisory Committee, there is an obvious need to continue this component of the economic planning activities which been initiated by this contractor. In order to fully address the scope of work that is currently under consideration, this historic assessment and environmental scan needs to be guided by a comprehensive economic development plan that results from this report. The City should consider contracting these services to in independent research team. Both RGA and CBIRD are willing to work with the City's administration to identify potential funding sources, develop the proposal and put together a research team which is consistent with the change and regulations that guides such historical evaluations. This team could involve other regional institutions such as representatives from the College of Architecture at both UT-Austin and Texas A&M University along with members of UTB's history department.


Photo Tour of Port Isabel's Historic Inventory


Designated Historical Buildings and Sites





The following pictures, labeled Proposed Historic Sites and Proposed Historical Business Buildings, are presented as recommendations only and do not represent an opinion from either a Certified Historical Officer or a licensed Architect.


Proposed Historic Sites


Address	114 W. Jefferson
Photograph Structure Classification: <u>Standard</u>	


Address	105 E. Jefferson
Photograph Structure Classification: <u>Standard</u>	


Address	220 W. Jefferson
Photograph Structure Classification: <u>Standard</u>	


Address	212 W. Jefferson
Photograph Structure Classification: <u>Standard</u>	


Address	208 W. Jefferson
Photograph Structure Classification: <u>Standard</u>	


Address	322 W. Madison
Photograph Structure Classification: <u>Deteriorating</u>	


Address	101 S. Musina
Photograph Structure Classification: <u>Standard</u>	


Address	205 W. Jefferson
Photograph Structure Classification: <u>Standard</u>	

Address	209 W. Jefferson
Photograph Structure Classification: <u>Standard</u>	

Address	509 S. Manautou
Photograph Structure Classification: <u>Standard</u>	

Address	206 E. Adams
Photograph Structure Classification: <u>Deteriorating</u>	


Address	113 E. Adams
Photograph Structure Classification: <u>Deteriorating</u>	

Address	106 W. Adams
Photograph Structure Classification: <u>Standard</u>	

Address	202 E. Adams
Photograph Structure Classification: <u>Standard</u>	

Address	218 E. Adams
Photograph Structure Classification: <u>Standard</u>	

Address	317 E. Adams
Photograph Structure Classification: <u>Standard</u>	


Address	118 E. Washington Street
Photograph Structure Classification: <u>Standard</u>	


Address	717 N. Gomez
Photograph Structure Classification: <u>Standard</u>	


Address	810 North Shore
Photograph Structure Classification: <u>Standard</u>	

Address	901 North Shore
Photograph Structure Classification: <u>Standard</u>	


Address	913 North Shore
Photograph Structure Classification: <u>Standard</u>	


Address	110 W. Washington
Photograph Structure Classification: <u>Standard</u>	


Address	101 E. Madison
Photograph Structure Classification: <u>Standard</u>	

Address	114 E. Madison
Photograph Structure Classification: <u>Standard</u>	

Address	205 N. Longoria (Firemen's Hall)
Photograph Structure Classification: <u>Standard</u>	

Address	700 Yturria St.
Photograph Structure Classification: <u>Standard</u>	

Address	113 Queen Isabela
Photograph Structure Classification: <u>Standard</u>	

Address	122 Queen Isabela
Photograph Structure Classification: <u>Standard</u>	

Proposed Historical Business Buildings



D.3 Historic Preservation Plan Action Items:

Item 3.a Goals and Objectives

Based on what must be considered a preliminary assessment of Port Isabel's potential historic sites, the following goals are provided for consideration.

Goal I. Initiate a resource development plan to acquire sufficient funds to support a comprehensive assessment of Port Isabel's historic structure to include these essential elements:

- A. A detailed architectural assessment of all targeted properties by professional architects and student interns from either the University of Texas or Texas A&M University Colleges of Architecture.
- B. A team of historians, such as Dr. Tony Knop of UTB/TSC, to conduct a historical assessment of each targeted property to ascertain its historic base. This process involves much analysis and also time for student interns to conduct research and evaluate all historical references and documents such as tracing all ownership as far back as feasible.

Goal II. Conduct a feasibility study and impact analysis of how Port Isabel's historic preservation will affect the community physical environment.

This process would involve the following action items:

- A. Conduct a qualitative assessment of how residents, of targeted historic properties, feel about this initiative.
- B. Conduct a cost-benefit analysis of all related costs to remodel, to standards, all targeted properties and how these costs would be borne by the owners.

- C. Use the Port Isabel Department of Historical Preservations Design Guidelines as the guiding schema for the proposed assessment.

Goal III. Develop a sustainability plan to ensure that historic preservation of remodeled properties continues beyond an initial phase during which there is enthusiasm and commitment to the endeavor.

Goal IV. Link and anchor all historic preservation planning to the overall economic strategic plan of the City.

Goal V. Develop a budget to support historic preservation after the initial assessment as delineated in the aforementioned goals. Of concern here is the city has the fiscal wherewithal to sustain its historic preservation initiatives. Such a budget needs to be seen as having diverse revenue streams to include local taxes, funds from potential bond sources, fees and external sources such as foundation or state/federal agencies.

Item 3.b.

The assessment from CBIRD shows that this community's economy will continue to be driven by tourism and as such it is imperative that it maintain and continuously upgrade the physical infrastructure of its historic homes and other significant structures. The greater challenge to the City is whether it will adhere to and maintain a focus on historic preservation that is based on its already approved guidelines of July 2002. These guidelines are excellent guide to direct all aesthetic and structural conditions of those properties that are evaluated as having historic preservation merit. It is RGA's and CBIRD's recommendation that the *Design Guidelines for Historic Properties* be reviewed and reiterated as the guiding principles for all historic preservation within Port Isabel. A copy of the *Design Guidelines for Historic Properties* is attached at the end of this Chapter.

