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City of Raleigh Design Standards Initiative:

Summary of Community Engagement

The initiative to develop new *Design Standards for Raleigh Historic Districts and Landmarks* began with a series of activities designed to elicit qualitative and quantitative input from the Raleigh community. This input will help provide direction as the Design Standards are developed.

Community engagement consisted of three types of input:

1. Listening sessions with community stakeholders
2. Community "Open House" workshops
3. Online community survey

This memo summarizes the results of the three engagement efforts.

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Executive Summary

The City of Raleigh's initiative to update the Design Standards for its eight local historic districts and individual historic landmarks began with a comprehensive community engagement effort to understand how the current Design Guidelines are working, where challenges exist, and what improvements should be considered. Engagement included 12 stakeholder listening sessions, two community open houses, and an online survey that received 166 responses. Together, these activities gathered perspectives from residents, property owners, preservation professionals, City staff, and members of the Raleigh Historic Development Commission (RHDC).

A central theme emerged across all three engagement efforts: the need to balance historic preservation with the practical realities of maintaining, improving, and adapting historic properties. Participants generally expressed support for preserving Raleigh's historic architectural character but identified opportunities to make the Design Standards clearer, more predictable, and more responsive to contemporary needs. There was particular interest in reducing unnecessary regulatory burdens while maintaining meaningful protections for the features that contribute to historic district character.

Key Findings

- **Clarity, Predictability, and Ease of Use.** One of the most consistent findings was the need for Design Standards that are easier to understand and apply. Participants called for clearer definitions, more illustrations, examples of acceptable and unacceptable changes, and greater consistency in Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) decisions. While City preservation staff were widely regarded as knowledgeable and helpful, the RHDC review process was sometimes described as intimidating, costly, and unpredictable. There was interest in expanding administrative approvals for certain types of work, although survey respondents did not consistently agree on which activities should qualify.

- **Flexibility in Materials, Maintenance, and Rehabilitation.** Participants expressed openness to substitute materials, particularly when original materials are unavailable, deteriorated beyond repair, or difficult to replicate. However, maintaining the appearance and integrity of historic buildings remains important. Survey results showed greater support for substitute materials that closely match original materials than for substitutions intended primarily to

reduce maintenance costs. Window replacement, wood siding, and porch repairs emerged as recurring challenges, particularly given the cost and limited availability of qualified contractors.

- **Managing New Construction, Additions, and ADUs.** Participants generally supported allowing historic neighborhoods to evolve while ensuring that new development respects their established character. Scale and massing emerged as the most important considerations for compatible new construction, with 75% of survey respondents identifying these characteristics as priorities. Opinions varied on whether new buildings and additions should reflect traditional architectural styles or introduce contemporary designs. There was also interest in clearer guidance for Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs), particularly regarding their placement, size, architectural character, and relationship to primary buildings.

- **Recognizing District-Specific Character.** Engagement reinforced that Raleigh's historic districts are not interchangeable. At the same time, most districts include diverse architectural styles, so community input was often non-specific in articulating unique attributes. Participants supported a common foundation of preservation standards supplemented by district-specific considerations, particularly where styles, development patterns, landscapes, histories, and cultural identities are distinctive. This was particularly important in districts with varied architectural character and in places such as Oberlin Village and Prince Hall, where cultural history and community identity extend beyond the physical characteristics of individual buildings.

- **Landscapes, Sustainability, and Adaptation.** Mature trees, setbacks, and other site features were identified as important contributors to historic district character. At the same time, participants supported flexibility for tree management, native landscaping, stormwater improvements, solar panels, and other sustainability and resilience measures. Survey respondents demonstrated particularly strong support for flexibility related to tree planting and replacement, stormwater improvements, and native or drought-tolerant landscaping, each receiving 75% support.

- **Public Education and Accessibility.** Participants emphasized that updating the Design Standards alone will not resolve broader challenges related to public awareness. Many homeowners, particularly those new to historic districts, may

not understand the differences between overlay district types or when a COA is required. Continued education, accessible resources, and clearer communication were identified as important complements to the updated Standards.

Looking Ahead

The engagement findings establish a foundation for developing Design Standards that are protective of Raleigh's historic resources while being practical, understandable, and adaptable. Although participants differed on specific regulatory questions, there was broad interest in standards that clearly communicate expectations, recognize the distinct character of individual districts, and provide reasonable flexibility for maintenance, rehabilitation, and compatible change. A particular challenge in writing the new Design Standards will be in providing the "yes/no" clarity that many community members desire with regard to acceptable materials and changes.

The next phase of the initiative will translate these findings into updated Design Standards, addressing areas of ambiguity, establishing clearer guidance for common improvements, and incorporating illustrations and district-specific considerations. The goal is to create a more accessible and consistent framework that supports the continued preservation, use, and evolution of Raleigh's historic districts and landmarks.

Listening Sessions

A dozen in-person listening sessions were held August 10-14, 2026. They were organized by City staff with guidance from the consulting team. Participants included:

- Raleigh City staff
- Residents of local historic districts and landmarks
- Raleigh Historic Development Commission (RHDC)
- Former Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) Committee members
- Local design professionals

The conversations were wide-ranging but guided by questions the team had developed to gather the most useful input. This memo summarizes what was heard and therefore includes some suggestions from participants that may or may not be factual, practical or supportable to include in the new Standards.

The consolidated summary, below, integrates broad input received from City staff, the RHDC, former COA Committee members, preservation organizations, and stakeholder focus groups. Many of these topics came up in multiple listening sessions.

