



2019 ANNUAL REPORT and 2020 WORK PROGRAM

Raleigh Appearance Commission

The Raleigh Appearance Commission is pleased to present its 2019 Annual Report and 2020 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 active facades, pedestrian connectivity and quality of experience, and pleasing urban form. It is unanimous within our group that sprawling parking lots, strip malls, covered streams, unbridled advertising, inappropriate grade change devices, and car-focused development do not lead to a beautiful city. We want to see more multimodal transportation opportunities, greenways, parks, and sustainable landscaping principles integrated into our urban fabric and forms. These qualities make for a more beautiful—and livable—city. The Raleigh Appearance Commission stands ready to help make it happen.

We look forward to our new service to the City Council in the coming year, and eagerly await all tasks assigned.

**Thank you for your support,
Members of the Appearance Commission**

Brandy Thompson, AIA, LEED AP, Chair

Jamie Ferguson, Vice-Chair

2019 Annual Report

I. WORKING GROUPS

In response to the Commission's increased involvement with review of development plans over the last several years, the Commission has defined new roles in an effort to promote community dialogue, foster design excellence and provide meaningful service to the city. To that end, the Commission organized itself into and defined the roles for two working groups: Advise (Design Advisory) and Promote (Design Advocacy).

1. Advise (Design Advisory) Working Group

- > High Impact/High Visibility Projects
- > Review of City of Raleigh area and corridor planning projects
- > Provide courtesy reviews as needed

2. Promote (Design Advocacy) Working Group

> Sir Walter Raleigh Awards

- Annual Fundraising - raised over \$13,000 in sponsorships and in-kind donations
- Event Re-branding
 - » Socialize- Educate- Celebrate
 - » Developed rotating Award Certificate competition with the City of Raleigh Arts Council

> Education (Commission and the Public)

- Commission education on Administrative Alternates review process

> Advocate for Commission review of important publicly funded projects:

- City of Raleigh Roadway and Streetscape Design reviews
- City of Raleigh Area and Corridor Plan reviews

> Continue to develop Collaboration and Partnerships with sister commissions:

- City of Raleigh Arts Commission
- Award Juries for other City of Raleigh Boards and Commissions



II. DESIGN REVIEW PERFORMANCE

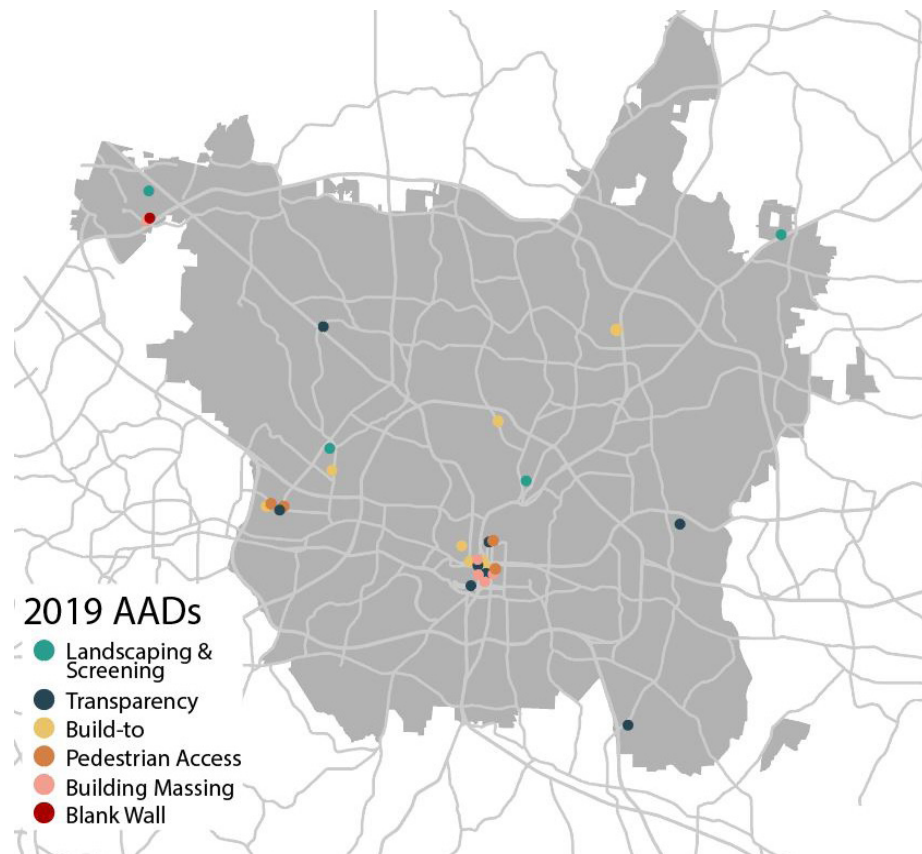
Among the Commission's chief functions is the review of Administrative Alternates for Design. The Commission also provides courtesy reviews of potential Administrative Alternate and site plan review submissions. Additionally, the Commission provides evaluation and input regarding design components of public projects, and area and corridor plans as requested.

