



# Main Street Matters!

A MONTHLY PUBLICATION OF THE TEXAS MAIN STREET PROGRAM

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## SPOTLIGHT ON DENISON

*Written by Donna Dow, Main Street Manager, Denison Main Street Program*

Currently in its 27th year as a Texas Main Street City, Denison is experiencing growth and seeing significant improvement in property development downtown. Located immediately south of the Texas/Oklahoma border on U.S. Highway 69/75, Denison is just an hour north of Dallas. The city of 23,000 joined the Texas Main Street Program in 1989, and the Denison City Council reaffirmed its commitment in 2010. Certified Local Government status was obtained in 2012. In 2013, the downtown also saw an unprecedented rise in occupancy, which is good news after the economic downtown decline in 2008.

This is not the first time downtown Denison has recovered from tough circumstances; and once again the city demonstrated its resiliency. After being named one of the state's original Arts & Cultural Districts in 2009, the economic squeeze negatively impacted the galleries.



Denison's Commercial Historic District was listed on the National Register in 1983. Over 75 residents live in 32 lofts plus a former hotel, and they enjoy a walkable environment with a variety of green spaces including five park-like areas. [Image source.](#)

Once down to a single remaining gallery, as of June 1, there are now four galleries. Two other businesses show first-class artworks along with handmade and repurposed items in a classy setting.

Founded in 1872 as the connecting point between the Missouri-Kansas-Texas ("Katy") Rail Line and the Texas Central Rail Line, Denison has a rich history. It served as the first rail stop after crossing Oklahoma (Indian Territory) and became one of the south's most important transportation centers.

Denison became a fast-paced commercial hub of saloons, hotels, manufacturing plants, banks, and an abundance of entertainment and culture, making it famous as the "jewel at the crossing of a great river."

Denison's historic figures have become heroes to the U.S. and abroad. Some of the iconic people from the city include:

- Thomas V. Munson, a world famous local horticulturist in the 1880s, who saved the

French grape crop from the ruinous phylloxera epidemic by cultivating an immune stock. This saved the world's vineyards from destruction.

- Entering the world as the son of a “Katy” mechanic in a humble part of town, Dwight David Eisenhower was commander of the Allied Forces at Normandy during World War II and President of the United States from 1953-1961.
- Captain Chesley B. (Sully) Sullenberger III became the hero of Flight 1549, when he saved the lives of more than 150 people onboard by safely making an emergency landing on the Hudson River in 2009.

Denison has structures of significance that are tourist attractions.

- Denison Dam, located north of Denison, is the structure that created Lake Texoma in the early 1940s. At that time, Denison Dam was the largest rolled, earthfilled dam in the United States. The lake is now well-known for its fishing, boating, and other water recreation.

Visitors number more than 6 million each year.

- The Red River Railroad Museum chartered in 1990 is located in the old Katy Depot; it conveys the impact the railroad had in the sculpting of the town.
- The THC's Eisenhower Birthplace State Historic Site is a well-visited Texas historic site. The Main Street Program partners with the Birthplace to host an annual Eisenhower Birthday Celebration during the second weekend in October.

Denison has very strong architecture in a linear layout. The Denison Commercial Historic District was listed on the National Register in 1983. Over 75 residents live in 32 lofts plus a former hotel, and they enjoy a walkable environment with a variety of green spaces including five park-like areas perfect for walking the dog or enjoying special events.

Denison's eclectic downtown spans a 30-block area and is nothing

short of a decorator's dream. Artists enjoy Denison's progressive flair and have woven themselves into the fabric of the culture through their custom textile creations, pottery, metalwork, paintings, and woodwork. The shops are lined with art in decorative settings, studios, galleries, antiques, retro furnishings, specialty retail, a historic theater, and a wine tasting room.

The visual and performing arts are also represented in Denison's downtown through concerts, festivals, shows, recording studios, education, instruction for music, and all levels and ages of dance. A recent streetscape improvement effort added piano key crosswalks as well as artistic playable musical instruments at three midblock crossings.

