

Anya Grahn

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Sunday, September 20, 2020 11:45 AM
To: Anya Grahn
Subject: HDC Design Guidelines

External email: Don't click links or attachments from unknown senders. To check or report forward to reportspam@townofchapelhill.org

Hi Anya,

I had expressed an interest in keeping informed during the development of the new design guidelines. Since I am in the middle of the cottage renovation on my property, I have not been actively involved listening to the meetings but I have been reading through the drafts. I wanted to give you my feedback.

I see in the drafts a sample "Raleigh COA Review List" separated by Staff Review and COA categories. I wasn't sure if this is something you are going to try and incorporate into the Design Guidelines, but in my opinion, this is the *single most important revision you could make to serve the public*. This allows a lot of minor changes to be the responsibility of staff and gives a quick and handy reference for homeowners to reference. I know a lot of time and effort is being put into the verbiage of the design guidelines, but I believe those details are more helpful to the HDC committee in justification of the decisions rather than the public.

The only other comment I had about the proposed design guidelines is I thought I saw something about approval being required to cut down trees over a certain diameter. Is this correct? First, I have a concern that creating such a requirement will cause homeowners to postpone cutting down trees that should be addressed and will create more of an issue if they fall rather than be cut down. Second, I feel the diameter is too small. My primary home used to be in Charleston, SC and their rule was you could not cut (unless diseased) if over 21" diameter. If below that, you could get a remediation where you could cut it down, but they would determine a specified width of additional trees that would need to be planted in its place.

The other thing I wanted to express my opinion on some other areas that are of a great deal of concern to residents of the Historic Districts which are not directly covered by the design guidelines. These are:

- 1) Parking
- 2) Property conditions
- 3) Interior alterations that convert/maintain single family homes into multi-family homes

Most but not all of the above issues are a result of the large number of homes in the Historic District that have been turned into rental properties. I have no issue with rental properties, they serve an important purpose, particularly to elderly residents, but in general instead of creating the ambience of a single-family home they introduce a lot of negative factors. Surrounding single-family homes in the Historic District are expensive homes and have to go through and adhere to rigorous standards in keeping with the Historic District. Maybe because of this rigorous process but also because of the expense, in general rental property owners do the absolute minimum to maintain, let alone improve their property, particularly the exterior as exterior modifications require HDC approval, but they also put off painting and repair and have zero landscaping. They also allow their residents to do as they please to the property with little oversight so a lot of these homes are treated as they would a dormitory. Neighbors only see the exterior of rental properties so that is where our concern primarily lies, except if interior alterations are converting the property to multi-family housing. Neighborhood residents in general do not want to live around rental properties that look like they are being used for rental properties. These properties are not in keeping with single-family homes or the ambience of a Historic District neighborhood and they can affect future resale values.

Parking

This is the single most issue that is a problem in the East Franklin historic district. We really need a resource that is responsive to this issue. We need to eliminate parking in front yards, require side or back yard parking for maximum of 4 residents not matter how many residents occupy the house, either eliminate on street parking or only allow residential street parking permits to be issued for specific addresses with the maximum of 1-2 cars depending on street frontage (this would mean renters can't park in front of other resident's homes). All overflow parking must find an alternate off-street parking situation.

Is there any way parking can be addressed in the HDC guidelines so that some action can be taken on violations? If not, who is the appropriate resource than can effect change in parking?

Exterior Property Conditions

Some examples are: peeling paint, rotting wood, DIY structures in front yard, bikes continuously kept in front yard, flags/signs in front windows, zero landscaping.

I see there is some verbiage in the design guidelines about maintenance but I not sure how these are enforced. It is very important to keep control of the exterior maintenance details such as rotting wood and peeling paint as not doing so has negative effects on the historic district. Houses become in such a state of disrepair that upon resale they turn into rental housing instead of continuing to be single family homes because of the \$ and rigorous standards required to restore them.

Bikes/hammocks in the front yard, flags/signs in windows, DIY structures in front yard and zero landscaping all detract from the historic district and are sure signs of rental property.