Broad Philosophical Observations

The standards should reflect historic preservation as a balancing act between old buildings and new needs. There is a tension overall between flexibility and specificity in the current Design Guidelines and the future Design Standards. Flexibility allows the COA Committee and RHDC to creatively address specific and unanticipated applications but also increases uncertainty for applicants.

The existing standards align with National Park Service standards and are excellent in many respects. If guidelines are too restrictive, they are a deterrent to projects that are already challenging. It is easy to forget that when now-historic buildings were built, they were modern. The new Design Standards should facilitate practical solutions to an evolving built environment.

Process & Usability

- There was universal appreciation expressed for the helpfulness, professionalism, and the knowledge of City preservation planning staff.
- Many participants were unhappy that the Design Review Advisory Committee (DRAC) was disbanded. The merits of DRAC included technical knowledge that

was free, and DRAC meetings were less formal and more accessible, particularly for homeowners and laypeople.

- The quasi-judicial nature of the COA process can be off-putting and intimidating.
- COA applicants seek more predictability and clearer guidance documents (e.g., a step-by-step COA guide or a decision tree for a few common issues).
- Should the new Design Standards recommend streetside review only (while accommodating statutory requirements for review of other portions of the property through greater flexibility)?

Addressing District-Specific Design Standards

- While "a bungalow is a bungalow" regardless of the district where it is located, site features (e.g., setbacks, driveways) and accessory structures vary by district.
- District-specific Design Standards should begin with the general standards, moving on to district-specific traits so a homeowner only needs one document.
- Character essays (currently district-specific companion essays to the general Design Guidelines) should be rethought. One approach is to move a new version to the front of the district-specific Design Standards, providing context and character-defining features.
- Currently, color and landscaping are treated as flexible features, which could allow district-specific tailoring (e.g., landscape not regulated in Prince Hall, color not regulated in Glenwood Brooklyn, based on neighborhood preference). It is still an open question of what "specificity" should mean on a district-by-district basis.
- Eight sets of Design Standards will be developed for the eight local historic districts. A ninth set of Design Standards will cover individual landmarks outside any district. Questions not yet resolved include how to organize the standards for landmarks, e.g., by architectural style, by context, or by special types (e.g., cemeteries or structures that are not buildings).

Building Additions and ADUs

- The new Design Standards need to address accessory dwelling units and building additions more clearly and comprehensively. Participants noted that the current Guidelines do not provide sufficient guidance.
- Current guidance on ADUs is seen as too vague. The new Standards should provide more specificity. This may include height of the ADU relative to the main house, placement relative to the main house, a square-footage percentage cap, guidance that responds to site topography, or adjustments for large-lot/small-house situations.
- The Standards should address whether an ADU structure is intended to look like a garage, a shed, or a small secondary house – or its own unique typology.
- There is a spectrum of opinions on architectural style of additions, with some favoring designs that imitate the original building and others preferring a clear distinction between old and new. One participant noted that additions should blend but not copy; they should be subservient; they should be theoretically reversible.
- A concern was raised about how additions may change the 50% building-depth threshold in Streetside Historic Overlay Districts (HOD-S). If an addition increases a building's overall depth, the 50% threshold shifts, changing which portions of the building are subject to historic review when future owners propose additional alterations.

New Construction & Compatibility

- New construction/infill is one of the most significant issues facing the districts, with differing opinions over contemporary vs. historically inspired design. Should the focus be on architectural style or whether new construction respects established massing, scale, and placement?
- Tear-downs are rare, largely attributable to a 12-month delay requirement in historic districts and for landmarks.
- Note that if new construction were not regulated by the Design Standards, there could be increased use of the demolition delay in order to build without restraint.

Precedents & Landmarks

- Some participants claimed that evidence used to support COA applications should be limited to existing, contributing buildings within the same district.
- The currently used "nearby and well-related" criterion is viewed by many as poorly defined.
- Unlike contributing buildings within historic districts, which are evaluated in relation to the surrounding neighborhood's architectural character, individual historic landmarks should be evaluated based on their own historic and architectural significance. Guidance for alterations and additions should draw from each landmark's designation report, recognizing that some landmarks represent unique architectural expressions that may not reflect their surrounding context.

Growth, Change & District Character

- Character in historic districts continues to evolve, and building use can shift over time, including changes of use (e.g., residential to commercial) or conversions of large single-family homes to multi-family (and sometimes back to single-family).
- The Character Essays, which are part of the current Design Guidelines, in most cases do not address the character of different streets within architecturally heterogeneous districts.
- Only 5–10% of Raleigh's properties are currently 50+ years old, but that percentage will grow substantially as more potentially significant properties cross the 50-year threshold.

Trees, Landscaping & Site Features

- Site features such as fences, driveways, and accessory structures are not prevalent in every district. Should these topics be addressed in the overall Design Standards or only in district-specific Standards?
- Landscape standards should address management and maintenance, taking into consideration the dynamic and organic nature of plant material which grows and dies.

- Some trees, when planted, are assets, but if poorly planned may grow into threats to buildings.
- Mature trees matter to district character, but not every lot has room for replacement trees, when required by the Standards. Standards should account for lot size and site conditions.
- Removing dead/diseased/hazardous trees is treated as minor work; removing a healthy tree is major work and more contentious.

Painting and Paint Color

- There is an ongoing question about whether paint colors should be regulated, given that painting is a reversible change. However, there is general agreement that painting previously unpainted brick or stone should be subject to review.

