



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, 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, a call for applications was made in November 2001. The THC announced Round III grant recipients in early 2002 and 2003. Commissioners 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.

In Rounds I through V, the THC received 133 courthouse master plans, the first step required in the assistance process. Of those 133 plans, 122 were approved. To date, THC staff has assisted in the restoration and preservation of 68 county courthouses.



The 1896 Denton County Courthouse was rededicated Nov. 6, 2004.

The estimated current need to restore courthouses that have approved master plans is approximately \$225 million in state funds.

The urgent need to preserve the state's historic courthouses became evident during the first five rounds of grants, as did Texans' enthusiasm for the program. There are, however, more than 183 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 \$337 million of total courthouse contribution activity has generated nearly 7,751 jobs, \$215 million in income and over \$294 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; approximately 234 are currently eligible for the program, 183 remain to be restored.
- Texas courthouses date from the mid-19th century and were among the first permanent structures in many counties.
- Restored historic county courthouses preserve an important architectural feature of Texas' past while making these landmarks functional and safe for use today.
- 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 123 Texas courthouses are listed in the National Register of Historic Places; 135 are Recorded Texas Historic Landmarks and 102 are State Archeological Landmarks.



The restored assembly room in the 1931 Menard County Courthouse.

- The state has invested \$207 million which has generated more than \$130 million in direct expenditures from participating counties and millions more in indirect expenses.
- After Round V project funding, a bond authority in the amount of \$225 million could extend the program for several years and complete the restoration and preservation for all those counties that have currently completed their required master plan and applied for funds.
- 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.

How to Reach Us

For more information, please contact the THC's Architecture Division at 512.463.6094 or email architecture@thc.state.tx.us.



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