Other streetscape improvements include original local artwork reproduced on both everyday and holiday banners. Custom sign toppers utilizing the city's brand were added to downtown street signs to make sure people know they are in a historic district.



The Red River Railroad Museum is celebrating its 25th anniversary in 2016. The museum is located in the beautiful Katy Depot. Denison was home of the MKT headquarters until the 1988 merger with Union Pacific.

Of course, the usual elements of planters were a part of the improvements as well.

Downtown Denison's market position continues to be strengthened through efforts to grow its status as "Event Central." With the 2012 construction of a new stage and public restrooms at Heritage Park, the area has become an increasingly popular location for public activities. A special event application and process was designed to facilitate and encourage community partners hosting their events open to the public to utilize Heritage Park, which is owned by a local nonprofit business owners group.

Denison Arts Council continues to host both a spring and fall art event in downtown. The fall's Dia De Los Muertos festival brings colorful giant-sized puppets down Main Street in a parade to highlight the day. The Hispanic Heritage Council held its first Cinco de Mayo event, and a local radio station brought a Kids Fest to downtown Denison in 2016. The Chamber continues to host the Fall Festival throughout downtown.

Main Street partners with other city departments to maximize resources and free or low-cost public entertainment. We join forces with the Parks & Rec and Library Departments on a community Christmas tree lighting, Tailgating in Touchdown Alley before home football games, and Movies on Main. Preparations are underway for an outdoor ice skating rink in 2016 for the holiday season. Grants have been obtained to support downtown activities and



(Top left) The very first Doc Holliday Festival event drew over 4,000 guests and was a huge success. The business owners saw increased traffic and sales from out of town guests. It was only possible to add this event to the schedule because of the tremendous volunteer support in planning and execution. (Right) A scene from our Monsters on Main. Kids young and not so young dress up and line the streets at this popular annual event. (Bottom left) By partnering with other organizations, Denison has grown the number of events that draw people to downtown. This was the inaugural year for KidsFest hosted by KMKT and KMAD, local sister radio stations. Over 5,000 attended. An Easter egg roll followed at another strong community partner and THC site, the Eisenhower Birthplace State Historic Site.

infrastructure.

2016 has already been busy on Main Street. The inaugural Doc Holliday: Saints & Sinners Festival held in April 2016 was a prime example of community groups working together. Denison was a boomtown in the late 1800s, and the first-time event drew 4,000 people to enjoy the festivities. Doc had an office in Denison, and a great deal of excitement continues to surround the old west. Carriage rides, gunfights, kids activities, historians, demonstrations, food, vendors, dulcimer music, and ghost tours were only some of the attractions.

The Red River Railroad Museum recently celebrated its 25th anniversary. The day ended with a hymn song and circuit riding

preacher. This will definitely be an annual event, as the layout was conducive to businesses seeing heavy traffic and being introduced to new customers.

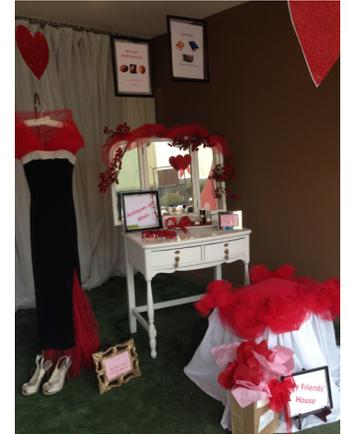
The very popular Music on Main weekly outdoor concert series is now in its 15th year and has expanded to a regional event through a partnership with the Levitt Foundation. After learning about a funding opportunity through the Texas Main Street office, Denison was successful in obtaining a \$25,000 grant in the first year of the Levitt AMP series. This doubled the budget supported by the city, sponsors, and local foundations, and it also doubled crowd size. Again in 2016, the Levitt AMP Denison Music Series presents Music on Main is seeing

growing numbers of locals, as well as those coming from as far away as England, Pennsylvania, Amarillo, and all over Texas and Oklahoma.