Other Site Features and Regulatory Issues

- Recent UDO changes broadened the range of exterior features subject to administrative review (e.g., solar panels, 6' tall fences). The Standards should clearly explain what does and doesn't require administrative or RHDC approval.
- Standards should be more flexible for rear yards, since character is primarily tied to the street-facing side. Standards should include illustrations of minor work changes to rear yards.
- The topic of building maintenance is not directly governed by the Design Standards but is a related issue. There was a desire expressed to strengthen enforcement of building codes, separate from the COA process for exterior changes.

Substitute Materials

- "Alternative materials" need clearer definition in the standards. Frequent COA issues involve windows: Replacement windows – even if exact replications – bring their own challenges because of the poor quality of available wood, for example.
- There's a general shortage of contractors and tradespeople with professional training in historic carpentry and masonry. For example, it is hard to find a contractor with the expertise and availability to restore historic windows.

- Some alternative materials raise concerns about their long-term durability.
- Wood siding should be addressed in the new Standards, with guidance on appropriate materials, profiles, and historic appearance.
- Porch floorboards should be addressed separately, with potential greater flexibility in acceptable materials given their limited visibility compared to siding, for example.
- Alternative materials are already allowed on infill development, new construction, additions, and in specific moisture-prone circumstances (e.g. column bases, window sills, low courses of siding near the ground).
- How does materiality impact the health of the building? Materials choices should not only benefit homeowners but also the sustainability of the home in the long term.
- The Standards should strike a balance between preserving authentic historic material and allowing thoughtful contemporary interventions. Is the goal to preserve character or materials?
- Some alternative materials may be acceptable if their profile, dimensions, depth, color, texture, and overall appearance closely match the historic materials they are intended to replace. As new materials come on the market, there is a question of how they should be evaluated for use on historic buildings. The vetting process should consider how they will serve long-term preservation goals. An assessment of attributes should consider:
    - Surface texture
    - Apparent Thickness
    - Edge Profile (e.g., sharpness, degree of rounding)
    - Shadow Line (e.g., how does light affect the shadow of the installed material?)
    - Dimensional stability and contextual compatibility: When installed, the material must not impact the surrounding materials differently than the historic material.
    - Hardness
    - Color Stability (e.g., for materials with exposed, unpainted surfaces)
    - Texture Stability (e.g., for materials with exposed, unpainted surfaces)
    - Appearance of exposed components in a complex materials (e.g., size, color, and color variation of revealed aggregate in concrete)
    - Suitability for the proposed use

- The public wants a clear yes/no list of acceptable materials and attributes. For example, "Here are attributes of a proposed substitute material that must be met for certain historic features."
- Appropriate substitute materials could be different from one district to another, if necessary.

During listening sessions, conversations referenced specific uses of substitute materials and products, including:

Porch Flooring

- Composite wood decking has been approved for rear decks. Aeratis (PVC) was discussed as an example of a wood-replacement product for front porches.
- The RHDC has generally been comfortable with replacing outdoor decking with substitute materials because it is low-profile and not particularly noticeable, while front porch flooring replacement with substitute materials has been more closely scrutinized.

Windows

- Windows are a particular concern because they are character-defining but also because it is increasingly difficult to find people who can repair or replicate historic windows.
- If windows are beyond repair, some feel it should be acceptable to replace them with aluminum-clad models that are similar to the historic appearance. Currently, a homeowner must provide evidence that more than 50% of the unit is beyond repair. Aluminum-clad wood windows have been approved, depending on location.
- Replacing original windows often begins a faster replacement life cycle due to reduced durability of new building materials (compared to historic materials), and that new window designs often lose some of the previous detail and change the experience of an old building over time. There is a question of whether the Standards should specify matching the exact historic muntin profiles.
- How should new materials and technologies be introduced into the guidelines? New windows are typically made of other materials, partly because new-growth wood has poor durability.

- Simulated divided lights for additions and new construction are regularly approved. There is a general wish that simulated divided lights be acceptable in replacement windows because of better thermal performance.

Wood and Wood Siding

- Wood textures and materials have changed over time. The primary goal should be to preserve existing historic structures and material (even when partially deteriorated), with replacement considered as a last resort.
- The RHDC has approved Hardie siding with the smooth side out, depending on where it is on the building. Aeratis and other PVC products have been discussed as acceptable replacements for wood.
- Because new wood products are of lower quality than historic materials, new products should be evaluated, in part, for their durability.

Solar and Emerging Technologies

- Locating a solar array on a south-facing roof may be restricted based on its visibility to the street. Questions raised include: Should there be an exception for methods of attachment that do not compromise the historic features? Should solar panels be considered a reversible change and allowed on any roof regardless of their visibility from the street?
- Should the guidelines address the potential new technology of solar shingles?

District-Specific Listening Sessions

What follows are summaries of stakeholder input at seven district-specific listening sessions (representation from Capitol Square and Moore Square were combined in a single session). Conversations among the participants at these sessions often expanded to broader issues (such as materiality or COA approval processes) and the summaries reflect that.

Blount Street Historic District

District Background & Character

- Blount Street is known for its concentration of mansions, most designated as landmarks; many homes were relocated here — some moved from the district's edges to its center.
- Many original mansions were lost over time, leaving a significant number of parking lots within the district; some newer construction now sits on former parking lots.
- The Executive Mansion and its surrounding street character are particularly notable; William Peace University is also located within the district.

