

Planning and Development Division

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Dr. Max Grossman
Vice-Chair, El Paso Historical Commission

Dear Dr. Grossman,

I am writing to you to share some of the experiences that Galveston has had with our historic downtown. Bustling today, the City has been working on revitalization of the downtown since the 1960s.

Often referred to as "the Wall Street of the Southwest," the Strand/Mechanic area was the economic lifeblood of the city in the 19th century. Businesses in the district included banks, warehouses and merchants that supported and managed the traffic of goods coming into and leaving the city. Cotton was the major export but building materials, produce and other dry goods also flowed through the district. Most buildings were built between 1875 and 1899. The Gothic, High Victorian, French and Italianate buildings now house shops, restaurants, offices and apartments. Today it is one of Galveston's most popular tourist destinations with over 5 million visitors a year but in late 1950s and 1960s the area was in decline with empty, derelict buildings.

Venturi and Rauch, Architects and Planners developed the Action Plan for the Strand in 1975. Prepared for the Galveston Historical Foundation, this plan is the first to specifically address the Strand. The plan identifies seven general goals that should guide planning for the Strand's revitalization and envisions the street as "a real place that enhances the life of Galveston's citizens and dramatizes the experience of its visitors." Ford, Powell & Carson produced two plans in the 1970s: *The Strand: Restoration and Revitalization* and *The Galveston Connection*.

These planning efforts resulted in more attention focused on the downtown area, primarily on Strand Street. The Strand/Mechanic Historic District was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in the late 1970s as a National Historic Landmark District, which is the highest level of listing available. That listing was soon followed by a nomination of the remainder of the downtown area as a Multiple Resource Area (MRA). In total, the downtown has 159 buildings located within the NHL Historic District and 33 buildings that are individually listed. Buildings that are listed in the NRHP have access to federal and tax credits, putting them at an advantage over non-listed buildings. The retention and rehabilitation of Galveston's historic buildings has resulted in a vibrant and successful downtown which is a popular heritage tourism attraction.

Sincerely,

Catherine Gorman, AICP, HHDFP
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