



2020 ANNUAL REPORT and 2021 WORK PROGRAM

Raleigh Appearance Commission

The Raleigh Appearance Commission is pleased to present its 2020 Annual Report and 2021 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, inclusive, 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

Cory R. Etc. -Chair

Candice A. Anderson -Chair

APPEARANCE COMMISSION ACTIVITY

Summary

As the City of Raleigh enters its ninth 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 Alternate review, improving City projects through charette-style discourse, and supporting innovative design in the public realm through the Legacy Project.

With the onset of the Coronavirus pandemic last winter, the Appearance Commission transitioned to a fully virtual environment for all review and committee meetings. With the support of Raleigh Television Network, Information Technology, and Urban Design Center staff, the transition to Webex went smoothly. Public notice for meetings was extended to allow more time to address technology needs and staff set up training sessions for participants new to the Webex format. In 2020, the Appearance Commission also hosted a virtual Sir Walter Raleigh Awards event that successfully celebrated the exemplary design achievements of the past year while maintaining protective standards for public health.

During the past year, the Commission took on more responsibilities when TC-17-19 transitioned Design Adjustments from the Board of Adjustments to the Appearance Commission. Now called Design Alternates, the transportation-related cases are now under the auspices of the Appearance Commission, granted Quasi-Judicial review power. The Commission also expanded their role with the creation of a Design Review Committee.

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 the City for project review and design development. As the Appearance Commission takes on Quasi-Judicial duties, the previous aims of creating a review process for projects that are “high impact/high visibility” is no longer a feasible option due to review requirements for the Quasi-Judicial process. The Appearance Commission created a new working group called the Design Committee to explore how the Commission could still contribute design expertise beyond the scope of Alternates to improve the landscape of the design that will shape our city for decades to come.

The following sections provide an overview of the Commission’s efforts and activities during 2020 and act as a framework for the organization of this report.

- > Working Groups
- > Design Review Performance
- > Observed Trends and Issues
- > Service to Council and Commissions
- > Design Outreach, Education, and Advocacy

Following the Annual Report, an outline of work program items that the Commission wishes to pursue in 2021 are summarized for your review.

2020 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 its 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

- > Administrative Alternates for Design and Design Alternate Review
- > Design Committee
- > 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
 - Virtual Event
 - No Fundraising
 - Altered format highlighted:
 - » Education-- opportunity to hear from design experts and
 - » Developed rotating Award Certificate competition with the City of Raleigh Arts Council
- > Legacy Project
 - Second year
 - Provided funding for the Envision Saint Agnes Hospital public art installation designed by the students of St. Augustine University
- > Education (Commission and the Public)
 - Commission education on Administrative Alternates review process
- > 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. During 2020, the Commission also took over the review of Design Adjustments, requiring the Commission to become a Quasi-Judicial review body. 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 2020 the Commission considered 37 Administrative Alternate requests.

Design Alternates

TC-17-19 transitioned Design Adjustments to the Appearance Commission during 2020 where there were renamed to Design Alternates, with the first Quasi-Judicial hearing occurring on October 1, 2020. Since October 2020 the Commission had 3 Design Alternate requests brought before them for review.

2020 Administrative Alternates:

- AAD-1-20 - 603 S Wilmington (2 requests)
- AAD-2-20 - 9951 Strickland Road
- AAD-4-20 - 4381 Lassiter Mill Road (2 requests)
- AAD-5-20 - 200 W Lane Street (2 requests)
- AAD-6-20 - 518 W Cabarrus Street (3 requests)
- AAD-7-20 - 4200 Pearl Road
- AAD-8-20 - 6201 Litchford Road
- AAD-9-20 - 7921 ACC Boulevard
- AAD-10-20 - 5600 Hillsborough Street (3 requests)
- AAD-11-20 - 1641 Glenwood Avenue
- AAD-12-20 - 6200 Glenwood Avenue
- AAD-13-20 - 4917 Capital Boulevard
- AAD-14-20 - 214 Buck Jones
- AAD-15-20 - 2055 S New Hope
- AAD-16-20 - 721 Halifax; 18 Seaboard Avenue
- AAD-17-20 - 630 Hillsborough Street
- AAD-18-20 - 3601 Marcom Street
- AAD-19-20 - 1111 E Whitaker Mill Road (2 requests)
- AAD-20-20 - 721 Halifax; 18 Seaboard Avenue
- AAD-21-20 - 10805 Leesville Road
- AAD-22-20 - 901 Freedom Drive (3 reviews)
- AAD-23-20 - 1451 Sawyer Road
- AAD-24-20 - 1217 Sawyer Road
- AAD-25-20 - 121 Fayetteville Street (4 requests)