Although playing a critical role, it is not all about fun and games in downtown Denison. A guiding document has traditionally been very important in Denison. After accomplishing much of the 2009 strategic plan, a downtown visioning session was hosted for the public in February 2014 by the city's Main Street Advisory Board. The plan is intended to guide the city through the year 2020.

Partners in the Vision 2020 effort were the Denison Area Chamber of Commerce/Convention & Visitors' Bureau, Denison Development Alliance/Denison Development Foundation, Denison Arts Council, and Downtown Denison Inc. The session was led by Julie Glover, the Economic Development Program Administrator for the City of Denton. Approximately 90 people attended the planning meeting representing business owners, property owners, potential business owners, interested parties, and community partners. A follow-up survey was conducted to obtain additional information and help prioritize goals. The top three focus areas were: 1) occupancy, 2) streetscape, and 3) resources including personnel and funding.

In 2011, an effort called Operation Increase Occupancy was initiated. It began with simply using volunteer efforts to wash vacant storefront windows. For Sale signs were limited to 9 square feet to avoid larger commercial real estate highway signage being utilized. While the smaller signs are visible, the effect



Operation Increase Occupancy was initiated in 2011, and it allows a small budget for a 2-woman dream team designer decorating crew to help transform the downtown storefronts window displays for upcoming seasons and holidays.

removes the loud pronouncement of significant vacancy. Main Street worked with Denison Development Alliance to encourage high speed connectivity that facilitates high tech businesses.

The multi-faceted Operation Increase Occupancy also included volunteer efforts and a minimal budget to decorate these storefronts. What began with working with other businesses and local nonprofits promoting their efforts has now transformed into a two-woman dream team designer decorating crew that creatively markets upcoming downtown

events. The window displays have not been solely responsible but have contributed to property sales and occupied buildings. The ladies move on to other properties that come available and have even been able to work with existing buildings owners to transform their windows.

Operation Increase Occupancy included the creation of a trio of publications designed to help educate new business owners, property owners, and realtors:

- The New Business Guide is designed to help those opening a business understand the steps

necessary to obtain historic preservation approval, building permits, and a certificate of occupancy. It also acquaints the new business owner with downtown stakeholders, the flow of information, resources available, and incentives. As always, we encourage utilization of a business plan which can be created with the assistance of the Small Business Development Center at Grayson College. And we always work with the Denison Development Alliance to strengthen the chances for long-term success.

- The Realtors Guide contains information a realtor or property owner can pass along to the potential buyer regarding benefits and requirements of locating within a historic district. The guide encourages staging a property for sale much like how a home is prepared to show its true potential. Zoning officials should be contacted to ensure the

potential use of the property is allowed prior to the sale. The guide also contains tips for monitoring vacant property.

- The Property Maintenance Guide helps owners look for signs of maintenance needs. Indicators such as spalling, missing mortar, plant growth, rust, leaks, and more can serve as early warning signs of needed repairs. Quarterly maintenance checklists are provided to prevent building issues. Regular inspections and attention to the building can prevent deterioration and extend the life of a building.

Operation Increase Occupancy continues with significant thought put into why the same buildings remain unoccupied. By examining targeted barriers to occupancy and looking into solutions for perpetually vacant buildings, the results are properties over five years without occupants are now