Administrative Alternates for Design

With an increased level of development within the city, the Commission is hearing more Administrative Alternate cases as compared to past years. During 2019 the Commission considered 31 Administrative Alternate requests.

2019 Administrative Alternates:

- AAD-1-19 - 8402 Darton Way
- AAD-2-19 - 9 & 21 Glenwood Avenue
- AAD-3-19 - 2413 Blue Ridge Road
- AAD-4-19 - 227 W Martin Street
- AAD-5-19 - 10100 Lumley Road (3 requests)
- AAD-6-19 - 1541 Sunday Drive (2 requests)
- AAD-7-19 - 502 W Lenoir Street
- AAD-8-19 - 6809 Davis Circle
- AAD-10-19 - 301 Hillsborough (3 requests)
- AAD-11-19 - 601 St. Mary's Street
- AAD-12-19 - 431 S McDowell
- AAD-13-19 - 8115 Brier Creek Parkway
- AAD-14-19 - 2923 Edwards Mill Road
- AAD-15-19 - 3701 Generosity Court / 4005 & 4001 Jones Sausage Road
- AAD-17-19 - 5401 Trinity Road (2 requests)
- AAD-19-19 - 215 S McDowell Street (4 requests)
- AAD-20-19 - 3620 Six Forks Road
- AAD-21-19 - 2020 Progress Court
- AAD-22-19 - 5700 Oak Forest Drive
- AAD-23-19 - 901 Freedom Drive
- AAD-24-19 - 8 W Peace Street (2 requests)



Courtesy Reviews:

The Commission provided applicant-requested courtesy reviews in advance of site plan review submittal for eight projects. The projects incorporated the Commission's preliminary comments, resulting in a higher level of refinement and contextual design:

- 121 Fayetteville Street
- 301 Hillsborough Street
- 603 S Wilmington Street
- 9951 Strickland Road
- 3701 Generosity Court
- 4917 Capital Boulevard
- 6200 Glenwood Avenue
- 901 Freedom Drive

City-initiated Project Review:

- Oberlin Road Streetscape Improvements
- Infill Development Survey and Report
- Hillside Development Standards
- Avent Ferry Road Corridor Study

III. SERVICE TO COUNCIL AND COMMISSIONS

The Appearance Commission has offered service to City Council and Commissions on the following juries and task forces in the past year:

- Environmental Awards Jury
- High Impact/High Visibility Projects

The Commission looks forward to the opportunity to work collaboratively with other boards and commissions to address citywide issues related to design, as well as review of design-related policy and text changes.

IV. OBSERVED TRENDS AND ISSUES

In providing professional critique for proposed development, the Appearance Commission has seen recurring patterns in site plan and building design. The Commission has identified and summarized trends in the design issues observed in the past year, and provides recommendations for how they may be addressed.

Design Review is an essential ingredient in achieving good architectural products. By observing development trends under the UDO over the past eight years, the Appearance Commission believes that a formal design review process is necessary to elevate the level of design and promote a thriving public realm.

TRENDS

National (and some local) developers and their products: The Commission has reviewed several important projects in the past year, and has observed that some of the products proposed are standard models that lack context and a sense-of-place. Insensitive, nondescript design, materials, and lack of articulation dominate the designs.

Commission's recommendation:

It is critical that more thoughtfulness in the design of these impactful projects would better contribute to the public realm. Better quality of material and attention to design details is necessary in the projects. Creating stronger design standards for impactful projects could produce higher-quality outcomes.

Inward-Facing Development: The Commission has seen a growing trend of projects that focus pedestrian activity and ground floor activation to interior, private drives and plazas. As a result, back-of-house service functions are placed on public streets, leaving large patches of blank, inactive facades that degrade the public realm.

