

CONSERVANCIES

A conservancy is a nonprofit organization with a mission of protecting public assets. Conservancies are often thought of as organizations focused on the preservation of plants, animals, or other natural resources, but a conservancy can also be formed to focus on the preservation of historic and cultural sites. A conservancy may own the sites it seeks to preserve, hold and enforce conservation easements issued by property owners (like those discussed above), or enter into contractual agreements with property owners to support the preservation of the site. For example, a number of conservancies have been set up across the country to support cities with improvements, maintenance, and programming at city parks. In these instances, the relationship between the conservancy and the city is typically a contractual one.

In Texas, a conservancy is typically set up as a nonprofit corporation through the Texas Secretary of State's office, with a 501(c)(3) tax exemption from the Internal Revenue Service to facilitate charitable donations. Organizationally, what distinguishes a conservancy from other nonprofit organizations is the conservancy's purpose clause in its Certificate of Formation or bylaws, which includes a focus on preserving sites with historical, architectural, archaeological, or cultural significance.

An important aspect of the conservancy model is long-term stewardship. This organizational model requires financial resources or strong community backing in order to be seen as a reliable entity that can be counted on in the future to carry forth its mission.

Examples of Conservancies in Texas

Conservancies focused on historic or cultural preservation have been organized around a broad range of goals with varying geographic scope. Examples include:

- **Emancipation Park Conservancy, Houston, Texas:** A Texas nonprofit organization responsible for the management, restoration, and enhancement of Emancipation Park, located in a historic African American neighborhood.
- **Los Angeles Conservancy, Los Angeles, California:** Nonprofit membership organization focused on recognizing, preserving, and revitalizing the historic and cultural resources of Los Angeles County.
- **The Plano Conservancy, Plano, Texas:** A Texas nonprofit organization that provides financial assistance to preserve heritage resources in Plano.

Emancipation Park – Houston, TX

The parcel of land that became known as Emancipation Park was purchased by formerly enslaved persons in 1872 as home for their Juneteenth celebration. In 1916, the land was donated to the City of Houston and, for almost two decades, was the only municipal park in Houston that African Americans were allowed to use. The park has remained a city park since that time.

In 2014, the Emancipation Park Conservancy was created as a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt nonprofit corporation to restore, manage, and enhance Emancipation Park while preserving the integrity and historical roots of the park, through a 30-year contract with the City of Houston. The Conservancy also plays an active role in fundraising and putting on programs and events at the park. The City retains overall control and responsibility for the park, including approval of improvements proposed by the Conservancy.

Emancipation Park was designated as a local historic landmark by the Houston City Council in 2007 and was more recently listed as a UNESCO Site of Memory associated with UNESCO's Slave Route project. The park is also included in the proposed Emancipation National Historic Trail under consideration by the federal government.