Proposed Solution for Deed Restriction Data Preparation

Current State of Information Regarding Deed Restrictions

The current publicly available information regarding deed restrictions is very scarce, and spread among a variety of resources. As of now, there is no central dataset or resource for information regarding all deed restrictions. Instead, users are often directed to consult their County Clerk or the appropriate civic organization for more information regarding the deed restrictions for their particular property. At best, there was an initial open dataset that included information for civic clubs, which can be found here[i]. However, the dataset does not list the deed restrictions associated with the area governed by a particular organization, does not cover all portions of the City of Houston, and has not been updated since its creation in 2013.

Proposed Solution

The initial solution is to create a website that provides information about deed restrictions for a given address or organization. That is, the website would allow users to look up an address and view the deed restrictions applied to the address as well as the organization governing the address. Accordingly, the dataset should include:

- An address;
- Each deed restriction applied to the address;
- The name of the organization governing the deed restrictions; and
- Contact information for the governing organization, such as a contact person, an email address, a phone number, and/or a website.

The website should also allow users to look up an organization, see the total area governed by the organization, and the deed restrictions applied to the area. Accordingly, the dataset should also include:

- An organization's name and contact information, which may include a contact person, an email address, a phone number, and/or a website
- The total area governed by the organization, displayed in a map program or app, such as Google Maps or ArcGIS
- The deed restrictions applied to the total area; and
- An indication of whether the particular deed restrictions applied vary by section or lot within the total area.

In particular, if it is possible based on the actual dataset, the website could, in the map display of the total area governed by an organization, employ a legend that differentiates which deed restrictions apply to a particular section or lot (e.g., red applies to areas that regulate the orientation of a structure, light blue applies to areas that regulate the size of a lot, etc.).

In addition to these methods for determining the deed restrictions for a given address and organization, the website should also provide a search functionality that allows users to look up areas based on the presence or absence of one or more specific types of deed restrictions. Ideally, the results of the search would yield a page displaying a map highlighting the areas that conform to the search criteria, and the user could select a particular area, which would lead to a page detailing the address and the associated deed restrictions and organization as described above.

As noted above, there does exist a dataset regarding the civic club organizations of Houston; however, given the sparsity and age of the included data, as well as the fact that the dataset does not include the associated restrictions, it is proposed to create a new dataset with the culmination of the website. This data may be collected whenever organizations create or modify existing deed restrictions for a particular area. Accordingly, it is proposed to have administrative accounts for organizations, such that when a deed restriction is created or modified, the organization can update their specific page as well as the relevant address pages with the information. The organizations could also use the administrative accounts to update their own contact information as necessary. The website may be structured such that only organizations, via administrative accounts, may create, edit, or delete information regarding addresses, deed restrictions, and contact information.

In later versions, the website may also include information about how deed restrictions are created, modified, and removed, as well as how to handle deed violations. For example, the website may have sections or pages dedicated to explanations of how an organization creates a deed restriction, which specific deed restrictions the City of Houston is allowed to enforce or to whom to report various deed restriction violations. However, the initial version of the website should focus primarily on collecting and displaying the deed restrictions for a given area and organization, as outlined above.

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i Civic Clubs Dataset, Houston Data Portal, http://data.ohouston.org/dataset/civic-clubs/resource/1d048f91-23a3-44b8-9ac7-43b3fb6d735a