



STAFF MEMORANDUM

UPDATE ON HISTORIC DISTRICT DESIGN STANDARDS

January 13, 2021

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PURPOSE

This memorandum provides an update on the Historic District Design Guidelines Rewrite Project that is anticipated to conclude in February 2021. No Council action is required.

BACKGROUND & PROJECT OVERVIEW

The Historic District Commission (HDC) adopted the current [Design Guidelines for Chapel Hill Historic Districts](#)¹ in 2002. The Design Guidelines provide a sound basis for consistent and predictable review of applications. The guidelines ensure that alterations are compatible with the historic character of Chapel Hill's three (3) local historic districts:

- Franklin-Rosemary
- Cameron-McCauley
- Gimghoul.

The HDC applies the Design Guidelines and the review criteria outlined in [Land Use Management Ordinance \(LUMO\) 3.6.2\(e\)\(4\)](#)² to their Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) review process. COAs are required for exterior alterations to buildings, sites, and structures in the local historic districts. The HDC does not review interior alterations, routine maintenance, or minor repairs to the building's exterior that do not change its appearance and materials.

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. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the SHPO has extended the August 2020 completion deadline to February 15, 2021. The HDC anticipates adopting the revisions in late January or early February.

TIMELINE FOR COMPLETING THE PROJECT

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 20, 2020	Town Council Meeting – Virtual
September 30, 2020	HDC Committee Meeting – Virtual
October 21, 2020	HDC Committee Meeting – Virtual
November 11, 2020	HDC Committee Meeting – Virtual
December 16, 2020	HDC Committee Meeting – Virtual
December 21, 2020	Last day for HDC members and public to provide edits on the draft Design Guidelines
Mid-January 2021	Final formatted Design Guidelines available online for community review
January 13, 2021	Update to Town Council
January 19, 2021	Historic District Open House - Virtual
Late January/ Early February 2021	HDC review and final adoption of the Design Guidelines
February 15, 2021	The Town's contract with the SHPO requires that the project be completed by this date. (The HDC could choose to adopt the Design Guidelines after this date.)

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

² https://library.municode.com/nc/chapel_hill/codes/code_of_ordinances?nodeId=CO_APXALAUSMA_ART3ZODIUSDIST_3.6OVDI

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

SUMMARY OF DESIGN GUIDELINE REVISIONS

Legislative updates in Chapter 160D of the North Carolina General Statutes provide that the Historic District 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." As part of the revisions to the 2002 Design Guidelines, staff has worked to adapt the Design Guidelines to design standards that comply with the Chapter 160D changes. Following the HDC's adoption of the new Design Standards, staff will return to the Town Council to amend the review criteria in [LUMO 3.6.2\(e\)\(4\)](#) to better align with the new Design Standards.

Notable changes to the local Design Standards:

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

PUBLIC OUTREACH

The new Design Standards will reflect the input of the HDC, Town staff, and community members. To provide additional public engagement opportunities on this project during the virtual environment, staff provided:

1. **Project Webpage.** Proposed revisions to the Design Guideline, project schedules, meeting dates and materials, and other resources are 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.** From July through December, the committee met virtually via Zoom. These meetings were open to the public, and recorded videos are available on the project [webpage](#).⁵
4. **Temporary Signs.** Staff posted ten (10) signs around the historic districts to increase public awareness of this project and encourage public participation.
5. **Virtual Open House.** Staff had held an initial kick-off meeting for this project on February 17, 2020 prior to the pandemic. Staff anticipates holding a second virtual open house for additional public comment on [January 19, 2021](#).⁶
6. **Historic District Commission Meetings.** Staff will review the project with the HDC and recommend adopting the new Design Standards on January 21 and January 28, 2021.

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

⁴ <https://chplan.us/20Of3gc>

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

⁶ <https://www.townofchapelhill.org/Home/Components/Calendar/Event/18310/15>