

## OFFICERS

Julian Read  
*President*  
 Mandy Dealey  
*President-Elect*  
 Betsy Christian  
*First Vice President*  
 John Rosato  
*Second Vice President*

Rebecca Davis  
*Secretary*  
 Kristen Wicke  
*Treasurer*  
 John Donisi  
*Immediate Past President*

## DIRECTORS AT LARGE

Betty Baker  
 Nancy Burns  
 Kent Collins  
 Matt Curtis  
 Amy Erben  
 Jay Farrell  
 Connie Green  
 Shelly Hemingson

Courtney Hoffman  
 Amy Hornaday  
 Lindsay Hunter  
 Dennis Karbach  
 Emily Little  
 John Mayfield  
 Peter Flagg Maxson

Tere O'Connell  
 Kristy Ozmun  
 Greg Phillips  
 Joe Pinnelli  
 Bratten Thomason  
 Susan Wittliff  
 Laurie Zapalac

## VOTING REPRESENTATIVES

Michael Holleran, UT School of Arch.  
 Marjorie Harris, Inherit Austin  
 Austin History Center Assoc. Rep.  
 Mike Ward, Pioneer Farms

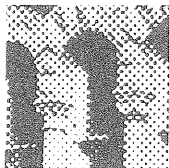
**STAFF**  
 Jacqui Schraad  
*Executive Director*

February 6, 2009

The Honorable Will Wynn  
 Mayor Pro Tem McCracken and Council Members  
 City of Austin  
 P.O. Box 1088  
 Austin, TX 78767

Dear Mayor Wynn, Mayor Pro Tem McCracken and Council Members:

The Heritage Society of Austin and its members were actively involved in advocating for the revised Local Historic District program that the city adopted in 2004. The purpose of the program was to provide a mechanism to preserve the unique character of Austin's historic neighborhoods, and to create an alternative to the ad hoc designation of individual landmark structures. Unfortunately, four years after the adoption of the ordinance, it has become clear that the program as designed has not delivered the intended results.



**HERITAGE  
 SOCIETY OF  
 AUSTIN**

P.O. BOX 2113  
 AUSTIN, TEXAS 78768  
 512-474-5198  
 FAX 512-476-8687

Since adoption, the revised program has inspired a dramatic increase in the number of Austinites involved enthusiastically in the study of their neighborhoods' heritage with the goal of establishing districts. Yet, despite the fact that at least nine neighborhoods have been working intently on establishing districts, only one subgroup has been able to complete an application for a scaled down, albeit significant, single district of only one block. The Heritage Society has been supporting these neighborhood organizations by granting funds and creating a Local Historic District Working Group that meets monthly with experts who provide advice and technical assistance.

The Heritage Society appreciates the time and consideration given by the City and its citizens in crafting the revised Local Historic District ordinance. However, the requirements for research and property owner sign-off far exceed that of our peer cities in Texas and the nation, and have created an unnecessary burden that is inconsistent with the Council established criteria. We share in the conviction of the Working Group that the ordinance needs to be amended if it is to accomplish its intended purpose.

Many of you attended the Heritage Society's' Preservation Awards Luncheon last fall, to hear national preservation expert Pratt Cassity, author of the National Trust for Historic Preservation publication "Maintaining Community Character, How to Establish a Local Historic District" share his opinion that Austin's research requirements are the most stringent and onerous of any city in the nation. Further, Austin's requirement for approval of the owners of at least 60% of the land in the proposed district exceeds that of Houston (51%), Fort Worth (50%) and San Antonio (51%). We respectfully urge the Council to revise the research and approval requirements of our ordinance to be in line with our peer cities.

Let us add one additional reason as to why we believe revising the ordinance to be timely and fiscally responsible. As you are aware, individual landmark designations of structures include modest property tax incentives to owners. Owners of structures within districts are not eligible for incentives, only a freeze for a period of time if a substantial renovation is initiated. Therefore, we believe a viable district mechanism to likely result in fewer individual designations, leaving more tax revenue in the City's coffers during these lean times.

We request that you initiate amendments to the ordinance to address these issues. We are willing and eager to work with you to prepare changes that will enable local historic districts to become a practical reality. Thank you in advance for your consideration and all you do to preserve what is best about Austin.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Julian Read". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Julian Read  
President