



STAFF MEMORANDUM

UPDATE ON HISTORIC DISTRICT DESIGN GUIDELINES

September 30, 2020

Prepared by: TOWN OF CHAPEL HILL PLANNING DEPARTMENT
Judy Johnson, Interim Director
Anya Grahn, Senior Planner

PURPOSE

This memorandum provides an update on the Historic District Design Guidelines Rewrite Project. No Council action is required.

PROJECT OVERVIEW & BACKGROUND

In summer 2019, the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) awarded the Town a Certified Local Government (CLG) grant of \$10,000 to revise the Historic District Design Guidelines. The Town allocated another \$15,000 to the project for a total of \$25,000. The project was intended to be completed by August 2020; however, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the SHPO has extended the completion deadline to February 15, 2021.

The Historic District Commission (HDC) adopted the current [Design Guidelines for Chapel Hill Historic Districts](#)¹ in 2002. The Design Guidelines need to provide a sound basis for consistent and predictable review of applications. The guidelines ensure that alterations are not incompatible with the historic character of Chapel Hill's three (3) local historic districts:

- Franklin-Rosemary Historic District
- Cameron-McCauley Historic District
- Gimghoul Historic District

The HDC reviews the following, which are included in the design review process:

- exterior alterations,
- changes in exterior materials,
- new construction,
- additions,
- significant site changes, and
- the relocation or demolition of historic buildings by applying the Design Guidelines and the review criteria outlined in [Land Use Management Ordinance \(LUMO\) 3.6.2\(e\)\(4\)](#)².

The following are not included in the design review process:

- Interior alterations,
- routine maintenance, and
- minor repairs to the building's exterior that do not change its appearance and materials.

SUMMARY OF DESIGN GUIDELINE REVISIONS

Legislative updates in Chapter 160D, which provides that the commission shall "adopt principles and standards to guide the commission in determining congruity with the special character of the landmark or district for new construction, alterations, additions, moving, and demolition.", Staff is working to adapt the Design Guidelines to design standards that comply with this revision.

Some notable changes to the local design guidelines include:

- Expanded Design Guidelines addressing new construction and new additions, including new garages and accessory buildings
- New sections on foundations for historic buildings, disaster preparedness and planning, as well as separating windows and doors into separate sections
- Improved introductions to each section to provide more insight into common preservation practices, including guidance on maintaining historic materials
- Character essays describing the distinct character and uniqueness of each local historic district

Prior to the final draft of the new standards, the HDC subcommittee will discuss key items such as:

- List activities that require HDC review versus those that staff can administratively approve
- Greater clarity on landscape preservation, as the Guidelines currently call for the HDC to review
- Guidance on incorporating sustainable features like solar panels

¹ <https://www.townofchapelhill.org/home/showdocument?id=2405>

² https://library.municode.com/nc/chapel_hill/codes/code_of_ordinances?nodeId=CO_APXALAUUMA_ART3ZODIUSDIST_3.6OVDI

- Formatting to ensure that the Guidelines offer clarity, while still being a comprehensible and instructive document

The HDC is authorized and empowered by the Land Use Management Ordinance (LUMO) and Chapter 160A, Article 19, Part 3C of the N.C. General Statutes, to adopt Design Guidelines. Staff will return to the Town Council to amend review criteria as outlined in [LUMO 3.6.2\(e\)\(4\)](#) to better align with the new design standards.

TIMELINE FOR COMPLETING THE PROJECT

The Town’s contract with the SHPO requires that the project be completed no later than February 15, 2021.

Date	Action
November 12, 2019	HDC appoints three members to serve on HDC subcommittee
February 2020	Planning Department contracted with consultant Heather Slane of HMW Preservation
February 17, 2020	HDC Committee Meeting
February 17, 2020	Public Information Meeting
March – June 2020	Draft revisions shared with HDC Committee and community members online and via email for individual reviews and feedback
July 29, 2020	HDC Committee Meeting – Virtual
August 19, 2020	HDC Committee Meeting – Virtual
September 9, 2020	HDC Committee Meeting – Virtual
September 30, 2020	HDC Committee Meeting – Virtual
September 30, 2020	Town Council Meeting – Virtual
October 21, 2020	HDC Committee Meeting – Virtual
November 11, 2020	HDC Committee Meeting – Virtual
December-January 2021	Historic District Commission and staff review of the final formatted Design Guidelines document.
January/February 2021	HDC adoption of the Design Guidelines

Meeting materials and copies of the draft design guideline revisions are available on the project’s webpage: <https://chplan.us/HDGuidelineRevisions>.

PUBLIC OUTREACH

The new Design Guidelines will reflect the input of the HDC, Town staff, and community members. In an effort to provide additional public engagement opportunities on this project during the virtual environment, staff have introduced the following:

1. **Project Webpage.** Staff has made proposed Design Guideline revisions, project schedules, meeting dates and materials, and other resources available on the Town’s project [webpage](#).³
2. **StoryMap.** In July, staff launched a [StoryMap](#)⁴, an interactive webpage that allows viewers to learn more about the Design Guidelines project, historic preservation, and the town’s local and National Register Historic Districts.
3. **Virtual Design Guidelines Committee Meetings.** Beginning July 29, 2020, the committee has been meeting virtually via Zoom. These meetings are open to the public and recorded videos are available on the project [webpage](#).⁵
4. **Temporary Signs.** Staff has posted ten (10) signs around the historic districts to increase public awareness of this project and encourage public participation.

³ <https://chplan.us/HDGuidelineRevisions>

⁴ <https://chplan.us/20Of3qc>

⁵ <https://chplan.us/HDGuidelineRevisions>