



TEXAS HISTORIC COURTHOUSE PRESERVATION PROGRAM

In 1999, the Texas Legislature and Gov. George W. Bush created the Texas Historic Courthouse Preservation Program through House Bill 1341, appropriating \$50 million for the 2000–01 biennium. The idea began in 1997 when the governor proposed a state and local courthouse revitalization project to preserve and restore Texas' unique county courthouses. In 1998 and again in 2012, the National Trust for Historic Preservation named Texas courthouses to its list of America's 11 Most Endangered Historic Places.

Background

In May 2000, the Texas Historical Commission (THC) awarded \$42.4 million in matching grants to 19 counties in Round I of the program. An additional \$7 million was distributed to 28 counties in Round II, which was the remainder of the original appropriation from the 76th Texas Legislature. Following another \$50 million appropriation from the 77th Texas Legislature in 2001, the THC awarded approximately \$47.4 million to 22 Texas counties to help preserve their courthouses. Round IV in May of 2004 resulted in 28 counties receiving matching grants as a result of the \$45 million bond authority extended to the THC by the 78th Texas Legislature.

In the 80th Texas legislative session, the appropriations bill passed \$62 million in bond authority to fund Round V of the program. In January 2008, 14 construction and three emergency projects were awarded. The 81st Texas Legislature appropriated \$20 million in bond authority to fund Round VI of the program. Grants were awarded in January 2010 to 19 counties, three full construction, three exterior construction, four emergency construction



The 1901 Harrison County Courthouse was rededicated June 20, 2009.

and nine planning projects. In the 82nd legislative session, an allocation of \$20 million for Round VII funded six emergency grants, three full construction grants, and three interior grants to complete previously funded exterior projects.

The most recent appropriation of the 84th Texas Legislature in 2015 was \$20 million from general revenue. The Round VIII grant cycle awarded emergency grants under \$450,000 during FY 2014–15 to address critical problems that continue to endanger the state's historic courthouses.

In Rounds I through VIII, 139 courthouse master plans (the first step in program eligibility) have been submitted. Of those 139 plans, 130 were approved. To date, the program funds have facilitated the restoration and preservation of 91 county courthouses.

The urgent need to preserve the state's historic courthouse became evident during the first eight rounds of grants, as did Texans' enthusiasm for the program. There are, however, nearly 180 nationally recognized historic courthouses across the state that could benefit from the Texas Historic Courthouse Preservation Program. Continuing the program is vital to the future of these grand community treasures.

Important Points

- The \$451 million (state and county matches) of total courthouse contribution activity has generated nearly 10,381 jobs, \$288 million in income, and over \$393 million in gross state product.
- The threat to historic courthouses is real. In 1993, fire ravaged the century-old Hill County Courthouse in Hillsboro. In 1999, fires destroyed the 1911 Reagan County Courthouse in Stiles and damaged the 1891 Tyler County Courthouse in Woodville.
- On August 4, 2000, fire gutted the historic 1902 Newton County Courthouse just two weeks after the THC approved its master plan for the Texas Historic Courthouse Preservation Program. The THC provided emergency stabilization funds and Round III funding for full restoration of the Newton County Courthouse.
- Texas has more historic courthouses than any other state; over 240 are currently eligible for the program, 180 remain to be restored.
- Texas courthouses date from the mid-19th century and were among the first permanent structures in many counties.
- County courthouse projects are serving as a catalyst in economic revitalization in business districts surrounding courthouse squares throughout the state.
- Historic courthouses are focal points for heritage tourism, one of the fastest-growing segments of the travel industry in Texas.

- A total of 142 Texas courthouses are listed in the National Register of Historic Places; 152 are Recorded Texas Historic Landmarks and 114 are State Antiquities Landmarks.
- The state has invested \$251,606,426 million which has generated more than \$199 million in direct expenditures from participating counties and millions more in indirect expenses.
- This program has been recognized by the Texas Society of Architects and the National Trust for Historic Preservation with honor awards. In May of 2008, the program received the Preserve America Presidential Award.
- Projects have increased employment in the construction industry, generated revenue in rural areas and strengthened skills of crafts people in many specialty trades.
- The restored courthouses offer an efficient and healthy environment for conducting business through compliance with the life safety codes, accessibility standards, and the removal of hazardous materials, mold and outdated mechanical, electrical, and plumbing systems.
- The restored courthouses provide safe and secure storage for vital county records as well as more efficient space for use of the records by the public.
- At least 17 major motion pictures include scenes shot in a historic courthouse, including "Bernie," "True Grit," "Lone Star," and "Tree of Life."

How to Reach Us

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