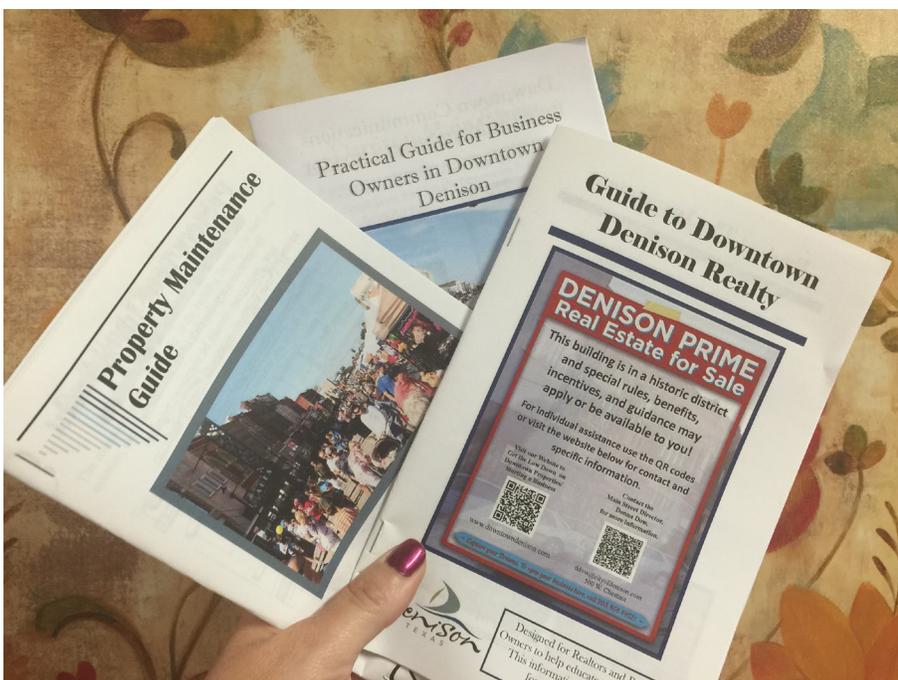
revenue-producing. This has included property owners making improvements or allowing the new tenants to do their own enhancements.

Ordinances have been addressed to facilitate special events and ensure buildings are utilized for intended purposes. Ordinance #28-49 Storage/Residence First Floors states: "Storage and residential uses are not allowed on the ground floors of Downtown buildings." An Entertainment District was also created. Ordinance #21-124 suspends mobile vending and itinerant merchant permits during special events and allows event organizers to be in control of all vendors. Ordinance #21-125 allows alcohol to be openly carried at special events inside the entertainment district.

A relationship was developed with the Greater Texoma Association of Realtors to ensure the group is knowledgeable of the great properties available for sale in Denison's historic overlay district or downtown. The realtors are hosted or visited on an annual basis to remind them what Denison Main Street and the Denison Development Alliance are doing to facilitate growth. Everyone in attendance receives a Realtors Guide.

Denison has also valued the businesses that helped mold the downtown. The THC's Texas Treasure Business Award status was attained for 20 Denison businesses. A ceremony was held on January 19, 2016, in which the mayor presented the businesses proclamations recognizing their employment opportunities and support of the state and local economy for at least 50 years.

Finally, incentives are important to facilitate development. Downtown buildings in the city of Denison



Three publications were designed through the Operation Increase Occupancy to help educate new business owners, property owners, and realtors.

are eligible for the following incentives, which help the city enhance its character and maintain its historic feel:

- Main Street Façade Reimbursement Program (grants are available for signage and exterior work on a 50/50 matching basis, for up to \$3,000)
- Texas Main Street Design Assistance
- Historic Preservation Tax Incentives Program (state and federal tax credits for qualifying historic buildings)
- Downtown Incentive Program (new businesses in areas of targeted need may up to 15% forgivable loan for property and equipment)

The results are an influx of loft development and perpetually vacant properties are becoming developed and occupied. By following Main Street's Four Point Approach, the recipe for success becomes more obvious every day.