Institutional & Commercial Use of Residential Structures

- Blount Street is distinct from other districts in having many institutions, businesses, and residential structures used for non-residential purposes.
- This creates site challenges: one example cited a rear yard fully paved for parking spaces. There is a need for guidance on accommodating parking on these sites without harming neighborhood character.
- Zoning staff reportedly aren't always familiar with how COA approval can deviate from standard UDO requirements, which complicates these mixed-use situations.

Site Design & Landscape

- Desire for the guidelines to address site elements more holistically — not just isolated design features but overall site character— including different review expectations for front vs. back yards, and relationships between neighboring properties (setbacks, porch alignments, etc.).

- Need for clearer direction on replacement trees and how to define the district's tree-related character, including how to handle a property that's heavily wooded in a way that isn't actually part of its historic character.

Process & Permitting Burden

- Interest in streamlining COA review while preserving public hearings, which are seen as important for neighbor input.
- Frustration with the volume of information required just to get a building permit.

Materials & Definitions

- Need for better coordination between the guidelines and zoning code so both use consistent terminology (e.g., for impervious surface/built area).
- Windows were a detailed point of discussion: simulated divided lite is already approved and should be specified directly in the guidelines (vs. true divided lite), with interest in extending similar flexibility to other product types where the historic appearance isn't compromised.
- General interest in a clearer framework — potentially a dedicated addendum — for evaluating alternate/composite materials, favoring materials that aesthetically conform to "real" materials over strict material authenticity.

Boylan Heights Historic District

District Background & Character

- Architectural diversity on generally small, hilly/sloped lots. Western Blvd cuts through and forms a neighborhood boundary, with the railroad bounding the district to the north.
- Front porches are a defining characteristic, and nearly every home has alley access.
- Small pockets of commercial use and at least one former industrial site are tucked into the neighborhood. The Boylan Mansion is now a boutique hotel, and there are existing ADU examples along Dorothea Drive and Cabarrus Street.
- Some of the most expensive homes in Raleigh are located in Boylan Heights.

Trees & Solar

- Trees are one of the hottest topics in the district, and the tree canopy is central to its identity.
- Mature tree cover complicates solar adoption — in many cases only the street-facing side of a roof gets adequate sun, and many roofs are shaded.
- Desire for tree regulation to differentiate by species/quality rather than treat all trees the same (e.g., invasive species shouldn't get the same protection). The commission has generally been agnostic on tree quality to date.

Guideline Clarity & Specificity

- Current guidelines are seen as generic, open to interpretation, and hard for laypeople to read/understand.
- Strong desire for more specificity on what's acceptable. This is especially challenging in Boylan Heights given its wide range of house types and sizes.
- There should be clear reference to a list of acceptable materials and better-defined terms (e.g., "temporary" vs. "permanent").

Process, Consistency & Enforcement

- The approval process feels harder than it used to be; the city was previously seen as more willing to provide assistance to applicants, and not everyone can afford to hire an architect.

- DRAC was valued for giving informal feedback before a formal COA submission.
- Frustration that even minor work like repaving a driveway requires a COA.
- Outcomes are seen as inconsistent over time and dependent on which committee members are reviewing (e.g., more modern fence designs have recently been approved that wouldn't have been in the past).

Materials

- Support for allowing substitute materials that are similar to, and visually read the same as, the original when viewed from the street.

Access & Education

- Starting an application isn't easy or approachable for newcomers; it would help if a homeowner could begin the process without already having a contractor lined up.
- New buyers often aren't aware of the guidelines when they purchase in the district — better education for prospective buyers is needed, since some arrive with a sense of entitlement about what they can do to their property.
- Preserving the overall feel of the neighborhood should take priority over accommodating individual property preferences.

Glenwood-Brooklyn Historic District

District Background & Character

- Predominantly Craftsman and Queen Anne architecture.
- Some mixed-use pockets: a corner store converted to an Airbnb, and portions of St. Mary's Street (north of Peace Street) where residential buildings are used commercially.
- Character varies from street to street within the district — applicants sometimes cite an example from a different street whose context doesn't actually match their own.

The 50% Streetside Rule & Its Consequences

- Roughly 50% of a house, as viewed from the sidewalk, is currently subject to regulation; work extending toward the rear generally falls outside COA requirements.
- The unintended consequence is oversized rear additions that are out of scale with the district. Second-floor additions are sometimes called "camelback additions."
- Suggested fix: define a specific sightline/roofline angle measured from the street, rather than relying on the 50% line alone, to control how tall and massive rear additions can read from the front.

Development Pressure & Neighborhood Context

- Developers are combining historically separate lots and the resulting new builds ignore the surrounding neighborhood context. Participants stressed that land/site context matters as much as individual building character.
- Specific examples cited: Brooklyn Street (810–814), where properties are expected to be demolished for townhomes despite going through the demolition-delay process, is seen as an unsuccessful outcome — contrasted with 934 N. Boylan Avenue, a demolition-delay success where the original house was preserved alongside an addition. 506 Cole Street (rebuilt after a hurricane-related demolition) and Cottage Court (grandfathered new construction, permitted before designation) were both cited as more successful new-construction outcomes.

Guideline Ambiguity & Specificity

- Working with staff is valued, but the guidelines themselves are seen as too broad and ambiguous, letting outcomes "swing too far" in either direction; some feel the guidelines now read as written defensively, to avoid legal challenges, rather than to give clear direction. Applicants have learned to use that ambiguity to their advantage.
- Specific terms need clearer definition — what qualifies as minor work, and what "mass" and "proportion" actually mean, including how much building volume is appropriate relative to lot size.
- Overall desire for the guidelines to state their intent plainly — what each standard is actually trying to protect.