Example of internally-focused development



Example of parking garage podium building

Commission's recommendation:

Greater priority must be given to the quality of design along public streets, especially in downtown. Regulations should be strengthened to limit the amount of facade given to back-of-house function, or incentive given to place service areas internally, ensuring activation along the street edge to protect Raleigh's public realm.

Parking Garage Podiums: Many recent projects have incorporated large parking deck podiums occupying several floors and located close to or adjacent to the public realm. This creates poor design conditions at ground level and the base of the building. Dedicating multiple floors of buildable area to car-specific space will render many buildings unable to adapt to the future needs of the city.



Commission's recommendation:

Projects in downtown and other more urban areas should be required or incentivized to reduce permanent, car-specific spaces from taking up such large portions of buildable area with detrimental visual impacts at the lower levels of the building. Standards should be strengthened to address these large, inactive facades. Wrapping upper floors with active uses could help mitigate this trend. There is precedent for design standards for parking decks in cities like Los Angeles, Spokane, and Boise that regulate cladding, appearance, and impact to the public realm. Stronger regulations coupled with design review could yield better outcomes for parking structures that address the public realm.

Administrative Alternate requests: The Commission has reviewed over 30 requests for administrative alternates during the past year, a majority for build-to, building massing, transparency, and pedestrian access. The Commission expects these issues to persist as development plan submittals continue under the UDO.

Commission's recommendation:

The Commission welcomes the opportunity to review and support the development of potential text changes to the UDO that could help result in better design of projects and fewer administrative alternates or variances for these types of requests.

ISSUES

The Commission's role: Due to a coming text change, the Commission will soon be losing its role in Administrative Alternate review. Without some degree of design review-- particularly for large, impactful projects-- development in Raleigh may not sustain quality design as it grows.

Commission's recommendation:

With Council's direction, the Commission could continue to study High Impact / High Visibility projects for design review. We could also increase our role in reviewing City-initiated projects. As design review is instrumental in achieving an active public realm and good urban design, the Commission urges Council to retain the Appearance Commission as a body to conduct design review as part of the City's development review process.

V. 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. The following describes the Commission's major public outreach efforts.

2019 Sir Walter Raleigh Awards

Held at Raleigh Union Station in October, this past year's Sir Walter Raleigh Awards drew a packed crowd of over 250 people. The event featured live music, a festive ambiance, and new faces in the audience as we joined together to celebrate great design.

13 awards were presented to a range of Raleigh projects, reflecting the best in Commercial and Institutional Design as well as Historic Rehabilitation, Landscape Design, and Community Impact. A new award category was added for Community Event, honoring ephemeral events that influence and celebrate great design in our city. The awarded winners' project budgets ranged greatly in size, but all shared a common commitment to creative problem solving, context-sensitivity, and design excellence.

