



2021 ANNUAL REPORT and FY23 WORK PROGRAM

Raleigh Appearance Commission

The Raleigh Appearance Commission is pleased to present its 2021 Annual Report and FY23 Work Program request.



ON-GOING SERVICE

The North Carolina General Statutes [§160A-452(3)] call on Appearance Commissions “to provide leadership and guidance in matters of area or community design and appearance to individuals, and to public and private organizations, and agencies.” In the coming year, the Raleigh Appearance Commission seeks to continue to serve in that capacity. We assess appearance issues as they relate to our urban fabric, contextual design, pedestrian safety, and the quality of experience. We appreciate and support the City’s approach on pedestrian and bike-friendly development, through development codes, street cross-sections, and continually challenging the status quo to make our standards better.

We have begun to see more multimodal transportation opportunities incorporated in Raleigh such as bike lanes, our first “protected intersection”, and bus rapid transit corridors, as well as seeing more greenways, parks, and sustainable landscaping principles integrated into our urban spaces. We applaud the integration of public art into many developments around the City and encourage more opportunities for this. These qualities make for a more beautiful, equitable, inclusive, and livable city. The Raleigh Appearance Commission stands ready to assist the City in these initiatives.

Council Member Stormie Forte has continued to give our Commission personal attention through attendance at our events (Annual Retreat, Sir Walter Raleigh Awards) and regular conference calls with our Chair and Vice-Chair to help support us in any way possible, and we appreciate her involvement and continued support.

We would also like to express our gratitude to the City staff, including Keegan McDonald, Justin Bucher, Senior Associate City Attorney Catherine Hill, Transportation Staff, and the entire Planning and Development team for the outstanding service they provide to our Commission and City. We believe that we have a special group with an unrelenting dedication to make Raleigh a world-class city.

We look forward to serving the City Council in the coming year, and eagerly await your calls for assistance.

Thank you,
Members of the Appearance Commission

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chris Roberts'.

Chris Roberts - Chair

APPEARANCE COMMISSION ACTIVITY

Summary

As the City of Raleigh enters its tenth year of regulating local development policy under the Unified Development Ordinance (UDO), the Appearance Commission continues to ensure we maintain a high quality of life in our community by providing guidance, advice, and recommendations regarding the visual quality and aesthetic characteristics of the City of Raleigh. The Commission provides valuable service by elevating project design through Design Alternate review, improving City projects through charrette-style discourse, and supporting innovative design in the public realm through the Legacy Project.

The Appearance Commission, like other appointed Boards and Commissions, continued to manage adversity in 2021. The ongoing pandemic and robust development activity required flexibility on the part of members and dedication to the mission of public service and good design. Perhaps the biggest shift came with the passage of text change TC-19-19 which completed the transition from the previous Administrative Alternate for Design process to a new Design Alternate process. While the Appearance Commission had started reviewing transportation related requests in 2020, beginning in the later summer of 2021, the group also began reviewing aesthetic and design related requests such as building massing, transparency and build-to. The changes also required a change to a quasi-judicial format for the Appearance Commission, and many of the findings for these requests were also changed, both of which required a re-education for our members. Applicants have responded well to this new process, presenting compelling and comprehensive alternatives to the strict standards of the UDO.

Design review is a critically important part of the development and growth of a city. As Raleigh grows, it is vitally important to ensure our downtown, parks, public spaces, and corridors are thoughtfully designed. With the rich and varied design expertise represented in the members serving, the Appearance Commission should be used as a resource for advancing the design discussion within Raleigh. The transition to a quasi-judicial function has prompted members to consider other ways they can impact the design of the built and natural environment outside of commentary on specific projects. Efforts in this direction will likely be more global than in the past, such as developing policy recommendations or funding/participating in studies.

The following sections provide an overview of the Commission's efforts and activities during 2021 and act as a framework for the organization of this report.

- > Design Review Performance
- > Design Outreach and Education
- > Observed Trends and Issues
- > Work Program

2021 Annual Report

I. DESIGN REVIEW PERFORMANCE

Among the Commission's chief functions is the review of legacy Administrative Alternates for Design and what are now called Design Alternates. Additionally, the Commission provides evaluation and input regarding design components of public projects, and area and corridor plans as requested.