Process & Support

- Question raised about whether certain review items could be shifted to staff-level approval rather than full commission review.
- Suggestion to create a prequalified list of designers/architects, potentially maintained or endorsed by Preservation Raleigh.
- Recognition of a knowledge and sophistication gap among homeowners new to the process, with a call for more coordinated education about the standards.

Moore Square and Capitol Square Historic Districts

District Background & Character

- Downtown district, part of the Christmas Plan, comprised primarily of narrow, deep 20th-century commercial buildings — brick construction, some with Italianate influence.
- Moore Square itself has many mature oak trees. Some vacant lots exist in and around the district
- Along Bloodworth and Davie Streets, most houses were relocated onto vacant lots and are now considered contributing structures.

Process, Enforcement & Fairness

- The COA process is seen by some as skewed toward applicants/homeowners, with no fair mechanism for neighbors to oppose an application.
- There is a gap in enforcement when work happens without a COA.

Specificity vs. Flexibility in the Standards

- Some expressed preference for clearer, more "black and white" standards, and giving City staff more authority to make decisions — but that authority should be backed by specificity in the Standards.
- At the same time, the Standards should not over-regulate: the goal is to preserve integrity and character without excessive prescriptiveness.

Trees & Additions (Minor vs. Major Work)

- Trees should be reclassified as minor work, with more flexibility for removal/management.
- Rear additions should also count as minor work, and additions in general should be made easier — explicitly framed as a way to prevent teardowns.
- It is an open question of whether minor/major work definitions should vary by district, with a general preference toward expanding what qualifies as minor work (consistent with the UDO).

Oakwood Historic District

District Background & Character

- Oakwood is a large district without a single unifying architectural character — roughly a dozen different styles are present, ranging from high-style architecture to a few newer cul-de-sac developments.
- Topography (slopes and grade) is a notable challenge across the district.
- The district includes the Louis Cherry House, a modern house that many cite as a good example of contemporary architecture in a historic neighborhood.
- City Cemetery is a designated landmark; Hillcrest and O'Rorke are two privately-owned African American cemeteries also designated as landmarks.

Neighborhood Subareas

- Desire for standards tailored to specific subareas rather than a neighborhood-wide approach. Suggestion to explicitly document and call out certain blocks so they can be treated as distinct within the broader district.
- Desire for clarity on what can be handled through administrative review versus full commission review (e.g., whether color is regulated consistently across the district).

Application & Process Burden

- Application requirements have become far more demanding — detailed drawings, perspective renderings, and surveys are now expected — which is difficult for the average homeowner, and hiring an architect can be cost-prohibitive.
- Staff used to be able to sit down with applicants and offer direct recommendations but are no longer allowed. This removed a valued informal support step.
- Example research is difficult: participants suggested categorizing past approved applications (e.g., small vs. large addition) to make relevant cases easier to find and noted that verifying examples can be logistically awkward since it may require inspecting the back yards of other properties.
- The commission was credited with doing a good job explaining district history and rationale to residents.

Lot Subdivision & Development Pressure

- Subdivision of larger lots is decided by the commission under a standard that the subdivision cannot be "incongruous"; several existing Oakwood lots are already narrower (35 ft) than the UDO's general 45 ft minimum, creating tension in how new subdivisions should be evaluated.
- The biggest concern raised was developers tearing down homes. New Standards should not make teardowns easier, including through more permissive subdivision rules.

Height, ADUs & Additions

- Height limitations — particularly exceeding the ridgeline — are a specific, recurring technical concern, compounded by the district's sloped topography.
- ADUs were noted as a significant gap in the current guidelines, especially for properties without an existing garage or other historic outbuilding.
- The "distinguishable from the original" language was flagged as a source of confusion — some read it as prohibiting additions or new construction that matches the neighborhood's style, which has resulted in additions that end up more modern than intended.

Minor Work & Materials

- Desire to expand and clarify what qualifies as "minor work," with more items potentially shifted into that category.
- Request for clearer guidance on what qualifies as an acceptable substitute material.

Oberlin Village Historic District

District Background & Character

- Oberlin Village is described as the oldest intact Freedmen's village, with Oberlin Road containing the majority of the district's larger, more significant homes.
- Several landmarks within the district were designated before the area became a historic district.
- Specific reference points came up repeatedly: 2215 Bedford Ave (a house sitting very close to the sidewalk, which other applicants now cite as precedent when seeking smaller setbacks) and 2212 Bedford Ave (new construction seen as notably tall relative to its surroundings).

Garages & Additions

- Second-story additions to garages are a recurring point of contention, but current guidelines struggle to address them because there aren't enough historic garages in the district to establish clear precedent.
- Breezeway connections for additions came up as a technique worth showcasing — good examples from within the district could help guide applicants.

Process Consistency & Support

- DRAC and informal access to City staff was valued as a helpful way to navigate the COA process informally, but DRAC has been suspended for legal reasons.
- Recurring frustration that the COA committee reaches inconsistent decisions on similar requests, seemingly dependent on which members are reviewing.
- Suggestion to split review into two distinct tracks — residential and commercial.
- The COA experience used to be more collaborative and flexible and has since become entirely evidence-based.

What the Standards Should Achieve

- Underlying question raised: what is the actual purpose of the standards — should the core test simply be whether new construction is incongruous with district character, rather than something more prescriptive?
- Tension between objective and subjective review criteria, with state statutes dictating what can be reviewed at all.

- Call for more specificity distinguishing new construction from remodels/additions, and clearer treatment of non-conforming/non-historic features.

