

Welcome to the Preservation Texas Legislative Alert listserv! You were identified as a member or supporter of historic preservation issues in your community. We expect to send out emails through May 2005 regarding timely issues before the Texas Legislature.

Thanks for your interest and support of Preservation Texas.

Historic Preservation Legislative Alert

The 79th Session of the Texas Legislature convened on January 11, 2005. Each session brings new opportunities for resources and programs that may support historic preservation efforts in our state and local governments. It also brings out special interests that propose an assortment of legislation to minimize or enhance the preservation of historic and cultural assets. What is now HOT on the legislative front are the following:

HB 218 Introduced by Representative Charlie Howard from Sugarland, this bill would exempt all religious owned property from local landmark designations. If this bill passed, any type of religious entity could remove or alter historic properties without regard to their significance for the community. This is a reconstituted bill that appeared in the 78th Session along with an exemption of religious property from all municipal zoning authority. This bill is now in the Urban Affairs Committee. ***Preservation Texas and the full preservation community of the state oppose this bill.***

SB 141 (Companion to HB 653) Introduced by State Senator Wentworth of San Antonio, this legislation would grant Texas counties expanded authority for regulating subdivision of land especially setting standards for subdivisions, drainage, and groundwater use.

SB 142 (Companion to HB 477) Introduced by Senator Wentworth, this bill further expands the authority of county governments to regulate subdivisions and manage land outside of city limits after a local option election. Both of these bills would grant counties more authority over land development, which is much desired by many county governments and some property owners in unincorporated areas.

HB 525 Authored by Representative Eddie Rodriguez of Austin, this bill creates homestead preservation districts that might increase homeownership and provide affordable housing. While not a direct bill to further historic preservation interests, the bill effects mostly inner-city neighborhoods and is an alternative to the loss of abandoned or problem residential areas.

Other statewide issues:

Funding for the Texas Historical Commission also is a priority in this session. The THC is seeking funds to further their heritage tourism program, support local historical museums and the Sam Rayburn House in Bonham, and enhance the agency's buildings and infrastructure. The total budget request for 2006 is \$ 8,021,494 and for 2007 is

\$7,410,293. The THC is the leader of many important historic preservation programs in the state. You should contact your state legislators and ask their support of the budget requests.

Texas Historic Courthouse Program of the Texas Historical Commission is now seeking \$250 million to establish a bond program to fund the restoration of the state's county courthouses. This highly successful program received recognition from the National Trust for Historic Preservation in 2004 as an Honor Award recipient. Dallas County received two awards from this fund, one for restoration and one for returning the original tower to the courthouse. *Preservation Texas and other preservation organizations are supporting this request.*

The **Trans Texas Corridor** is Governor Perry's extensive proposal to improve transportation in the state by building more super highways and eventually adding high-speed rail. This proposal may affect rural historic or cultural resources and is widely debated by an assortment of diverse special interest groups. Public hearings are now occurring across the state.

A complete list of contacts and filed bills are found on Texas Legislature Online.

Who to contact (email or telephone) about these issues?

If using email, address your comments to your State Representative and State Senator as follows: first.last@house.state.tx.us

Other national issues:

The Congressional Joint Committee on Taxation (JCT) issued a report recently that recommends major changes to the tax code that would dismantle the federal tax incentive for **conservation and preservation easements**. Easements are a long-held preservation tool that has been very successful in stimulating the preservation of challenging and expensive historic properties. This is now before the House Ways and Means Committee; Texas representatives on the committee include Lloyd Doggett (Austin area), Sam Johnson (north Dallas County area), and Kevin Brady (East Texas).