Design Alternates (DA)

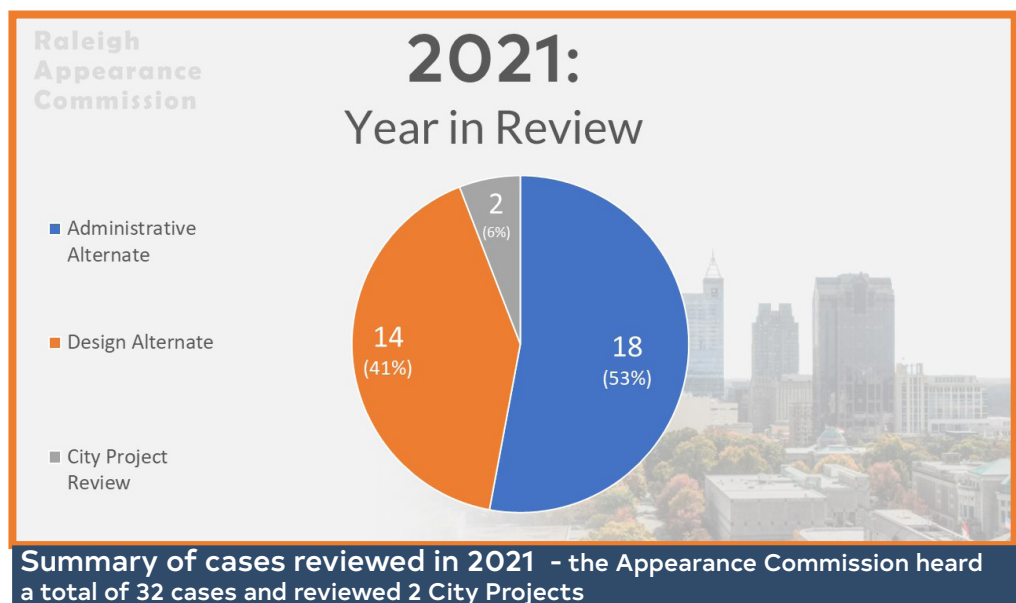
Text Change TC-19-19 went into effect on June 17, 2021 meaning all development plans submitted on or after this date are subject to the new Design Alternate process. As mentioned previously, the Appearance Commission had already begun reviewing transportation related Design Alternates in 2020, though this text change completed the transition. The Commission acted on 14 Design Alternate cases in 2021, however many of these cases contained multiple requests involving different sections of the code.

Administrative Alternates for Design (AAD)

During 2021 the Commission acted on 18 Administrative Alternate for Design requests. The number of AAD cases will continue to decline as more development plans submitted prior to June 17, 2021 are finalized/completed. Due to the pandemic, many development plans may automatically qualify for a time extension. Under permit choice, an applicant may choose which rules apply to their development plan if said rules change while the plan is still under review. This may result in future AAD cases as applicants may opt into this process instead of applying for a new Design Alternate.

