



TOWN OF CHAPEL HILL

Historic District Commission

Meeting Minutes

Town Hall
405 Martin Luther King Jr.
Boulevard
Chapel Hill, NC 27514

Chair David Schwartz
Vice-Chair Angela Stiefbold
Deputy Vice-Chair Sean Murphy
Madhu Beriwal

Josh Gurlitz
Duncan Lascelles
Nancy McCormick

Tuesday, October 13, 2020

6:30 PM

Virtual Meeting

Virtual Meeting Notification

Board members will attend and participate in this meeting remotely, through internet access, and will not physically attend. The Town will not provide a physical location for viewing the meeting.

The public is invited to attend the Zoom webinar directly online or by phone. Register for this webinar: [URL](#) After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the webinar in listen-only mode. Phone: 301-715-8592, Meeting ID: 869 6659 3390

Opening

Roll Call

Staff present: Anya Grahn, Liaison to Commission, Becky McDonnell, Liaison to Commission, Brian Ferrell, Counsel to Commission

Present 6 - Chair David Schwartz, Vice-Chair Angela Stiefbold, Madhu Beriwal, Josh Gurlitz, Duncan Lascelles, and Nancy McCormick

Absent 1 - Deputy Vice-Chair Sean Murphy

Secretary reads procedures into the record

Approval of Agenda

A motion was made by Schwartz, seconded by McCormick, to approve the agenda.

Announcements

Petitions

Approval of Minutes

September 23, 2020 Meeting Minutes

[\[20-0653\]](#)

A motion was made by Schwartz, seconded by Beriwal, to approve the meeting minutes as amended. The motion carried by a unanimous vote.

New Business

Historic District Design Guidelines Update

[\[20-0654\]](#)

Staff liaison Grahn and Commissioner Stiefbold, chair of the Commission's Design Guidelines Committee, provided an update of the Design Guideline Revision project. Grahn reviewed the intent, purpose, and role of the local design guidelines. She discussed their relationship to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards. She explained the scope of the project to bring the guidelines into compliance with the new 160D state law, expand existing sections of the guidelines, introduce new sections to address key building features such as foundations, improve the introduction sections of the guidelines, and incorporate character essays to describe the distinct character of each local historic district. Grahn provided a timeline showing the completion of the project in February 2021. Stiefbold and Grahn asked that the Commission provide input on three topics: sustainability, replacement materials, and approval authority.

Stiefbold discussed state laws governing solar panel placement and the National Park Service's recommendations for the installation of solar panels on historic properties. She discussed the types of solar panels including solar thermal (hot water) panels, solar photovoltaic panels, solar photovoltaic shingles, and free standing panels. She presented images of solar panel placement on historic buildings and asked the commission where it was appropriate to install solar panels.

The Commission discussed the demand for solar panels in the historic district. They spoke to the need to differentiate between new and old additions as well as the reversibility of alterations to historic structures. Commissioners discussed the 10 to 15 year payback on solar panels and the need to make them visibly unobtrusive from the street. There was interest in ensuring that the solar panels not exceed the ridgeline of the roof, that the panels have a low profile, and that they match the roof pitch. The Commissioners stated that roof-mounted solar panels, when placed on street-facing elevations, should appear as a subordinate structural element and not visually overwhelm the roof. The Commission also discussed that other sustainability features like green roofs were not popular on residential construction and that they would be open to reviewing wind turbines on a case-by-case basis in the future.

Stiefbold spoke to the appropriateness of replacement materials based on the National Park Service's (NPS) Preservation Briefs 8 and 16. She explained that the NPS recommended the in-kind replacement of historic materials; however, substitute materials could be considered when the historic material was unavailable, skilled craftsmen were unavailable, there was an inherent flaw in the original material, or the building code required a change. She discussed the importance of substitute materials being compatible with historic materials in appearance, physical properties, and performance expectations. She pointed out common replacement material requests that included windows, decorative features and siding, porch and deck floors, fencing, and foundation materials.