## RETAIL RECRUITMENT

*Article written by Sarah Marshall, Assistant State Coordinator/Small Business Specialist, Texas Main Street Program*

### Small Business Recruitment

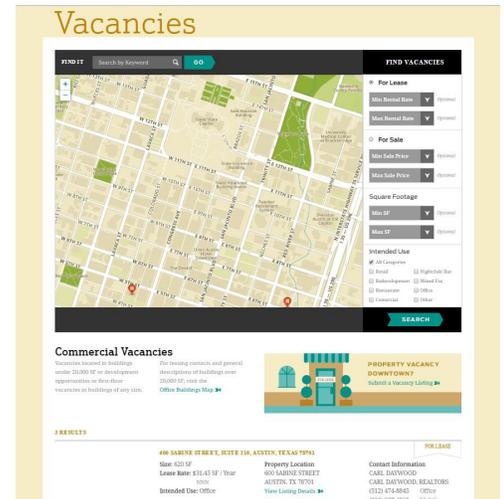
The best Main Streets across the nation have a thriving retail and restaurant scene, where small business owners know that downtown is the place to get considerable foot traffic and enjoy a connection with their community. However, not all entrepreneurs understand the value of being downtown, and Main Street managers can bridge that gap by recruiting great businesses to join their downtown to reap all the benefits the location has to offer. There are several different ways to recruit quality small businesses on to a Main Street, while decreasing the vacancy rates.

### Main Street Website

Many Main Streets have great

websites that attract locals and visitors downtown, but the sites should also be utilized to entice new businesses to locate on Main Street. Establish a section of the site to include all pertinent information that might lure a business owner to locate downtown. This section should contain as much data-driven information that can be found or developed. This might include sales trade area, market profile (with demographics and psychographics), consumer trend reports, survey results, and sales gap analyses. The Main Street Economic Vitality committee can play a crucial role in helping to find and organize this data. Readily available sources for the information also include your local economic development corporation if one exists and the Census Bureau. The Texas Main Street Program team can also help guide managers toward this information. Nothing persuades a well-informed business owner more than data showing the potential for their business in your town.

Having financial assistance information on your website also is necessary when recruiting business.



(Left) Main page of Austin Downtown Alliance allows users to choose if they want to experience downtown or do business downtown. (Middle) Austin Downtown Alliance offers demographic and market data, retail support information, testimonials, how-to guides, loan program information, psychographics, and other pertinent information for new small businesses. (Right) Downtown Austin Alliance lists their vacancies on their site and provides searchable information about them.

Connecting the business owner to financial incentives helps them find these opportunities more easily. If a lot of hard work has gone into creating retail rent subsidies or façade improvement grants, this is a great place to let prospects know about it. Links to small business loans or other programs designed to help entrepreneurs financially should also be included. Some good examples of Main Street websites working to assist small businesses are Denison (<http://www.cityofdenison.com/339/Business-Start-Up-Information>) and Elgin (<http://elgintx.com/208/Do-Business-Downtown>).

Another significant addition to this portion of the website should be a section with all of the currently marketed vacancies in downtown. Not only should the buildings for sale be included, but the spaces for rent need to also be here. If there are many vacancies downtown, they can be categorized to make them more attractive; for example, categorize by street and identify traffic volumes; categorize by historic building features to attract tenants seeking the charm of tin ceilings and original storefronts; or categorize by parking and identify which lease spaces offer off-street versus only on-street parking. If there are many vacancies in the district, prioritize them. Increasing the marketing for the more strategic vacancies first will allow you to highlight select properties initially. You can also collaborate with a local real estate agent or someone who has their finger on the pulse of downtown space and retail. This is a great project for an intern to assist with setting up and maintaining.

The Downtown Online Inventory software tool, which is under

development at this time by the Texas Main Street Program and Town Square Initiative staff, will include a user-friendly feature intended to make marketing vacant lease space to potential businesses easy. The software runs on a mapping platform and will track buildings “With Available Space.” The spaces will then be searchable by such things as rent amount, building amenities, or location within a historic district. The first development phase will be complete by September 2016, and the THC hopes to make it available to Main Street programs in 2017.