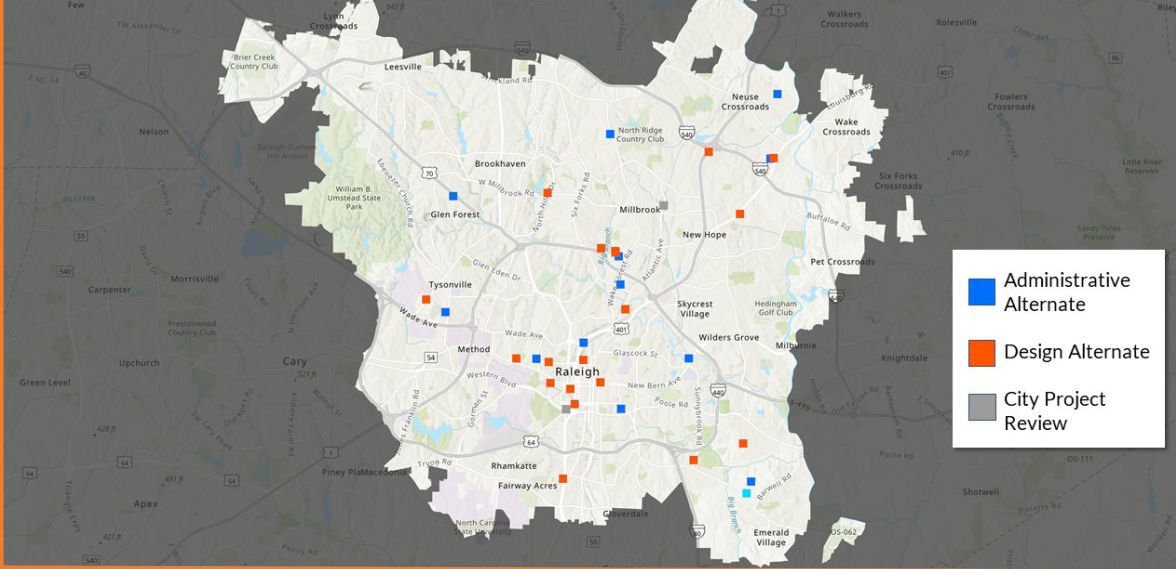
City Project Review

The Commission continued its advisory role by providing feedback on the Eastern and Western Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) corridors. The Wake County BRT project continues to make progress with the Southern corridor entering the design phase in the Spring/Summer of 2022. A Major Investment Study (MIS) of the Northern corridor is also under way with the goal of identifying a potential extension from downtown Raleigh to Midtown and Triangle Town Center. The Commission plans to stay engaged with the project's internal and external stakeholders and provide design guidance as needed.

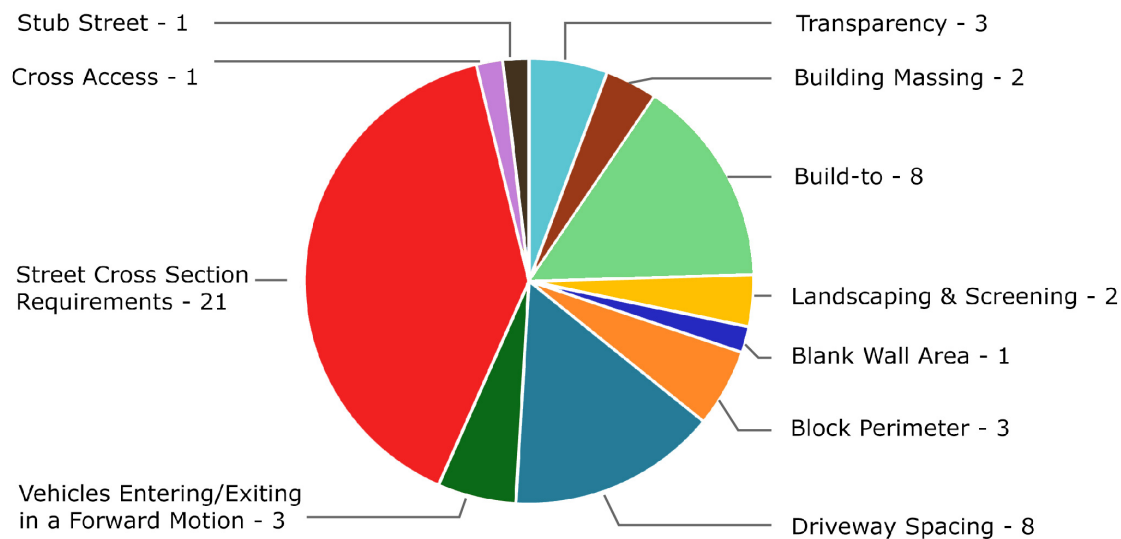


Appearance Commission

Cases Heard 2021



Geographic distribution of cases reviewed in 2021



Breakdown of Types of Requests - The 32 cases reviewed by the Appearance Commission contained 53 individual requests

II. DESIGN OUTREACH AND EDUCATION

The Appearance Commission actively pursues public awareness and education initiatives on a variety of fronts, focusing on design, livability, and awareness of appearance in Raleigh. This year's work focused on three initiatives - Sir Walter Raleigh Awards, Sir Walter Raleigh Awards Certificate, and the Legacy Project - described below.

2021 Sir Walter Raleigh Awards

Due to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, and the desire for an in-person event, the 2021 Sir Walter Raleigh Awards were held on April 13, 2022 at Raleigh Union Station. The event was attended by Mayor Baldwin, Councilmember Forte, members of the design community, as well as City staff. Music was provided by the AI Strong Quintet. In all, ten awards were presented to a range of Raleigh projects, reflecting the best in Commercial, Residential and Institutional Design as well as Historic Rehabilitation, Landscape Design, and Community Impact.