Prince Hall Historic District

District Background & Character

- Prince Hall sits within the Christmas Plan boundaries and includes both residential and commercial buildings, anchored by the Prince Hall Masonic Lodge (427 S. Blount Street).
- Largely composed of small bungalow/shotgun houses, most of which have been rehabilitated over time.
- The Pope House, a museum, is city-owned.
- Many contributing properties on Bloodworth Street were originally relocated there and saved.
- A new three-story building received a COA in 2012 and remains somewhat controversial from a design/materiality standpoint (The Ten at South Person).

Affordability, Gentrification & Barrier to Entry

- Participants connected gentrification pressure directly to the district's location, affordability, and African American/HBCU history.
- Historic designation itself was described as a barrier to entry. Some generational families may not be able to afford the materials the guidelines currently require for repairs or additions.
- Strong interest in preserving the district's integrity while avoiding pricing out existing residents. New standards might consider more flexibility in Prince Hall (e.g., allowing more modern infill/additions), given the district's already mixed condition.

Process & Education

- Residents need clearer guidance on how to even start a COA/project — the process as it stands is seen as intimidating or unclear for "regular folks."

Materials & Building Systems

- There is tension between retaining historic wood siding and adding insulation or other modern systems.
- At the same time, historic houses didn't originally have modern systems and aren't necessarily well-suited for such retrofits. More education is needed.

What Should Define District Character

- Scale and proportion are character-defining features of Prince Hall — more so than architectural style or fine-grained details.
- Some participants supported clearly differentiated contemporary additions ("conversations between old and new") rather than requiring a created historic appearance.
- Maintenance obligations under the overlay district need clearer definition.

At-Risk Properties

- The Lucille Hunter House was flagged as one of the district's more significant properties and is at real risk of being lost without near-term intervention.

Community Open House

Two community open houses were held at the Chapel at Dix Park. They were held on the evening of August 11 and the morning of August 13 to maximize opportunities for participation. Attendees could provide input through a series of interactive boards and stations, as well as through informal conversations with the consulting team members.

While attendance was modest (approximately 30 people), participants were engaged and knowledgeable. In reviewing the exhibits, participants could indicate preferences using sticky dots and by writing comments on Post-It notes.

Themes emerging from the workshops included:

- **Need for Public Awareness and Understanding.** While those who attended tended to be engaged and have an understanding of local historic district policies, they believe there is a general lack of understanding or lack of information among the broader public. Participants believe that the public doesn't understand the difference between the three types of character preservation overlay districts, and that new homeowners often don't know when a COA is needed. Education and outreach are important. Updating the Design Standards only goes so far in addressing the public's understanding of the requirements and regulatory process.
- **Clarifying Major and Minor Work.** There is confusion about "major" and "minor" work. The Design Standards should provide more clarity on the distinction.
- **Clear, Illustrated, and User-Friendly Standards.** The new Design Standards should be highly illustrated and provide easy-to-grasp examples of acceptable and unacceptable changes.
- **Cost is a Challenge.** Cost is seen as a challenge for many homeowners when undertaking work that requires a COA.
- **Common Maintenance and Repair Challenges.** The most common maintenance and repair challenges include wood siding repair, window repair and replacement, and finding qualified contractors to do the work.
- **Flexibility in the Use of Substitute Materials.** There is an openness to substitute materials in cases where the original material is no longer available, the substitute closely matches the original, or when a material's condition is beyond repair.

- **Guidance and Support for ADUs.** Accessory Dwelling Units are seen as an important topic for the new Design Standards. The Design Standards should provide more complete guidance on siting, massing, character, and relationship to the main structure. ADUs are seen as something to be encouraged, especially if they can address the "missing middle" housing challenge.
- **Compatibility of New Construction with Historic Neighborhood Character.** New construction in historic districts should fit in but (most people feel) should not replicate historic architecture. Instead of replicating, it should relate well to neighborhood character and scale. The greatest concerns relate to the construction of "McMansions" that can change the character of the neighborhood and adversely impact neighbors.
- **Tree Preservation and Landscape Guidance.** Trees, especially mature trees, are among the most important site features in historic districts. There is support for guidance (but not mandates) for homeowners on landscape design and encouragement of native species. There is also support for making it easier to remove invasive tree species.
- **Flexibility for Sustainability Improvements.** The Design Standards should be flexible enough to allow for sustainability improvements such as energy efficiency upgrades, solar panels, and weather resiliency improvements.

Community Survey

The online community survey was launched shortly after the listening sessions and community open house workshops concluded. The survey was distributed via mail to residents living and owning in historic districts and landmarks, via a link on the City's website, and through postings to the City's social media channels. Engagement was considered good in comparison to past city engagement experiences, with 166 people taking the survey over the course of three weeks.

About 64% of respondents live in one of the eight historic districts. Among the 37 respondents who said they live in or own a locally designated *landmark*, only eight are outside a designated historic district.

The survey instrument included a "branching" structure so respondents could answer questions related to one or more of the eight historic districts after answering general questions about the design standards and the COA process. Oakwood, Boylan Heights, and Glenwood-Brooklyn had the highest participation. *Respondents could choose to answer district-specific questions even if they don't live there, and many opted to do so.*

District	Respondents living/owning in a historic district	Chose to answer district-specific questions
Oakwood	47	47
Boylan Heights	21	30
Glenwood-Brooklyn	19	21
Blount Street	5	12
Moore Square	4	13
Prince Hall	3	10
Oberlin Village	1	11
Capitol Square	1	5
Not in a district	56	n/a

About 73% of respondents who live in a historic district have experience with a COA application. A similar number knew that a COA is not needed for routine maintenance or in-kind replacement.