Courtesy Reviews:

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

- 121 Fayetteville Street
- Project Smile
- East Civic Tower

Design Alternates:

Starting with the October 1st, 2020 meeting, the Appearance Commission began reviewing Design Alternates as a Quasi-Judicial body. Design Alternates provide an alternate means for compliance with certain streetscape and transportation related code requirements. The Commission reviewed the following cases:

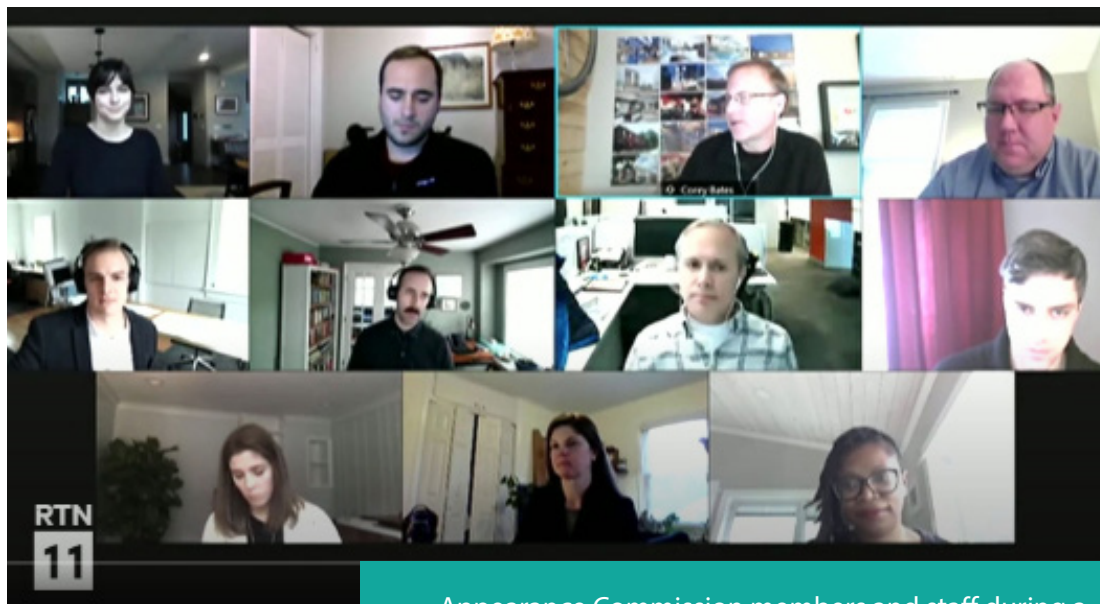
- 2815 Capital Boulevard
- 1428 Gavin Street
- 901 Freedom Drive

City-initiated Project Review:

- Atlantic Avenue Widening
- Barwell Road Improvements
- Blue Ridge Road Bike and Pedestrian Improvements

III. SERVICE TO COUNCIL AND COMMISSIONS

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.



Appearance Commission members and staff during a Webex virtual meeting

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 or changes to the UDO are necessary to elevate the level of design and promote a thriving public realm.