Presented by the City of Raleigh to:

Mary Lee Baldwin

Mayor,
City of Raleigh

B. E. Finn

Chairperson,
City of Raleigh
Appearance
Commission

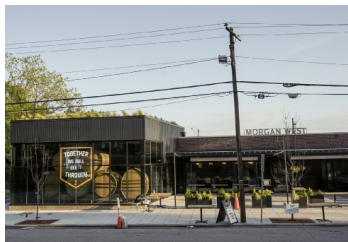


Sir Walter Raleigh Awards Certificate

The Commission again sponsored a design competition for the redesign of the award certificate. The 2021 Certificate Design Competition winner was Meg Elizabeth Finn.

Legacy Project

Due to the coronavirus pandemic, the Appearance Commission requested funds for the annual Legacy Project be rolled over into Fiscal Year 2022. The Commission hopes to use these extra funds to facilitate more impactful projects in the future.



2021 'Commercial' Award Winner - Trophy Brewing and Pizza

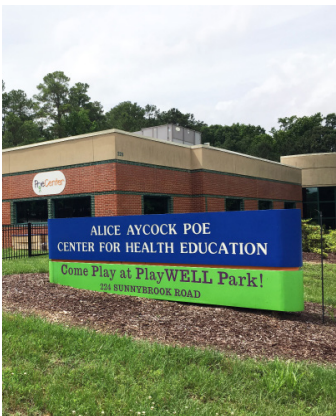


2021 'Community Impact' Winners - Bailey Drive Gateway at Walnut Creek Wetland Park (left, bottom right), Gretchen Sedaris (top right)



2021 'Educational' Award Winner -

Poe Center for Health Education





2021 'Public Facilities' Award Winner -
Steve Troxler Agricultural Sciences Center



2021 'Public Spaces' Award Winner
- John Chavis Memorial Park



2021 'Rehabilitation / Historic Preservation' Award Winner -
Heights House (Montfort Hall)



2021 'Residential' Winner -
The Saint



III. OBSERVED TRENDS AND ISSUES

In providing professional guidance for proposed development, the Appearance Commission has observed several emerging, recurring patterns in site planning and building design. The Commission has identified and summarized trends from the past year and seeks to provide recommendations for how they may be addressed. Design Review is an essential ingredient in achieving great development. By observing development trends over the past nine years, the Appearance Commission believes that potential changes to the UDO should be considered to elevate quality of design and promote a thriving public realm.

TRENDS

A significant number of Design Alternate requests over the past year have been in urban areas. Urban development poses unique challenges that are atypical of more suburban projects and lower-density developments. As such, there may be opportunity to find solutions to our Design Alternate trends by scrutinizing the urban zoning requirements.

Cross-Access (Sec. 8.3.5.D): The Commission has reviewed several urban projects that have difficulty meeting the cross-access requirements, or projects where this would not afford any meaningful connections in our dense, urban zones. As a result, the Commission looks at these conditions and tries to justify how they comply with the City Comprehensive Plan when it is really a matter of practicality.

Commission's recommendation:

Consider exempting projects within urban zones, small blocks, or dense, tall development from meeting the cross-access requirements that are more useful in suburban development patterns.

Vehicles Entering and Exiting in a Forward Motion (Sec. 8.3.5.A): Most projects in urban zones are unable to meet the UDO requirements "to allow vehicles to enter and exit the parking area in a forward motion", specifically with regard to vehicles accessing service areas and loading docks. It is often necessary for these projects to provide service and loading areas along a public street and can be impractical to design these facilities with enough turn-around space for large trucks to enter and then exit in a forward motion. Urban loading areas commonly provide enough space for trucks to enter forward and then back out, or vice versa.

Commission's recommendation:

In consultation with transportation staff, the Commission would like to explore an exemption from this requirement for projects in our most dense, urban zones. The Commission has typically required specific conditions to address the safety of pedestrians in these situations. These conditions include having an attendant present when trucks back out of these areas and changes in materiality to the ground plane to make pedestrians more aware. While we know these supplemental conditions do not alleviate the conflict, we continue to look for simple, effective solutions to preserve safe pedestrian corridors. Conditions such as these could be incorporated into the UDO along with a study of successful interventions in other Cities.

Relief from UDO Sec.8.5.3.A -
Vehicles entering and exiting
in a forward motion

Relief from UDO
Sec.8.3.5.D - Cross Access



Distances from Driveways to Intersections (Sec. 8.3.5.C.3): The Commission continues to see projects that are unable to meet distance separation requirements between driveways and intersections in urban areas with small block sizes. Separation distance requirements of 200' and 300' from driveway-to-driveway and driveway-to-intersections become unfeasible in downtown and other areas where blocks are traditionally 500' long or less.