The Commission discussed how windows contribute to the historic character of a building. They found that the shape, size, profile, and fenestration pattern all contribute to the historic appearance. They considered the cumulative impact of replacing historic wood windows with contemporary windows that do not always exactly match the profile and shadow lines of a historic window as well as the availability and expense of craftsmen to restore original wood windows. They also addressed the energy efficiency and durability of new materials. They found that historic windows should be preserved and restored when possible; however, in-kind replacement could be considered in some circumstances. They considered the compatibility of replacement window materials such as aluminum, fiberglass, and vinyl. There was an interest in listing appropriate materials that were generally accepted by the commission as well as encouraging applicants to provide greater detail in their Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) applications to demonstrate how closely the replacement window matched the historic window.

Stiefbold asked the Commission when and where replacement and contemporary siding materials should be permitted. They discussed different siding profiles and materials, including Hardiplank, engineered wood, and resins. The Commission again found that priority should be given to preservation, restoration, and in-kind replacement of historic materials, but substitute materials could be considered where it matched the profile, width, shape, texture, and appearance of the historic material. They also talked about the performance and longevity of replacement materials. Grahn, Counsel Ferrell, and the Commission spoke to the challenges of revising the guidelines due to the frequency with which new construction materials are made available on the market.

The Commission also discussed the height, location, and materials of fences. Commissioner Beriwal explained that the current design guidelines had misled her to propose a metal fence that was not approved by the Commission. Some found that the design guidelines should make a distinction between the types of fences permitted in front versus rear yards. Many found that backyard fences can have more flexibility in design and materials because they are not visible from the street, and there was an interest in maintaining the open feel of front yards. They considered the need for garden fences and Stiefbold explained that the Design Guideline Committee had recommended against the Historic District Commission regulating seasonal garden fencing or temporary fencing. There was concern that modern materials, such as Trex, were too reflective and were not consistent with the matte finish of painted wood fences. The Commission considered the performance of contemporary materials and the patina they form over time. They found that traditional materials were preferable, but contemporary materials may be appropriate on a case-by-case basis.

Stiefbold presented different concrete paving options. The Commission discussed how pavers could be used to address storm water drainage and flooding. There was interest in preserving existing red brick and Chapel Hill grit on both public and private walkways in the town's historic districts. There was concern that flat concrete lacked the texture achieved by concrete pavers and stamped concrete. Generally, the commission found that contemporary materials, if used, should evoke the materials traditionally used in the districts and that concrete pavers may be acceptable in some circumstances.

Grahn described the existing approval authority given to staff, as outlined on page 69 of the Design Guidelines. She pointed out items that staff commonly approved as well as those items that typically were approved by the Commission on their consent agenda. She explained the delegation of review authority that Raleigh used, whereby projects are categorized as routine maintenance, minor work, or major work. She summarized staff and commission approval authorities in Raleigh. She presented a list of these items to the Commission and requested they break them into three categories: those items that staff could approve, those items that staff could approve under some conditions, and those items the commission should always approve.

The Commission discussed increasing the range of activities that could be administratively approved. They found that items that could alter the historic

character of the districts should be reviewed by the Commission. Some found that greater specificity of the design standards would provide better direction for administrative approvals.

The Commission continued the discussion to the November 2, 2020, meeting to allow more time to review and consider these items.

Adjournment

Next Meeting - November 2, 2020

Order of Consideration of Agenda Items:

- 1. Staff Presentation*
- 2. Applicant's Presentation*
- 3. Public Comment*
- 4. Board Discussion*
- 5. Motion*
- 6. Restatement of Motion by Chair*
- 7. Vote*
- 8. Announcement of Vote by Chair*

Public Charge: The Advisory Body pledges its respect to the public. The Body asks the public to conduct themselves in a respectful, courteous manner, both with the Body and with fellow members of the public. Should any member of the Body or any member of the public fail to observe this charge at any time, the Chair will ask the offending person to leave the meeting until that individual regains personal control. Should decorum fail to be restored, the Chair will recess the meeting until a genuine commitment to this public charge is observed.

Unless otherwise noted, please contact the Planning Department at 919-968-2728; planning@townofchapelhill.org for more information on the above referenced applications.

See the Advisory Boards page <http://www.townofchapelhill.org/boards> for background information on this Board.