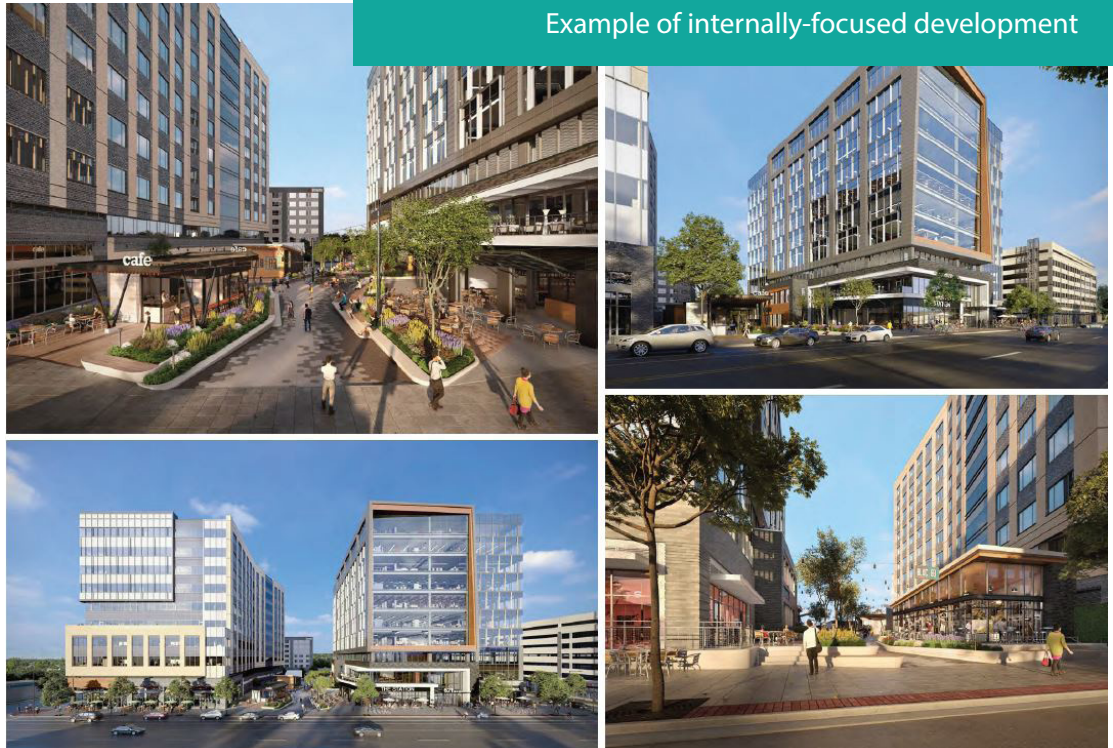
TRENDS

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

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 functions internally, ensuring activation along the street edge to protect Raleigh's public realm.

Example of internally-focused development



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 for alternative compliance could yield better outcomes for parking structures that address the public realm. It is the Commission's understanding that City Council has request staff develop and model zoning conditions and a UDO text change related to parking garage screening, as well as a report that will outline innovative strategies for parking structures. The Commission stands ready to assist with these items.



Administrative Alternate requests: The Commission has reviewed 37 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.

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 - Sir Walter Raleigh Awards, Sir Walter Raleigh Awards Certificate, and the Legacy Project - described below.

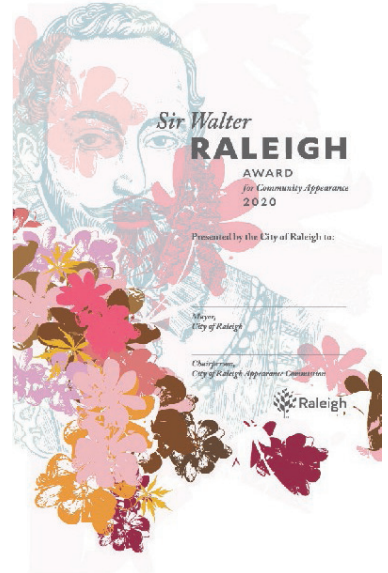
2020 Sir Walter Raleigh Awards

Due to the Coronavirus pandemic, the 2020 awards ceremony was held virtually. Staff compiled video segments from Commission members, award winners, and Mayor Baldwin. Additionally, David Hill of the NCSU School of Design spoke on behalf of the awards jury about how the 2020 award winners responded to the challenges of the past year through design. To keep the celebratory spirit of the annual awards event, Peter Lamb and the Wolves provided welcome music and a full set following the virtual ceremony. Though the Appearance Commission looks forward to a return to the in-person event, they are proud that the ceremony may reach more people virtually.