Commission's recommendation:

In consultation with transportation staff, the Commission believes exemptions could be provided that would give plan review staff more flexibility in how they approve driveway-to-intersection spacings in urban settings. We still anticipate the need for Design Alternate relief in certain instances but would like to explore alternative criteria for projects in more compact areas of the city.

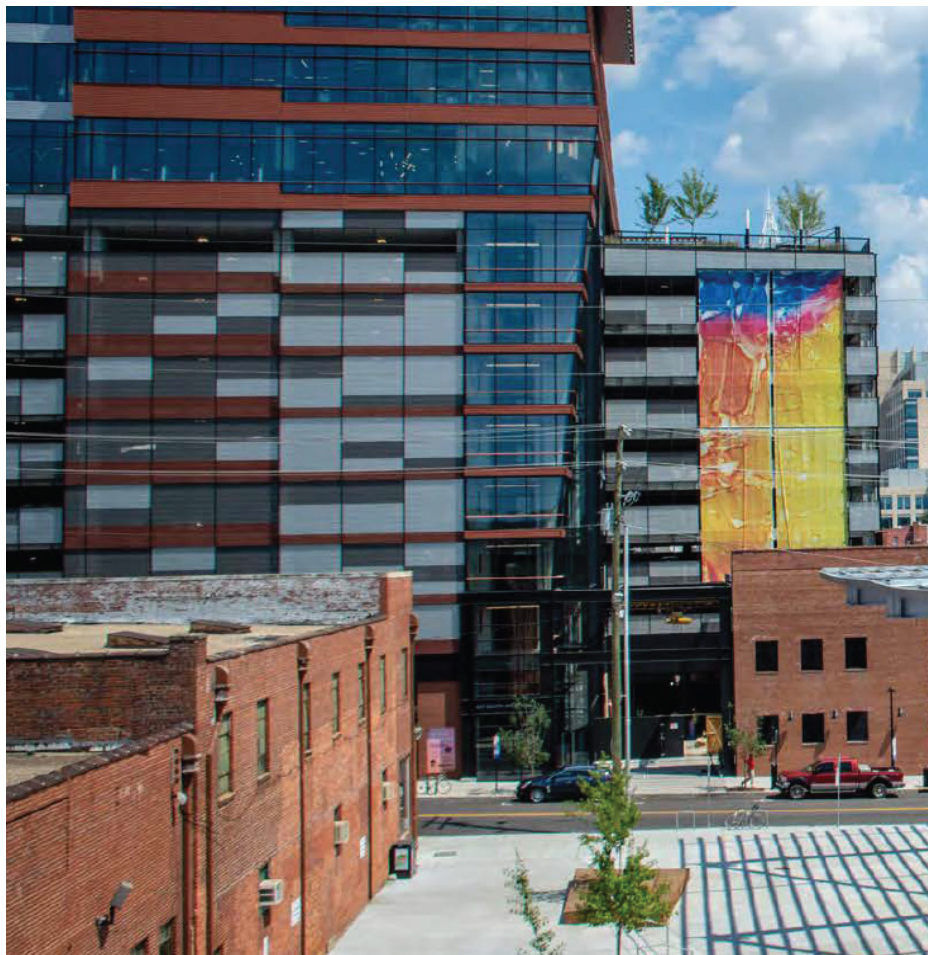


Parking Deck Podiums and Parking Deck Screening: Our city is growing up at a pace not seen before. Much of this vertical growth in our urban core has followed a trend that includes structured parking as the podium or plinth for the rest of the building. These expansive parking areas not only impact our transportation system but also create an aesthetic hurdle. The current Council and City staff have made major leaps to improve mass transit and reduce parking in our urban areas, however, the current influx of tall buildings with expansive parking structures appears to be incongruous to the effort, supporting a polarization of who will drive and who will use public transit options in the future.

Aesthetically, as parking structures continue to fill the lower & middle sections of our urban spaces, we must be proactive in establishing design guidelines and regulatory compliance to minimize the visual impacts of the structures. Efforts that elevate public art, quality materials, and innovative practices should be incentivized in a meaningful way. Minimum compliance should be elevated to ensure that our City's structured parking design isn't a regret for our future City.

Commission's recommendation:

The Commission will continue its involvement in the research and drafting of text change TC-2-21 Parking Structure Screening and Lighting. In addition, the Commission hopes to participate in future studies looking at innovative design standards and criteria for parking decks which could help inform other code and regulatory changes.