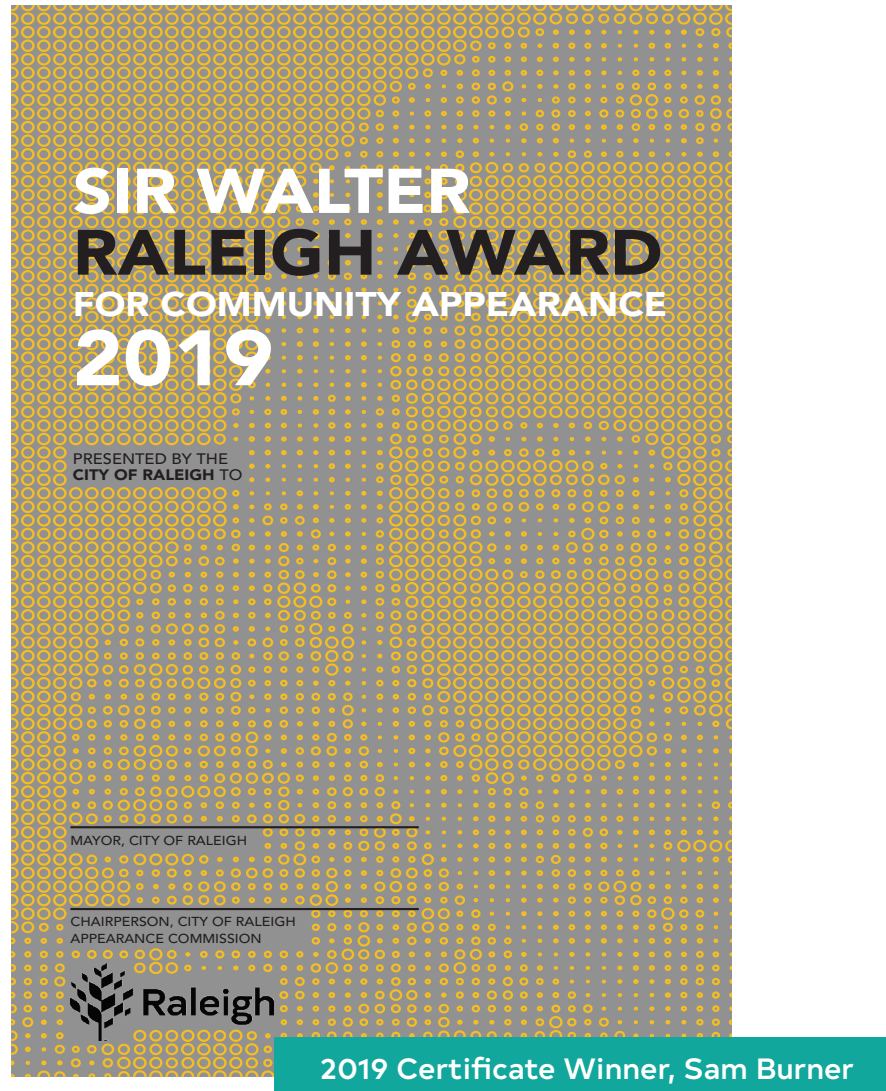




Peter Lamb and the Wolves performing during SWRA

Sir Walter Raleigh Awards Certificate

As part of the planning for this year's ceremony, the Commission again sponsored a design competition for the redesign of the award certificate. With advice and assistance from the city's Arts Commission and staff, the Commission developed a call for designers and solicited submissions from local design professionals. Feedback on the new design was well-received. Going forward, the Commission not only plans to put out a call for a certificate design each year, but also include the design of marketing materials unique to that year.



The Legacy Project

During the 2019 Retreat, the Commission created a new program to make their own unique contribution to design in Raleigh. Using their wide range of design expertise and years of observing design trends and needs in Raleigh, they implemented a program to create a tangible legacy of design through partnerships.

In 2019, the Commission partnered with Parks with Purpose for their inaugural project. Through this collaboration, two benches were installed along the greenway by the Walnut Creek Wetland Center.



"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 2020 to continue to encourage and promote the highest design standards for development in the Capital City."

2020 WORK PROGRAM

Raleigh Appearance Commission

The Appearance Commission held its 2020 planning retreat in late January. During the meeting, the members discussed their role in shaping Raleigh's design landscape through reviews and the potential to create a unique Commission contribution to design through the Legacy Project.

The commission will continue to provide design review and recommendations for a variety of development projects, including city-initiated projects and streetscapes and courtesy reviews for private development. However, a proposed text change to the UDO would eliminate the Commission's role in the Administrative Alternate process. Lacking formal, albeit advisory, review of projects, the City will no longer regularly benefit from the Commission's interdisciplinary expertise.

A primary concern for the Commission in 2020 will be advancing alternative methods for design review in Raleigh. With the Urban Design Center, the Commission initiated in 2017 a report on the feasibility of a design review process for "high impact/high visibility" development projects. That report, which included peer city precedent research, was presented to City Council in 2019, but never moved past the Growth and Natural Resources committee. In 2020, the Commission would like to re-open investigation on this topic and assist Council and staff in the creation of a design review process.

ADVISE + PROMOTE.

ADVISE

The Design Advisory Working Group 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

The Design Advocacy Working Group will help promote, market, and celebrate good design within the community, using the following objectives:

Elevate the Design Conversation

The Commission will work to initiate greater dialogue on design excellence through 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. Expanding from last year, the Commission will seek out partnerships for the Legacy Project to promote and advise innovative design.

Celebrations

Sir Walter Raleigh event planning and coordination.

The Commission has implemented a new vision for the Sir Walter Raleigh Awards, including partnerships, new categories, and outreach to new audiences. This year the Commission will continue to evolve its awards program to expand the audience and celebrate design excellence.

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.

2019 Appearance Commission Members

Candice Andre
Corey Bates
Rolf Blizzard
Todd Delk
William Dodge
Martha Eberle

Jamie Ferguson
Katherine Hogan
Cari Jones
John Koonce
Jake Levitas
CJ Mann

Corey Mason
Albert McDonald
Chad Parker
Bernard Thaxton
Brandy Thompson
Adam Walters



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