Two central topics of the survey are COA review and clarity of the new Design Standards:

COA Review Experience

Survey responses support Raleigh's historic district program but want a faster, more predictable review process for COA applications. Respondents say they would like to see more types of projects eligible for staff review ("minor work") and greater acceptance of substitute materials, but when asked about specific types of projects that should qualify for staff review there was less consensus.

Those who have experience with a COA application have found staff to be helpful and trusted but experiences with RHDC for "major work" applications were reported as less predictable. The public perception is that the Commission applies the current design guidelines inconsistently. Sometimes Commission approvals require multiple review rounds and applicants feel the need to hire professional representation. There is a further perception that some homeowners follow the rules and apply for a COA while their neighbors don't, or that some homeowners (not undertaking a project that requires a COA) leave their homes in disrepair because of a lack of code enforcement.

Wishes for the New Design Standards

Respondents want clarity in the new Design Standards so there is predictability of outcomes at the staff and RHDC review levels. As reflected in the listening sessions and open house outcomes, there is a strongly expressed desire for definitive yes/no rules.

There was little consensus on what "major work" projects might be recategorized as "minor work" to allow staff review. The recategorization of window and door replacement on character-defining facades as minor work was supported by 53% of respondents. Minor modifications to previously approved projects was supported by 81% of respondents as only needing staff review. Support for recategorizing other major work projects (e.g., solar panels, fences taller than six feet, ADUs and additions, and altering historic porches) as minor work all fell below 50% support.

Most respondents want to maintain strong COA controls on new construction.

Other Topics

Other topics addressed in the survey included how the Design Standards should address and regulate substitute materials; additions and new construction; accessory structures and ADUs; site features; and energy, resilience, and environmental improvements.

Substitute Materials and Building Features

Survey responses reflected the diversity of viewpoints heard during the listening sessions, but the survey provided a more quantifiable understanding of public opinion. Overall, the opinions of survey respondents lean toward support of substitute materials in many common situations. Respondents were less supportive of using substitute materials primarily for improving durability or reducing maintenance.

Respondents supporting use of substitute materials	Situation
69%	When the original material is no longer available
68%	When the substitute material closely matches the original appearance
60%	When the original material cannot be repaired
47%	When it improves energy efficiency
42%	When it improves durability
36%	When it reduces maintenance
20%	Always
1%	Unsure
1%	Never

There is broad support (72% of respondents) for the use of substitute windows. Allowing substitute materials for roofing, foundations, porch flooring, doors, and siding are generally supported. Acceptance drops below 50% for substitute materials in columns and decorative details.

Respondents supporting	Where substitute building materials may be used
72%	Windows
69%	Roofing
63%	Foundations
57%	Porch flooring
56%	Doors
55%	Siding
50%	Trim
50%	Railings
45%	Columns
36%	Decorative details
10%	Unsure

Additions and New Construction

In regulating additions to historic homes or new construction in historic districts, the most important qualities for compatibility are scale and massing (75% support) and architectural details (61%). It is a somewhat surprising result that all other design characteristics fall below 50% support.

Respondents supporting	Characteristics of additions or new construction in historic districts
75%	Scale and massing
61%	Architectural details
49%	Orientation and setbacks
45%	Height
34%	Roof shape and pitch
30%	Exterior materials
26%	Porch placement and form
25%	Window size, proportion, and pattern
7%	Door size, location, and design

Open-ended comments on this topic ranged widely, valuing historic character while leaning slightly toward less regulation. For example:

> *"I think scale and architectural details (including window pattern and roof shape and pitch) are important to keep things in character - PARTICULARLY with additions. I think there's room for variability in architectural detail with new construction in historic districts - but scale and massing are still important."*
>
> *"Neighborhoods should be allowed to change and shift overtime."*
>
> *"Property owner preference. If a Historic District wants to make decisions about private property, then the Historic District can make an offer to buy the property, and then do what they want after purchase."*

Accessory Structures and ADUs

When asked about accessory structures and how they should be addressed in the Design Standards, the quantitative responses and open-ended comments suggest there is less familiarity with how the current Design Guidelines address these issues and how much specificity the new Design Standards should provide. The most common answer choice to "Which aspects of accessory structures need clearer guidance in the

Design Standards?" was "Unsure" at 45% of respondents. However, comments suggest general support for the concept of ADUs:

> *"ADUs are a great thing!"*
>
> *"I believe that the accessory dwelling would be in proportion for the primary dwelling."*

The clearest style preference is that new, detached ADUs should "reflect the traditional appearance of the primary building while being deferential in size to the primary building" (45% of respondents). A smaller number (25%) suggest ADUs "allow contemporary residential design while being deferential in size to the primary building."

Site Features

Questions related to site features in historic districts showed less distinctive preferences than some other questions, such as those on substitute materials. Survey respondents most highly value setbacks as important to preserving the character of historic districts and landmarks (58% of respondents). Setbacks relate to the scale of the building on the parcel, and this was a topic that came up often in earlier listening sessions. Front walks and other walkways were also ranked as important (51%). Other site features ranked lower, such as open spaces (36%), fences and walls (31%), and driveways and parking areas (19%).

Energy, Resilience, and Environmental Improvements

Respondents expressed support for design flexibility around many improvements that relate to renewable energy and improved resilience. These include a desire for design flexibility around tree planting and replacement, stormwater improvements and rain gardens, and native and drought-tolerant landscaping.