"The Appearance Commission's ultimate goal is to encourage the use of the public realm by all of Raleigh's citizens through elevating design expectations for long-term, high quality, sustainable appearance. The Appearance Commission is honored to provide on-going service to the City of Raleigh, and looks forward to engaging with Council, city staff, and the public in FY23 to continue to encourage and promote the highest design standards for development in the Capital City."

FY23 WORK PROGRAM

Raleigh Appearance Commission

The Appearance Commission held its 2022 planning retreat on March 17 at the Walnut Creek Wetland Center. During the meeting, the members discussed the Commission's activities over the past year, current development trends, and upcoming work related to the Sir Walter Raleigh Awards and Legacy Project which will help recognize and contribute to the City's evolving placemaking initiatives. Planning and Development Deputy Director Ken Bowers also presented on the history of the Urban Design Center and the new Urban Projects Group.

The second half of the retreat focused on ways that the Commission could be involved in discussions that facilitate better design in Raleigh, whether that be through area planning, such as the edges of Dix Park, or any other non-project-specific initiatives where the City could benefit from design input by the experts that make up our Commission. Due to the Commission's new Quasi-Judicial function, we are no longer able to interact with private development projects outside of the Design Alternate process. This limitation has left the Commission looking for ways to have a broader scope of input on new development.

The Commission will continue to provide design review and recommendations for a variety of development projects, including city-initiated projects and streetscapes. However, because of the Quasi-Judicial function noted above, private development projects no longer have the benefit of input from the design experts on our Commission until the designs are almost fully developed. At that stage, the Commission's review is limited to the specific Design Alternate request and related findings.

Due to this change in function of our Commission, we recommend the Council explore other means to provide the development community with early review and input from design experts familiar with the City processes. One possible solution to this could be done through a group of past Appearance Commission members that offer concept and sketch review input early in design, or through some other means. Finding an alternative way for developers and designers to get input earlier in the design process, from people that are most familiar with Raleigh's development standards will help create projects that fit into the fabric of our City in a more meaningful way. Particularly for designs that do not meet the letter of the UDO, this would give the City an additional touchpoint to set expectations and mitigate projects from being too far developed before they pose a problem.

ADVISE

The Commission will provide professional design assistance to stakeholders in the community in the following areas:

UDO Text Change Studies

The Commission will review the UDO and study the design outcomes under the code to determine areas where text change could be beneficial to development.

Review and Participate in Area and Corridor Planning Efforts

The Commission seeks to be an advisory resource in the development and review of city area and corridor planning efforts, and will expand its advisory and review role for City-initiated projects.

Study of Development Trends

The Commission will study development trends and their impacts on the public realm to advise City Council and Staff on how best to promote high-quality design.

PROMOTE

Through its Design Advocacy function, the Commission will help promote, market, and celebrate good design within the community, using the following objectives:

Elevate the Design Conversation

The Commission will contribute to the conversation on design excellence by participating in community lectures, workshops, tours, round-table discussions, and community outreach projects.

Foster Partnerships and Collaborations

The Commission will continue to collaborate with City Council and other boards and commissions. Building on its efforts from the past three years, the Commission will seek out new partnerships for the Legacy Project to promote and encourage innovative public projects.

Celebrations

Sir Walter Raleigh event planning and coordination has been updated over the past several years as the Commission has implemented a new vision for the awards, including new partnerships, new categories, and outreach to new audiences. This year the Commission will continue to celebrate design excellence while trying to expand the audience even further and incorporate the Legacy Project's placemaking efforts.

The Appearance Commission looks forward to providing continued professional service to the City of Raleigh in the coming year. The Commission stands ready to address any special tasks initiated by the City Council, along with performing the usual duties of development review, engaging in community outreach, and pursuing other initiatives that promote design excellence. Please consider this Commission as a resource as you are faced with important decisions about Raleigh's future growth, character, and prosperity.

2021/22 Appearance Commission Members

Candice Andre
Corey Bates
Megan Beach
William Dodge
Martha Eberle
Jamie Ferguson
Will Gaskins

Patrice Gilmore
Katherine Hogan
Jake Levitas
Megan Beach
Corey Mason
Kyle Springer
Chad Parker

Chris Roberts
Bernard Thaxton
Adam Walters
Marcus Tuttle
Douglas Johnston
Edmund Lynch
Jonathan Best



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