

## **Anya Grahn**

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**From:** Bev Kawalec [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, July 29, 2020 12:59 PM  
**To:** Anya Grahn  
**Cc:** [REDACTED]  
**Subject:** Comments after Design Guidelines meeting of 8/2020

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Anya and Historic District Commission members,

I enjoyed observing the excellent Design Guidelines committee meeting of July 29, 2020. I am impressed with the knowledge and dedication of all present.

I would like to know the last name of Randy, the citizen who spoke at the end of the meeting. I think he made some excellent points. Although the new Guidelines are extremely thorough, I think that they are going to confuse, rather than clarify, appropriateness for the applicants and the commission members. The different purposes of the Guidelines-- describing the districts, setting standards for judging appropriateness and providing specific detail for renovations and additions--- need to be separated into different documents.

The updated descriptions of the districts are wonderful. They have long been needed. But, applicants are going to read sentences in the descriptions and think that those sentences justify their proposed changes, or that those sentences define what they can do. The background descriptions need to be separated from the standards in a more definitive way. Preferably they would be in a separate document.

The standards are too thorough and cover too much. They are going to overwhelm applicants. Some applicants will just take one look at them and say "I give up" these regulations are too onerous and I can't deal with them. Other applicants, for the big projects, are going to get very involved in relatively insignificant details and not focus on the big congruity issues. Specific information designed to help the homeowners understand how to maintain and build their structures needs to be separated from the standards used to evaluate congruity.

All the details about how to maintain and construct structures are indeed helpful to the homeowners. I believe the Town needs to determine and clarify to what extent it is the job of the staff to the Commission to assist the homeowners with the details of their projects.

To a certain extent, some homeowners in the Historic Districts feel burdened by the regulations of the districts. I believe we should make every effort to make applying for a Certificate of Appropriateness straightforward and uncomplicated. I believe you need to simplify the Design Guidelines document.

Thank you for your consideration.

Beverly Kawalec

## Anya Grahn

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**From:** Randall Lanou <[rlanou@buildsense.com](mailto:rlanou@buildsense.com)>  
**Sent:** Thursday, July 30, 2020 9:14 AM  
**To:** Anya Grahn  
**Subject:** Guidelines Feedback

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Anya

Good to see you yesterday at the design guidelines meeting. I included my February note to the committee at the bottom of this one - that message remains directly applicable and contains usable feedback.

A few comments from a 30,000 foot view:

- I am reminded at every HDC related meeting that the focus is on what you **cannot** do. For a successful positive impact on our historic districts, the HDC must support investment, recognize that change is often positive, and show what you **can** do.
- If you try and serve many different functions - education, maintenance manual, and guidelines that inform the CoA process, you'll likely do none of them well. My bias is for a document that fully supports and informs the CoA process - and that is it.
- Please consider the separation idea that we briefly discussed yesterday. A concise and focused part of the document should key to and inform the LUMO - the basis of CoA decisions. Everything else should be in a separate document or section. For example, the information focused on conservation in the masonry section could and should be separated into another section or document. The paragraph that begins with "Masonry plays a prominent role..." could and should be in the description of the character of the district section. If you take out every reference to maintenance and conservation techniques from the section that supports CoAs, the document will less than half as long.
- Editing the existing document is a mistake. The best solution is a reorganized and re-written document, rather than an edited and revised document.

I'm delighted that Josh is on the committee - I've heard universally good things about him and his significant skill set. Architects are part of the practitioner team that makes good projects happen. At least one builder voice is on the committee is missing. One (of many) things that practitioners can do is to walk through a case study of each part of the guidelines and point out unintended consequences of poorly considered decisions and language. An example is the "mortar check" and salvaged brick discussed today. At least part of each discussion should be about the money and time burden on the applicant. Please don't get me wrong - I loathe poor masonry work. The key is that the HDC is not quality control - their job is limited to determining congruity of the project with the special character of the district.

This is a good segue to the materials discussion. One high-level way to look at materials (that is directly relatable to congruity) is to consider the things that are apparent from twenty paces. Finish (painted, for example), dimension (window trim or corner boards, for example), exposure (on lap siding, for example), scale (brick or stone dimensions, for example), pattern (window divided lites, for example), and design (standing seam metal roofing profile, for example) are all apparent from twenty paces and have a significant impact on congruity. Whether the wood siding was milled in 1923, 1997, or 2019 is not apparent from 20 paces and has no bearing on congruity. Some alternate materials also appear the same at twenty paces and also have no bearing on congruity.

I strongly recommend against discouraging cleaning of masonry - or any other surface - presumably because the "patina" of layers of dirt feels old and, hence, historic.

The guidelines must inform and address the LUMO provision that encourages both traditional and contemporary design harmonious with the character of the district.

Most metals patina and change over time. Galvalume and copper, for example, change significantly from when initially installed. This fact must be taken into account when reviewing these materials.

The materials guidelines for restoration and renovation should state the end goal and allow the applicant to determine the best path to the goal. For example, if the goal is historically correct windows that are congruous with the district, the applicant should determine the the path based on the condition of the existing units, budget, and their goals. If the windows are in poor shape and their goals are focused on durability, a healthy indoor environment, and energy efficiency, they may choose replacement.

