

May 21, 2020

Dear Mayor and Town Council,

I am writing on behalf of the Community Design Commission to request that the Town Council require design review of new construction and renovation of Downtown buildings. The CDC is concerned by the lack of oversight provided in the current ordinance.

In 2015, the 100 block of East Franklin Street and a small part of West Franklin Street were added to the National Register of Historic Places; the Strowd Building, at 159 E. Franklin St., was named one of several contributing structures. We learned recently that the town approved an addition to the roof of the Strowd Building in May 2019, evidently without review or input by either the Historic District Commission (HDC) or the Community Design Commission (CDC). Construction work is underway, and photos are attached.

This addition to the Strowd Building highlights the need for design review in Downtown and adds urgency to our recently submitted 2021 budget objective to conduct design studies in parts of Chapel Hill that define the character of our community. These design studies should emphasize that any new construction or substantial rehabilitation projects acknowledge the context of adjacent structures and traditional designs while emphasizing creativity and innovation and acknowledging the change of time.

Without special action by the Town Council, we are at risk of losing some of the important character of our downtown.

Therefore, the CDC requests that Council designate Downtown as a Special Appearance District, as allowed through the General Statutes of North Carolina and the Town Charter. We also request that Council ask the Town's Urban Designer to work collaboratively with the Community Design Commission to create a strategy plan and design guidelines that encourage thoughtful growth that respects downtown as a vital attraction for visitors and residents alike. This option fits into the CDC's 2021 budget objective mentioned above. In addition, we ask that projects be referred to the CDC for advisory review while such a district is under development.

We request that the Town Council receive this petition and refer it to the Manager for a report and recommendation. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Susana Dancy". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Susana" and last name "Dancy" clearly legible.

Susana Dancy, Chair

Community Design Commission, Town of Chapel Hill