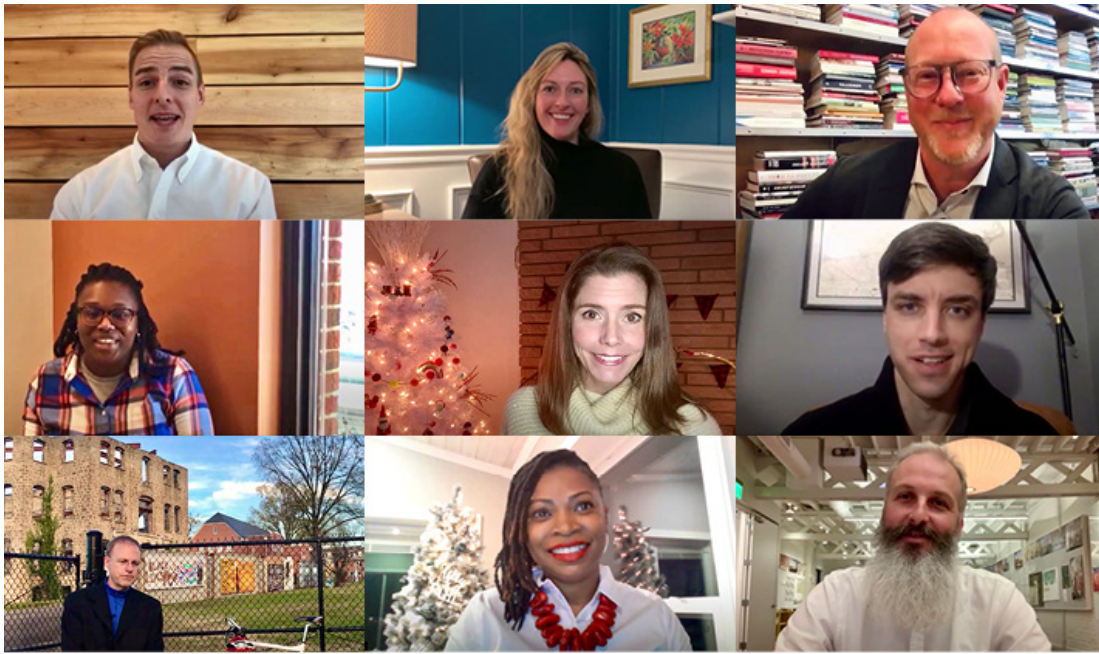
Ten awards were presented to a range of Raleigh projects, reflecting the best in Commercial and Institutional Design as well as Historic Rehabilitation, Landscape Design, and Community Impact. A new award category was added, named The 2020 Award, honoring projects and designers that used design to address the challenges faced during the past year. The awarded winners' project budgets ranged greatly in size, but all shared a common commitment to creative problem solving, context-sensitivity, and design excellence.

Sir Walter Raleigh Awards Certificate

The Commission again sponsored a design competition for the redesign of the award certificate. The 2020 Certificate Design Competition winner was Lincoln Hancock for his design that celebrates the relationship of the natural and built environment in Raleigh.



LEFT: Peter Lamb & the Wolves ; RIGHT: Certificate artwork by Lincoln Hancock, winner of the 2020 certificate design competition



TOP: Award presenters from the Appearance Commission and Jury representative, David Hill. BOTTOM: 2020 award winners





Envision St. Agnes Hospital, recipient of the 2020 Legacy Project

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 2020, the Commission helped to fund the Envision St. Agnes Hospital public art installation, a project designed by the students of St. Augustine University to celebrate the hospital's history. In the early part of the 20th century, St. Agnes was the only well-equipped hospital serving African Americans in the southeast.



“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 2021 to continue to encourage and promote the highest design standards for development in the Capital City.”

2021 WORK PROGRAM

Raleigh Appearance Commission

The Appearance Commission held its 2021 planning retreat in early February. During the meeting, the members discussed the Commission's activities of the past year, current development trends, current and upcoming regulatory changes that would affect their duties and work program, and their roles in helping shape Raleigh's design landscape through its functions and the potential to create a unique Commission contribution to design through the Legacy Project and the City's evolving Placemaking initiative.

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.

In 2021, the Commission will prepare for the upcoming text change, TC-19-19, to transition Administrative Alternates for Design to a Quasi-Judicial format. With updated findings and revised standards, the new version will be renamed Design Alternates, aligned in review process with the transportation-related Design Alternates for consistency.

ADVISE + PROMOTE.

ADVISE

The Commission, primarily through its Design Committee, 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 work to initiate greater dialogue on design excellence by leading 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 two years, the Commission will seek out new partnerships for the Legacy Project to promote and advise innovative design.

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 Commission also hopes to resume an in-person event if circumstances allow.

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.

2020 Appearance Commission Members

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

Will Gaskins
Patrice Gilmore
Katherine Hogan
Jake Levitas
Corey Mason
Chad Parker

Chris Roberts
Bernard Thaxton
Brandy Thompson
Adam Walters

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