

# HISTORIC COURTHOUSE PRESERVATION



AN ISSUE BRIEF FROM LEGISLATIVE BUDGET BOARD STAFF

ID: 4806

OCTOBER 2018

## OBJECTIVE

The Texas Historical Commission oversees the Texas Historic Courthouse Preservation Program that provides matching grant funding to counties for preservation of their historic courthouses.

## KEY FACTS

- ◆ Since 1999, the courthouse preservation program has provided approximately \$272.3 million in grant funding to preserve 93 historic county courthouses.
- ◆ All grant funding awarded must be matched by the receiving county with at least 15.0 percent of the overall project cost for a construction grant and 50.0 percent for a planning grant. Emergency grants require a match of at least 50.0 percent of the total project cost.

## BUDGETARY IMPACT

For the 2018–19 biennium, \$19.2 million in Other Funds from the Economic Stabilization Fund and \$1.0 million in General Revenue Funds are appropriated for the courthouse preservation program.

THC also carried forward approximately \$0.1 million in unexpended balances from previous biennia.

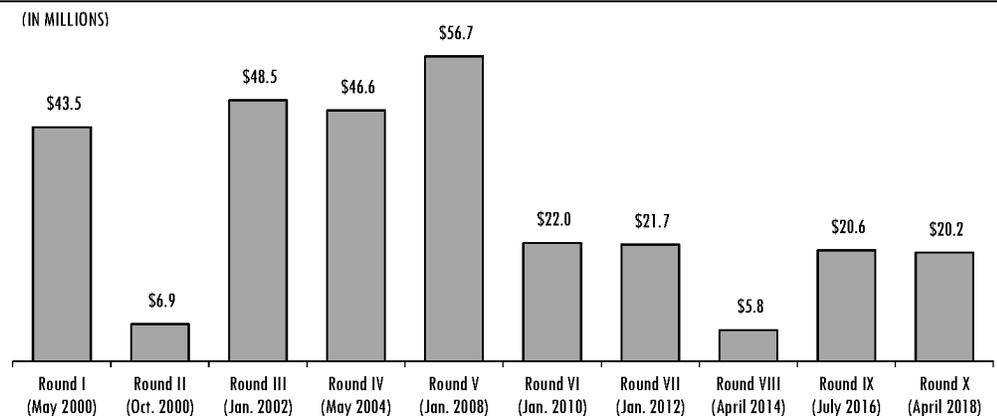
## STATUTORY REFERENCES

The Texas Government Code, Section 442.0081.

In 1998, the National Trust for Historic Preservation added Texas courthouses to its list of America's Most Endangered Places. One year later, the Legislature established the Texas Historic Courthouse Preservation Program within the Texas Historical Commission (THC). The purpose of the courthouse preservation program is to provide matching grants to local governments across Texas that present a need to restore or preserve their historic county courthouses. For purposes of the program, a county's courthouse is classified as historic if it is at least 50 years old and serves or has served as the county courthouse.

Courthouse preservation grants originally were funded during the 2000–01 and 2002–03 biennia with \$45.5 million and \$49.5 million in General Revenue Funds, respectively. During subsequent biennia, the agency was appropriated \$153.7 million from General Obligation Bond Proceeds during fiscal years 2004 to 2015 and \$20.0 million in General Revenue Funds during fiscal years 2016 to 2017 to continue grant funding. Since the inception of the courthouse preservation program, THC has awarded \$272.3 million during nine rounds (or funding cycles) of grant awards. **Figure 1** shows grant funding awards by round from fiscal years 2000 to 2018. For the 2018–19 biennium, the program was appropriated \$19.2 million in Other Funds from the Economic Stabilization Fund and \$1.0 million in General Revenue Funds for grant funding.

**FIGURE 1**  
**TEXAS HISTORIC COURTHOUSE PRESERVATION PROGRAM GRANT AWARDS, FISCAL YEARS 2000 TO 2018**



NOTE: Round X awards are projected based on legislative appropriations for the 2018–19 biennium.  
SOURCE: Texas Historical Commission.