Respondents supporting	Flexibility on energy, resilience, and environmental improvements
75%	Tree planting and replacement
75%	Stormwater improvements, such as rain gardens
75%	Native and drought-tolerant landscaping
64%	Water conservation features, such as rain barrels
61%	Solar panels
58%	Replacement windows and doors
54%	Electric vehicle charging equipment
44%	Storm doors and windows
37%	Exterior heating, cooling, and electrification equipment
30%	Severe weather protection, such as impact shutters
6%	Unsure
1%	Other

District-Specific Characteristics

The survey used "branching" to allow respondents to answer questions related to the distinct characters of the eight historic districts. (Respondents could choose to answer questions related to more than one district.) The purpose of this part of the survey was to seek public input on how the new Design Standards could address district-specific characteristics, threats, or other issues. For example, some districts are valued for architectural variety, porches and trees; the downtown districts for civic and commercial character; Oberlin Village and Prince Hall for African American history. The number of responses was greatest for Oakwood (47 responses), Boylan Heights (30) and Glenwood-Brooklyn (21). Other districts received 13 or fewer responses and input has been summarized for general direction only.

Blount Street (13 responses)

- Respondents value the Blount Street district's grand historic homes and historic architectural details and material. Tree canopy, the mix of historic residential and institutional buildings, and large yards and setbacks are also valued. When new construction is proposed, there is a preference for traditional design.

Boylan Heights (28 responses)

- Respondents associate several architectural styles and building or site traits with Boylan Heights, including vernacular styles and historic bungalows, front

porches, and mature trees. They also value the neighborhood's natural features (e.g., its topography) and urban design features (e.g., curving streets and alleys). Historic alleys are used for rear access, parking, and trash collection, but also for alternative pedestrian and jogging routes. Tall fences or neglected maintenance have adversely impacted some alleys. Boylan Heights is valued as a planned, quiet neighborhood with clear edges. However, there are concerns that large additions to historic homes are leading to the gentrification of a once mixed-income neighborhood and loss of character.

Capitol Square (5 responses)

- Capital Square had the smallest number of district-specific respondents. This is likely because it is a district dominated by institutional uses and the survey may not have successfully reached government and other institutional stakeholders. The historic civic and institutional buildings and formal landscapes are all valued characteristics of Capitol Square.

Glenwood-Brooklyn (20 responses)

- Glenwood-Brooklyn is valued for its early 20th century architecture (including Victorian, Craftsman, and Colonial styles) and its mature tree canopy. Style preferences for new construction lean toward traditional.

  "The diversity of the neighborhood… dates to the original development - it's really three neighborhoods in one…"

- Respondents value the architectural diversity of the neighborhood and how it includes working class homes on small lots as well as larger homes on wide, tree-lined streets. One comment underscored the value of the Streetside HOD in Glenwood-Brooklyn:

  "Streetside HOD seems to strike a reasonably good balance between maintaining the overall character of the public realm while allowing for more property owner flexibility in backyards."

Moore Square (13 responses)

- Moore Square is valued for its City Market, pedestrian-oriented character, historic commercial character, and Moore Square itself. Historic storefronts and commercial buildings are especially valued. Several comments emphasize the importance of returning Moore Square to a vibrant, diverse commercial district:

"The business/retail corridors - Raleigh needs to return this district to a bustling, vibrant, diverse business district."

Oakwood (45 responses)

- Oakwood had the most district-specific survey responses. People highly value the variety of architectural styles, the tree canopy, and front porches and connections between homes and the street. Preferences for traditional or contemporary design in new construction there were split, with respondents on both ends of the traditional-contemporary spectrum, but the average leaning toward traditional style at a score of 33 out of 100. Among the comments, the Victorian character of Oakwood is highly valued, as well as the mix of grand and modest homes:

  "The density of Victorians."

  "A mix of styles and sizes. Historically commercial buildings at many intersections."

  "The variety of architectural styles and proportions, meaning grand houses interspersed with more modestly sized homes. The presence of commercial style buildings on corners."

Oberlin Village (10 responses)

- For Oberlin Village, in addition to valuing its historic homes and open spaces, people also value its African American history and cultural identity. The survey asked for opinions on how the historic district designation should influence the Design Standards' guidance for vacant lots. Opinions among the respondents were mixed but suggest a tolerance for greater design flexibility while respecting the neighborhood's overall scale. The comments on Oberlin Village underscore the importance of African American history in the neighborhood and the importance of maintaining affordability through mixed-use development.

  "Oberlin represents one of the first steps toward freedom, dignity and self-determination for Raleigh's formerly enslaved population."

Prince Hall (10 responses)

- The African American history and cultural identity of Prince Hall are highly valued, and the Prince Hall Masonic Temple among its most important historic assets. If vacant lots are developed, there is accepted tolerance for more contemporary styles of new construction, while respecting the neighborhood's scale. One comment notes that many of the empty lots existed at the time of historic district designation and they should therefore be treated with flexibility when new development is proposed.

  "Substantial portions of the Prince Hall district are empty parking lots and they were at the time that the district was created. New construction on these underutilized lots should be allowed to grow in scale and massing and should be allowed to be contemporary in style and form."

- Other comments underscore the importance of the district's cultural history even more than its architecture:

  "Prince Hall is representative of a rich cultural heritage and community that has international significance in the Civil Rights movement. Raleigh is overlooking a tremendous opportunity to preserve and celebrate this honorable heritage."