



Date: July 13, 2020

To: Wendell Davis, County Manager

Through: Jay Gibson, General Manager

From: Sara Young, AICP, Acting Planning Director

Subject: Historic Properties Local Review Criteria Revisions

Summary

The Historic Properties Local Review Criteria, which provide a basis for review of Certificates of Appropriateness (COAs) for all local historic district properties and local historic landmarks was adopted in 2015 as the result of a major re-evaluation and resetting of Durham's local historic preservation program and standards. Since that time staff, along with the Historic Preservation Commission, have been monitoring the effectiveness of the revised standards, noting where additional improvements could be made for further clarifications and simplifications. The revised criteria incorporate changes and suggestions made by the Commission, staff and the public, including both past COA applicants and other residents of local historic districts. The Historic Preservation Commission recommended approval by an 8–0 vote on March 3, 2020. The City Council approved by a 6–0 vote on June 15, 2020, on the condition that a criteria amendment permitting tree removal without a COA for the purpose of installing solar panels be reversed. The City Council is willing to revisit the proposed amendment once local advocacy groups, in coordination with the Environmental Affairs Board (EAB), reach an agreement over the merits of tree coverage versus solar panels. Targeted discussions on this topic began at the EAB's subsequent meeting on July 8, 2020.

Recommendation

Staff recommends approval of the revised Local Review Criteria.

Background

The existing Historic Properties Local Review Criteria were created in 2015, consolidating seven sets of review criteria (one for each district at the time) previously contained within each district's preservation plan. The consolidated Criteria now apply to eight local historic districts and approximately 85 local historic landmarks. Current changes introduce Golden Belt as the most recently designated local historic district, and also help to clarify criteria language, improve ease of implementation, and reduce certain restrictions.

Issues and Analysis

Staff identified some of the following items for revision:

- Protect historic masonry by addressing mortar type and waterproof coatings
- Better organize and reduce redundancies in criteria related to additions
- Limit quantity of wall signs and projecting signs on a single building elevation
- Reduce restrictions on solar panels
- Refer to other guiding documents, such as North Carolina General Statutes and *Durham Landscape Manual*
- Improve treatment of street tree remnants following tree removal
- Introduce criteria for landmark signs
- Expand glossary

The Historic Preservation Commission's Rules of Procedure (ROP) has also been revised. While that document does not require approval by the governing bodies, it does work in conjunction with the Criteria during the COA review process, defining the scopes of work that require a COA and the type of COA required.

One topic of particular interest recently has been the treatment of solar panels. Both the ROP and the Criteria have been revised substantially to reduce staff and Commission oversight of solar panel installation while continuing to protect historic character and building materials. The current ROP requires a Major COA for all panels facing the street, and a Minor COA (staff approval) for panels not facing the street. The proposed Rules of Procedure eliminate the COA requirement for all non-street-facing panels on contributing structures, and for all panels on noncontributing structures, so long as they meet a standard design when visible from the street and are not attached to a character-defining roofing material. For street-facing installations on contributing structures, a Minor COA is required. Any deviation from the standard (matte black panels installed on street-facing roofs) requires a Major COA.

The Local Review Criteria currently specify to minimize visibility from the street for both contributing and noncontributing structures. The new Criteria provide allowance for visible—and even street-facing—panels on noncontributing residential and downtown properties, provided the panels meet a standard design (matte black or otherwise matching roof color, and flush-mounted to project no more than four inches from the roof surface). The Criteria do not restrict attachment to roofing materials not considered character-defining (e.g., asphalt or architectural shingles, modern standing-seam metal, membrane). All associated equipment must be located on a rear or side building elevation.

Finally, staff considered other adjustments to site work criteria that could provide additional environmental benefit. Driveway paving, in particular, will now be limited to concrete pavement strips (ribbon driveways) in lieu of full slab driveways in the districts, where feasible, to reduce the amount of impermeable surface area introduced to the urban landscape, and to more closely conform to the historic character of the local districts. This is already a standard for small lots within the Urban Tier per UDO 7.1.2.C.4a.

Alternatives

- 1) Approve the revised Historic Properties Local Review Criteria as amended by City Council
- 2) Offer additional input for further revisions as needed

Staff Contact

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Attachments

Attachment 1: Revised Historic Properties Local Review Criteria

Attachment 2: Revised Rules of Procedure

Attachment 3: Extracts from revised Criteria relating to solar panels