## TYPES OF GRANTS AWARDED

The courthouse preservation program offers matching reimbursement grants to counties and municipalities for their historic county courthouse projects in the form of planning grants, construction grants, and emergency grants. Construction grants, for major construction activity,

are awarded for approximately 85.0 percent of the total project cost when matched locally by at least 15.0 percent of the total project cost. Applicants seeking a planning grant to prepare construction documents for these major projects are required to provide a local match of at least 50.0 percent of the planning costs. Emergency grants are for projects that address critical needs and issues endangering the buildings or occupants. If an emergency grant is requested, a local minimum match of approximately 50.0 percent is required. Additionally, the grant requested by each applicant may not exceed a cumulative total of \$6.0 million. Funds remaining from a previously awarded grant are recaptured when the actual project cost is less than the budgeted cost. THC may award supplemental construction and emergency grant funding to grantees for unanticipated costs that arise during the course of the projects.

**MASTER PRESERVATION PLANS**

To participate in the program and be considered for a grant, counties must submit to THC a courthouse preservation master plan. Master plans are broad planning documents intended to assess and guide the effects of a proposed treatment or construction-related capital project on the existing courthouses. Each plan includes: a historic context for the courthouse; a narrative of the physical changes made to the courthouse; a description of the current condition of the courthouse; the space needs for the courthouse; recommendations for the rehabilitation of the building, including cost estimates; a phased plan for the entire project; and a schedule for regular building maintenance.

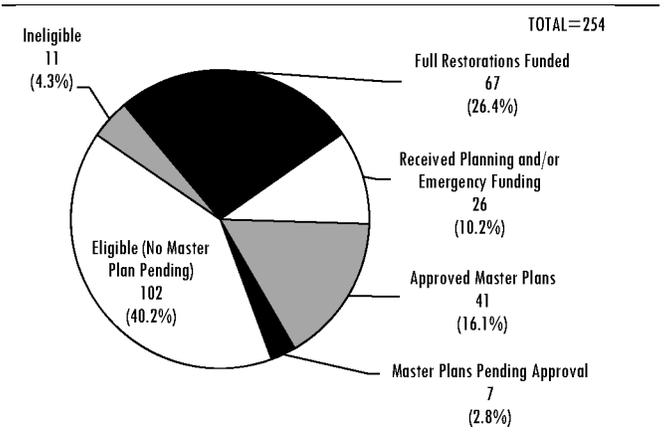
An applicant’s master plan must be approved before it is eligible to participate in the program and request grant funding. After a master plan has been approved, unless major changes to the master plan have occurred, an applicant does not have to submit a new master plan for future grant rounds. However, THC recommends updating the master plan every few grant cycles to include changes in the building’s condition. As of January 31, 2018, THC has approved 134 master plans.

**APPLICATION PROCESS**

Before grants are awarded for each funding cycle, THC establishes a timeline and application requirements for the upcoming grant round. Potential applicants are notified of the upcoming grant cycle through a call for applications, which is disseminated to local governments.

New applicants have an opportunity to submit a master plan for review and approval, if not already approved. Applicants also may submit construction or planning documents for review and approval. THC notifies applicants if their master plans are approved and whether they are eligible to apply for courthouse preservation grants. Any applicant with an approved master plan may submit an application for grant funding. THC reviews the applications according to established scoring criteria and, after a public hearing on the applications, awards grants. Major items required to be submitted with an application for a courthouse preservation grant include general courthouse information, including: when it was constructed; the dates of any major modifications to the building; current functions of the courthouse; any historical designation the building may have; and photographic documentation of the courthouse. Other required information includes a project description and projected results of the completed project, a funding request with estimated expenditure projections, and evidence of local support. **Figure 2** shows statewide participation in the program by application stage, including the number of master plans submitted and restorations funded through fiscal year 2018.

**FIGURE 2  
TEXAS HISTORIC COURTHOUSE PRESERVATION PROGRAM  
PARTICIPATION BY APPLICATION STAGE  
FISCAL YEARS 2000 TO 2018**



NOTE: Ineligible courthouses are younger than age 50 or are not owned by a county or city.  
SOURCE: Texas Historical Commission.

**USEFUL REFERENCES**

Texas Historic Courthouse Preservation:  
[www.thc.texas.gov/preserve/projects-and-programs/texas-historic-courthouse-preservation/about](http://www.thc.texas.gov/preserve/projects-and-programs/texas-historic-courthouse-preservation/about)

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