

****DRAFT** Petition to Town Council**

Community Design Commission

April 27, 2020

Dear Mayor and Town Council,

We are writing to request that the Town Council add a process to require design review of buildings downtown. At our meeting of April 27, 2020, the CDC authorized me to submit this request.

We learned recently that staff approved an addition to the roof of the historic Strowd Building in the 100 block of East Franklin Street in May 2019. Construction work is underway (please see attached photos). This approval evidently occurred without review or input by either the Historic District Commission (HDC) or the Community Design Commission (CDC). This addition to the Strowd Building highlights for us the need for additional advisory board design review in downtown Chapel Hill, and it adds urgency to our recently submitted budget objective to conduct design studies.

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

In 2015, the 100 block of East Franklin and a small part of West Franklin were added to the National Register of Historic Places. In addition, the Strowd Building was named as one of several contributing structures. The Federal National Register is the official list of the Nation's historic places worthy of preservation. Most of the 100 block is not in the Town's local historic district, although the Courthouse Building is.

The following are options for your consideration; the options could be additive and implemented over time:

- 1) Institute now a policy to direct the staff to send to the CDC for a courtesy review those development applications for new construction, or exterior renovations not requiring Special Use Permits in the downtown area; this review would be advisory in nature. The review would encompass design aspects of an application relating to how it fits into the context of the historic fabric of the downtown.
- 2) Make the downtown area added to the National Register in 2015 a "Special Appearance District," with the Community Design Commission issuing Certificates of Appropriateness, as the CDC now does in the Blue Hill District; or
- 3) Add the downtown 2015 National Register area to the Town's local historic district, with the Historic District Commission issuing Certificates of Appropriateness, as the HDC now does in the local historic districts.
- 4) Designate all of downtown as a Special Appearance District; and with the Community Design Commission, create a master plan for all of downtown that allows for thoughtful growth and includes a consistent look and feel to what is considered a vital town attraction for visitors and

residents alike. The CDC recently sent to the Council a proposed budget objective to conduct design studies of key areas of Town with the help of the Town's Urban Designer, including the downtown. This option fits into that proposal.

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,