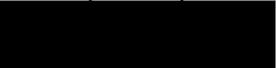
How does the HDC enforce the standards within the design guidelines about maintenance and exterior appearance? If landscaping is introduced into the Design Guidelines will the HDC be able to enforce some minimum landscaping requirements?

Interior Alterations

There are some beautiful single-family homes that have in the past (and could be in future) converted to multi-family housing, most likely the result of not maintaining both exterior and interior property conditions. Once this is done, it is very expensive to convert the properties back to single family homes, as was the case of our main home at 3 Mint Springs. In addition, some landlords are skirting the building permit process so that they can make repairs and often they are done out of code (which was both the case for the main home at 3 Mint Springs as well as the cottage we just purchased). Would it be possible to prevent conversion to multi-family housing through the HDC guidelines? Could there also be a process change so that all building permits for interior floor plan alterations for homes in the historic district get sent back to HDC to review the interior alterations to make sure homes are not being converted to multi-family? Not sure how to control non permitted work.

I appreciate all you and the HDC has on your plate. You are an important resource in keeping the Historic District a nice place to live. Would it be possible to either expand HDC control over the above areas or give residents a designated resource that would have the power to make change in these areas that are important to us as residents?

Thank you for your help,



Anya Grahn

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, September 22, 2020 11:06 AM
To: Anya Grahn
Subject: Some possible language for

External email: Don't click links or attachments from unknown senders. To check or report forward to reportspam@townofchapelhill.org

Hi Anya,

I noticed that the HDC guidelines are being updated. Would you be kind enough to put my suggestions in the appropriate folder? For convenience, I wrote them in a format that could be inserted if anyone wishes to do so.

1. **"The HDC does not consider paint color in making determinations of congruency."** (This is covered in some other places but would be very divisive and labor intensive.)
2. The HDC should **only** consider areas of a building that are visible from a public street. (These are **not** covered in many places but have been covered by our HDC.) **"Only the portions of a structure that are visible from within 200 feet of a public street should be reviewed by the HDC."** Looking at more than this is too time consuming and has no clear benefit.
4. **"The HDC does NOT consider the impact of construction on trees that are on the owner's lot."** (The usually ends up in a very subjective long discussions that are usually not productive. In addition, since a property owner is allowed to remove trees, then the fact that an owner has chosen to keep a tree should not be held against him/her in decision making. **"Trees that meet specific Chapel Hill criteria for preservation, based on species and size, e.g. long leaf pines and live oaks, should be considered in making determinations."**
5. **"Although some overhead wires are historic, there presence has proliferated with cable, fiber and other technologies, efforts should be made to put them underground where possible."**
6. **"Although solar panels are not historic, dispensations should be made for solar panels on historic houses in order to protect the environment."**
7. **"Congruency should be determined primarily based on a comparison with historic houses within the historic neighborhood and/or in the town of Chapel Hill. Congruency should not be determined based on portions of structures that are not deemed historic and which were not specifically approved by the HDC." "Kit Houses, from Sears and other historic manufactures, should also be compared with**

published historic configurations for those houses. For example, if a kit house had a front porch as an option, then it may be permissible to introduce a similar front porch on an existing kit house even though the original house in Chapel Hill was not built with the front pouch option.”

I would also recommend starting out with a preface, that recognizes that the ‘best is often the enemy of the good.’...I don’t know how to say it but something like: **“Chapel Hill is a living town, and ideals for how homes should be designed to promote a high quality of life as well as to protect the environment have and will continue to change. The Chapel Hill Guidelines were designed to protect historic houses and to promote congruity, but also recognizing that Chapel Hill is continually evolving. Additions may at times be inconsistent with original structures either due to size or the addition of materials or features that would not have been characteristic of the period in which the houses were originally constructed, but which are now deemed important e.g. thermal windows, central air conditioning, fiberglass shingles and handicap access to name a few. By allowing these original houses to be updated we may be able to preserve both the vibrancy of Chapel Hill and these houses for many decades to come. When such updates are made they should be made in a manner that minimizes their appearance when viewed from public spaces as well as in a manner that to the greatest extent possible protects the original structural elements such that a future generation might be able to reverse he changes.”**

Best wishes,

Benjamin

Benjamin B. Brodey, MD, MPH