### Recruit Specific Tenants

There are steps managers can take to engage specific tenants that they want to locate downtown. There is no need to stand by idly with a list of vacancies and need for small businesses trying to attract the right kinds of businesses. By taking action, managers can get those vacancies filled.

Many cities have some sort of small business education program, whether it be an SBDC (<http://www.sbdctexas.org/>) or an informal entrepreneur instructional class. Sometimes it is through the city itself, or it could be located within a community college or nearby university. These programs are ripe with entrepreneurs who are ready to launch their business, and the fact that they sought help before beginning their business shows they are already a step ahead of many start-ups. Talk to the educators of these classes or the directors and specialists of the program to see if they can identify those with potential.

Another great place to seek out new business owners is at a local crafts fair or farmers’ market. Many small businesses on Main Streets got their start in this type of venture. If a business is ringing up sales and can hardly keep up with the volume, they might be more inclined to



This retail incubator space leases to small businesses that are not quite ready for their own store.

take their business to the next level with your encouragement. Sometimes, these smaller businesses would do great in their own store, but they are still too small to open up a full shop. Consider working with vacant property owners to create retail incubator spaces, where you can set up these cottage businesses so that they can get started in the right direction before they own their own store. Pop-up shops are also great for small businesses that are not quite ready to open their own store.

One important factor in building a relationship with a prospective business owner in your downtown is talking with them either face to face or over the phone. You can still email them information afterward, but you are going to have better luck recruiting people to move downtown if you build a relationship with them first instead of just cold-emailing them information. Like many other aspects of running a successful Main Street, relationship building goes a lot further than just doling out facts.

Regardless of the methods used to recruit businesses downtown, someone within the Main Street organization needs to be proactive in recruitment. These tasks need not just fall on the shoulders of managers either; empower Main Street board or committee members to also look for new businesses. By having more than one person actively recruiting new businesses to locate downtown, chances of success will increase over time.

## Furthur Reading

Main Street Matters:

- [May 2015](#)
- [November 2015](#)
- [May 2016](#)

## MAIN STREET EVENTS

### BRENHAM

#### Hot Nights, Cool Tunes Summer Concert Series

**Saturday, July 9, 2016**

**Saturday, July 16, 2016**

**Saturday, July 23, 2016**

**Saturday, July 30, 2016**

**7 p.m.**

Enjoy great music around the square in downtown Brenham. Family fun with a Classic Car Cruise-In!

### CELINA

#### Small Town Saturday Night

**Saturday, July 9, 2016**

**7 p.m.**

Come to the historic square in downtown Celina for our rendition of Small Town Saturday. The evening will feature baseball, classic cars, water balloons, and everybody's favorite: apple pie. There will be activities, games, contests, prizes, and fun for the whole family including our American classic feature, "The Sandlot."

## CUERO

### Market on Main and Downtown Farmers Market

**Saturday, July 23, 2016**

**9–4 p.m.**

There will be an artisan and antique market, Biergarten, live music, farmers market, and food truck eatery.

## ELGIN

### Sip Shop and Stroll

**Thursday, July 14, 2016**

**5–8 p.m.**

Sip a little wine and shop as you stroll through the stores in historic downtown Elgin. You will find diverse merchandise, eclectic decor, artwork by local artists, and live music in many of the venues.

## LA GRANGE

### Summer Movie Nights on the Square

**Friday, July 8, 2016 - "Flipper"**

**Friday, July 15, 2016 - "The Nutty Professor"**

**Live Music at 7 p.m., Movie at 8:30 p.m.**

Enjoy live music, entertainment, and a movie on an enormous inflatable screen! This summer, we are celebrating the 20th Anniversary of La Grange Main Street with movies dating back to 1996.

## ROCKWALL

### Night Owls Late Till 8!

**Thursday, July 14, 2016**

**5–8 p.m.**

Downtown shops extend their hours, offering promotions, live music, and discounts.

