

## **The Special Character of The Capitol Square Historic District**

Designated in 1976, the Capitol Square Historic District stretches for five blocks along an east/west axis that follows the ridge between the Crabtree Creek and Walnut Creek basins. The district's centerpiece is the granite Greek Revival style Capitol (1840, National Historic Landmark).

The district's form is largely defined by its relationship to the original city plan of 1792, platted by surveyor (and state senator) William Christmas. Distinguished by wide streets and five public squares, the primary square of Christmas's plan, Union Square, was reserved for the State Capitol. Leading toward the four compass points from Union Square were four main streets, ninety-nine feet wide; the east and west streets, Hillsborough Street and New Bern Avenue, compose the east/west spine of the district. All other streets in the plan were sixty-six feet wide, including Edenton and Morgan streets, which define the north and south sides of the district and of Union Square. The primary north/south streets of the district include Salisbury and Wilmington streets, which define the west and east sides of Union Square, and Person Street.

The street pattern is regular, with streets intersecting at right angles as laid out in the original city plan. The one exception is at the east end of the district, where contemporary traffic engineering concerns for one-way traffic patterns led to the curving connection of Morgan Street to New Bern Avenue, creating a cul-de-sac at New Bern Place. Original granite curbstones remain in much of the district, with some concrete curbs introduced, as well as some sections of new granite curbing installed in association with city streetscape improvement programs. Special period streetlighting fixtures, reminiscent of the fixtures that lined the streets at the turn of the century, have been installed in the core areas of the district; other fixtures are the standard modern cobra head design. Sidewalks are typically wide, extending from building to curb, with Hillsborough Street and New Bern Avenue the primary exceptions. Sidewalk materials vary: concrete is the dominant material; red-tone concrete unit pavers are found in many areas, primarily along Hillsborough Street, with gray concrete pavers encircling the Capitol Square perimeter.

The landscape found at Capitol Square provides a green oasis in the heart of the urban area. The cool solidity of the granite Capitol is set off by the lush warm green of the lawns and majesty of the mature trees that fill the square. Gracefully curved aggregate-patterned concrete walks sweep across the park-like setting, with monuments arranged for the edification of strolling passers-by and numerous iron benches for those that have time to pause. Streets leading from the Capitol are lined with street trees that carry the green motif out into the downtown. In some parts of the district, surface parking interrupts the balance of green trees, shaded walks, and building facades that generally characterize the area.

The architectural character of the district is largely institutional in nature, dominated by state government buildings and church complexes. The general scale of two- and three-story buildings is punctuated by occasional taller buildings, a water tower, and church spires. A total of four churches, three of Gothic Revival influence, one of Romanesque design, front on Capitol Square, one near each of its four corners. The rest of the buildings facing the Capitol are state government office buildings, primarily in the Classical Revival style, with more recent structures exhibiting an understated Art Deco flair. Their weightiness physically charts the increasing complexities of public administration in the twentieth century. Stone is the material of choice for most of these structures, lending a decidedly

strong impression of solidity, formality, and permanence. However, providing relief and contrast at three corners of the square are the deep red brick facades of two churches and a state building. Further west from Capitol Square are two additional church complexes that maintain this institutional sense; yet their lawns, landscaping and some domestically-scaled accessory buildings begin to soften the powerful impression that is felt in the immediate area of the Capitol.

To the east of the Capitol, however, awaits a surprise of domestic delight unusual in the heart of an urban setting. Owing to the landscape and architectural qualities displayed in the two blocks of New Bern Avenue, this area departs from the strongly institutional character of the rest of the district. The lush courtyard of Christ Episcopal Church (1854, National Historic Landmark), the dignified double porticos of the State Bank (1813), and the urban residential form of the Capital Apartments (1917) lead one east from the Capitol toward New Bern Place, a city redevelopment project with a strong historic preservation emphasis. Here, Haywood Hall (ca. 1799), a residence and garden constructed for John Haywood, State Treasurer, is buttressed by four other residential-style structures. The White-Holman House (ca. 1799) and the Montgomery House (ca. 1906) were relocated to New Bern Avenue to ensure their preservation; while the New Bern Place condominium development (1985) is larger in scale, its modern interpretation of Queen Anne styling imparts a decidedly residential character. The cul-de-sac that terminates this portion of New Bern is paved in granite-colored unit pavers edged by granite curbing, and is flanked with landscaped spaces and brick walls. The lack of through-traffic creates a calm ambiance of repose in an otherwise bustling downtown scene. On the northern periphery of this area, along Edenton Street at Blount Street, the Richard B. Haywood House (1854) and the Bailey Apartments (ca. 1924) also contribute to the domestic feeling of the eastern portion of the district.

Capitol Square Historic District represents the heritage of the city's institutions of work, worship, and home, wrapped in a landscape of surprising diversity: from the wooded square, to tree-lined city walks, to side yard gardens and courtyards. Here, one can sense the silhouette of the early decades of Raleigh's small village setting, of its ante-bellum residential character--a devout town whose major industry was governance--against the dominant elements of the large, present day government operations discharging their duties behind the tall, solemn classical facades of the early twentieth century.