Item 3.c. As key to any development, the formulation of any improvement plan requires extensive research, community input, proper leadership, established goals, and above all, financing. Because historical preservation many times involves private property, certain steps not typical of public lands and buildings, require finesse and legal counseling. Most of the sites in the drive-by survey reveal that most historically labeled structures are privately owned. **Map D--Historic Preservation Map**, attached at the end of this Chapter denotes the location of identified potential historical sites, but does not attempt to dictate a construction plan nor does it attempt to prepare an architectural schematic for improvements. As stated in the prior paragraph, the City should follow recommendations contained in the *Design Guidelines for Historic Properties* and that they need to be reviewed and followed. The Guidelines are well designed and any further efforts to address this would not be financially prudent.

Item 3.d.

This item can not be attended to until a comprehensive assessment is conducted of the targeted historic structures and facilities within Port Isabel. Based on CBIRD's experience in working with historic renovation projects and in occupying historic designated structures such as the Historic Young House and the Historic Cueto Building, both in Brownsville, it is safe to state that the city can count on an average of about \$35.00 to \$50.00 per square foot to renovate a property to historic standards. These figures are rather conservative since they do not include all other auxiliary costs such as grounds and furnishing to meet the environment of the designated historic period. The following Table D-1 is provided simply as a planning guide and does not reflect the opinions of a license construction contractor or a licensed architect. Because there is no present program designed to direct administration of these goals and because a budget for funding has not been established nor has a source been identified to administer said program, the estimated dollar amounts are not included in the Capital Improvement section of this Plan.

TABLE D-1 Historical Preservation Improvements Plan			
YEAR	TASK	DESCRIPTION	ESTIMATED COST (\$1,000's)
YEARS 1—2	1	Hold Public Forums to inform public of Plan including the Historic District and Landmark Zoning Ordinance. Consider contracting with consultant firm or firm and create and adopt a policy for distribution of funds to the public.	1 30
	2	Sponsor Public workshops for review of Plan and Ordinances and remediation plans.	4
	3	Budget funds for construction improvements. Establish historic housing improvement goals (2 houses per year).	75
YEARS 3—5	1	Hold Public Forums to inform public of Plan and its progress.	1
	2	Begin annual applications for historical housing funds to public and private channels based on community requests.	5
	3	Provide for an average addition of 2 to 3 historical housing units	150
YEARS 6—10	1	Hold Public Forums to inform public of Plan and progress.	5
	2	Provide for an average addition of 2 to 3 housing units per year to the community for the remainder of the planning term.	150
	3	Review the <i>Design Guidelines for Historic Properties</i> and make appropriate changes.	5

SOURCES OF FUNDING: The following are potential sources of funding that have proven to be successful in program implementation. Although they are not the only resources available, they are the most common and most experienced agencies for the services needed.

- 1) Community Development Funds
- 2) Housing Funds Programs (TDHCA)
- 3) ORCA (Office of Rural Community Affairs)

- 4) U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, Office of Rural Development
- 5) Texas Enterprise Fund
- 6) U.S. Economic Development Administration, EDA, Dept. of Commerce
- 7) Non-Profit agencies or Private sources and Grant foundations.
 - a) *Meadows Foundation*
 - b) *HEB Foundation*
 - c) *Ford Foundation*
 - d) *Moody Foundation*

- 8) Texas Historical Commission
 - a) *Texas Preservation Trust Fund Grants*: For Historic Structures & Archeological Sites.
 The Texas Historical Commission (THC) awards grants for preservation projects from the Texas Preservation Trust Fund (TPTF). Created by the Texas Legislature in 1989, the TPTF is an interest-earning pool of public and private monies. The earned interest and designated gifts are distributed yearly as matching grants to public and private owners of eligible historic properties and archeological sites. TPTF grants pay up to one-half of total project costs to help preserve Texas' cultural resources. Grant funds are awarded for acquisition, development, planning and education.

Project types eligible for grant assistance include:
 - Archeological sites
 - Commercial buildings
 - Public buildings such as schools, city halls, libraries and museums
 - Unique historic structures such as bridges, water towers, lighthouses and ships
 - Monies for training individuals and organizations about historic resources and preservation techniques

 - b) *Heritage Tourism Grants* (THC): Government and nonprofit organizations within active Texas Heritage Trails Program regions can apply for matching grants when funds are available. Grants are used for heritage tourism-oriented projects such as interpretation, signage, publications and web sites, curriculum development, educational programs, and workshops and training. Grants are one-to-one with in-kind and/or cash matches.

 - c) *Certified Local Government Grants* (THC): Certified Local Government (CLG) grants provide funding to enable local communities to develop quality programs and fully participate in the

state's preservation process. CLG grants require a cash or in-kind service match from the community. Eligible grant projects include, but are not limited to:

- Training for local preservation commissions
- Completing or updating surveys of historic resources
- Producing historical walking or driving tour brochures, videos or other educational materials
- Preparing preservation plans
- Preparing National Register of Historic Places nominations

d) *The Texas Main Street Program (THC)*: The Texas Main Street Program, part of the Texas Historical Commission's Community Heritage Development Division, helps Texas cities revitalize their historic downtowns and neighborhood commercial districts by utilizing preservation and economic development strategies.

The program began in 1981 and is affiliated with the National Trust for Historic Preservation. The Texas Main Street Program is among the most successful downtown revitalization programs in the nation, and has assisted more than 130 Texas cities through the program. The program has resulted in the private reinvestment of more than \$860 million in Texas downtowns and neighborhood commercial districts, the creation of more than 18,200 jobs and the establishment of more than 4,600 new businesses.