**Rockwall Farmers Market**  
**Saturdays in July**  
**8 a.m.–12 p.m.**

The Farmers Market is a Saturday morning staple! With over 30 vendors, the market offers local fruits and vegetables, fresh baked breads, natural beef and poultry, seafood, cheese, farm eggs, pasta, honey, and much more. The market has become one of the area's most popular destinations to purchase fresh produce and specialty foods.

**WAXAHACHIE**

**Trucks 'n Tunes**  
**Saturday, July 9, 2016**  
**6–10 p.m.**

Trucks from the Metroplex invade downtown Waxahachie for the evening! Enjoy the beer garden sponsored by the Waxahachie Downtown Merchants Association and live music. Bring the family and enjoy an evening of fun in downtown Waxahachie!

**Summer Moonlight Movies**  
**Friday, July 15, 2016 - "Jaws"**  
**9 p.m.**

Join us for a FREE movie under the stars! Bring your blanket or lawn chair; concessions on site.

## Websites of Interest

**Advisory Council on Historic Preservation: [www.achp.gov](http://www.achp.gov)**

**African American Heritage Preservation Foundation: [www.aahpfdn.org](http://www.aahpfdn.org)**

**(The) Alliance for Historic Landscape Preservation: [www.ahlp.org](http://www.ahlp.org)**

**(The ) American Institute of Architects: [www.aia.org](http://www.aia.org)**

**American Planning Association: [www.planning.org](http://www.planning.org)**

**American Society of Landscape Architects: [www.asla.org](http://www.asla.org)**

**(The) Cultural Landscape Foundation: [www.tclf.org](http://www.tclf.org)**

**(The) Handbook of Texas Online: [www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online](http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online)**

**Keep Texas Beautiful: [www.ktb.org](http://www.ktb.org)**

**League of Historic American Theatres: [www.lhat.org](http://www.lhat.org)**

**National Main Street Center: [www.preservationnation.org/main-street](http://www.preservationnation.org/main-street)**

**National Park Service: [www.nps.gov](http://www.nps.gov)**

**National Trust for Historic Preservation: [www.preservationnation.org](http://www.preservationnation.org)**

**Partners for Sacred Places: [www.sacredplaces.org](http://www.sacredplaces.org)**

**Preservation Easement Trust: [www.preservationeasement.org](http://www.preservationeasement.org)**

**PreservationDirectory.com: [www.preservationdirectory.com](http://www.preservationdirectory.com)**

**Preservation Texas: [www.preservationtexas.org](http://www.preservationtexas.org)**

**Project for Public Spaces: [www.pps.org](http://www.pps.org)**

**Rails-to-Trails Conservancy: [www.railstotrails.org](http://www.railstotrails.org)**

**Scenic America: [www.scenic.org](http://www.scenic.org)**

**Texas Department of Agriculture: [www.TexasAgriculture.gov](http://www.TexasAgriculture.gov)**

**Texas Commission on the Arts: [www.arts.state.tx.us](http://www.arts.state.tx.us)**

**Texas Downtown Association: [www.texasdowntown.org](http://www.texasdowntown.org)**

**Texas Folklife Resources: [www.texasfolklife.org](http://www.texasfolklife.org)**

**Texas Historical Commission: [www.thc.state.tx.us](http://www.thc.state.tx.us)**

**Texas Parks and Wildlife Department: [www.tpwd.state.tx.us](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us)**

**Texas Rural Leadership Program: [www.trlp.org](http://www.trlp.org)**

**Texas State Preservation Board: [www.tspb.state.tx.us](http://www.tspb.state.tx.us)**

**Urban Land Institute: [www.uli.org](http://www.uli.org)**

Texas Historical Commission  
P.O. Box 12276  
Austin, TX 78711-2276  
512.463.6100  
fax 512.475.4872  
[thc@thc.state.tx.us](mailto:thc@thc.state.tx.us)



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