One thing is clear: if the HDC is operating at the level of insisting that window trim, for example, is patched instead of replaced, the process will continue to be dysfunctional and a barrier to renovation, restoration, and investment in the district.

Proposed text for wood guidelines follows. Other materials could follow a similar edit and format. It needs to be clear that these guidelines are for renovation and restoration, and not for new projects in the district.

1. Retain and preserve, replace in keeping with the character, or rebuild or renovate features and surfaces that are important in defining the overall historic character of buildings or site features within the historic districts. These include, but are not limited to, exterior wood siding and trim, board-and-batten, decorative shingles and sawn work, turned posts and balusters, porch floors and steps, door and window surrounds, cornices and soffits, and rafter tails and brackets.
2. Replacement features and surfaces should match the original in design, dimension, scale, pattern, detail, and finish.
3. It is not appropriate to conceal a historic feature or surface with a different material.
4. It is not appropriate to introduce new features or details to a building that would create a false historical appearance.

Comments on the current guidelines:

Item 1 - modified text suggested above

Item 2 - eliminate - covered in the new item 1, eliminate or separate the balance which is about ongoing maintenance

Item 3 - eliminate or separate - entirely about maintenance

Item 4 - eliminate or separate - entirely about maintenance

Item 5 - eliminate - this should be the applicant's judgement about getting to the end goal: retain and preserve, replace in keeping with the character, or rebuild or renovate features that are congruous.

Item 6 - eliminate - this should be the applicant's judgement about getting to the end goal: retain and preserve, replace in keeping with the character, or rebuild or renovate features that are congruous.

Item 7 - eliminate - covered in the new item 1.

Item 8 - eliminate - the HDC has no purview over color.

Item 9 - modified text suggested above

Item 10 - modified text suggested above

The entire paint and exterior color section should be separated or eliminated as the HDC has no purview in this area.

The sustainability section needs a page one re-write. Or, simply eliminate it. While the description of the sustainable features of older houses is largely accurate, that information must be presented in the context of how most folks operate and live in our houses today. Many of the features described were ways to mitigate extreme heat when the houses did not have a mechanical system. Now, we do. That fact changes the strategies for thermal enclosures. Some carry forward well - shade trees, for example, remain incredibly effective at helping to cool houses.

Much of the information about sustainability is inaccurate. Examples include statements about ventilated crawl spaces, ventilated attics, and comparable performance between old windows and new. A sensible path is to let homeowners choose the path to the congruity goal (described above) and have the guidelines and HDC stay out of things that are out of sight and not relevant to congruity. Choices about insulation, mechanical systems, window performance, etc. should belong to the homeowner. The very helpful and practical information about locating mechanical systems should be retained but the sustainability section may be the wrong location for that information.

I see language that allows photo-voltaic arrays in a very limited way. While I am aware that mine is a minority opinion, I find it unethical to limit homeowner's options to generate clean energy because some people are offended by the appearance of the panels. Issues around equity, health, sustainability, and climate change are far more important than the appearance of panels on a roof.

I hope that some of this is helpful,

Randy

*Note from February:*

*I have some thoughts about the new design guidelines delivered in the form of our hopes and and dreams for the HDC.*

*We envision a Chapel Hill Historic District Commission that delivers a clear, consistent, seamless, expeditious, fair, and respectful Certificate of Appropriateness application and review process that encourages investment in diverse projects that are congruous with the special character of our historic districts.*

*A clear process is one where all stakeholders understand the goals, criteria, and boundaries. A clear process is focused on the North Carolina State mandate to determine congruence with the special character of the district - and nothing else.*

*A consistent process has defined rules and examples for determining congruity and yields results that do not vary significantly as commissioners or commission leadership changes.*

*A seamless process starts with the big idea to encourage investment in the maintenance, upkeep, and growth of historic districts. A seamless process directly ties the design guidelines to the LUMO and the provision that "encourage[s] design, whether contemporary or traditional, which is harmonious with the character of the historic district." A seamless process includes design guidelines that provide illustrated, concise, and clear examples of congruousness, or lack thereof, for the categories listed in the Land Use Management Ordinance. A seamless process clarifies and describes excluded criteria - what factors are not relevant to the application review process.*

*An expeditious process recognizes, respects, and mitigates the tremendous cost and time required to complete a certificate of appropriateness application. An expeditious process fully supports and encourages the applicant to make an investment in their property and the community.*

*A fair process recognizes and rewards property owner's emotional, time, and financial investment in improving, expanding, and renovating their property. A fair process recognizes that our beautiful historic districts are not the progeny of zoning restrictions or historic district commissions, but are the children of time, design, building, investment, and change.*

*A respectful process recognizes and values practitioners equally with theoreticians and academics. The group of professionals that do the practical work of designing and building exceptional renovation and preservation projects must have a voice.*

*This is a heartfelt plea to the consultant and staff team that will write the new design guidelines. I hope that you will start fresh and write concise, clear, and illustrated guidelines, coordinated with the LUMO, in support of a clear path for property owners to invest in their property, their community, and in the character, diversity, and health of our historic neighborhoods.*

Thanks!

Randall Lanou  
Partner | Company Lead

BuildSense | Design + Construction



Listen. Plan. Design. Build.

*“When the world was flat as a pancake, Mona Lisa was happy as a clam.” - John Prine*