



FAQs: North Main Street Extension of the Davidson Local Historic District

1. BACKGROUND

The Town of Davidson continues to explore the expansion of its local historic district, with a goal of preserving and protecting more historically significant structures. The current local historic district includes the two to three blocks that comprise downtown. While a large portion of "old" Davidson is located within a national register district, it is the smaller local historic district which contains the legal provisions to protect historic properties and guide historically sensitive repairs and construction within its boundaries.

Last year, the town hired historic district expert Mary Ruffin Hanbury of Hanbury Preservation Consulting to determine which neighborhoods are appropriate for local historic district designation. Following public input sessions and a windshield survey that took place this summer, the consultant provided a draft local historic district designation report for a portion of the existing national register district located north of the existing local historic district.

The draft designation report for the North Main Street Extension of the Davidson Local Historic District was reviewed by the State Historic Preservation Office and accepted by the Davidson Historic Preservation Commission in the fall. In order for the district expansion to be adopted, it must follow the map amendment (i.e. rezoning) process. This process will include a recommendation from the Planning Board, a public hearing, and final approval by the Board of Commissioners.

2. FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is a local historic district?

Local historic district designation is a type of zoning that applies to entire neighborhoods or other areas that include many historic properties. The zoning provides controls on the appearance of existing and proposed buildings. Designation is an honor, meaning the community believes the architecture, history, and character of the area are worthy of recognition and protection. A change to the local historic district boundary is an amendment to the planning ordinance and must be approved by the Davidson Board of Commissioners.

How does a local historic district affect my property?

Owners of property (both vacant and developed) in the local historic district are required to receive approval for many exterior changes in the form of a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA). This applies to existing historic structures, as well as newly constructed structures in the local historic district. Applications for COA are reviewed by the Davidson Historic Preservation

Commission (HPC) or staff for compliance with the Davidson Historic District Design Guidelines. There are two types of approvals for COAs: staff approved minor works or HPC approved major works. Staff may approve minor projects which do not substantially alter the character of the structure or site (i.e. in-kind replacement of materials, new light fixtures affixed to a structure, construction of fences in the side or rear yard, addition of decks or patios in the rear yard, replacement of doors and windows compatible with existing doors and windows, etc.). Staff has the discretion to refer any minor project to the HPC for review. Routine maintenance does not require a COA.

What is the difference between a minor vs. major work in the local historic district?

Minor work projects require an application and issuance of a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA). Minor work projects may be approved administratively by staff if the proposed work is consistent with the Historic District Design Guidelines. Examples of minor work project include but are not limited to the in-kind repair or replacement of materials, installation of light fixtures in keeping with the neighborhood, removal of siding covering original material, screening in of an existing porch that is not visible from the street, removal of deteriorated accessory buildings which are not original to the site or otherwise historically significant, construction of small utility buildings, playhouses, or playground equipment, etc.

Major work projects require an application and issuance of a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) by the HPC. In general, these projects involve a change in the appearance of a building or site, and are more substantial in nature than routine maintenance or minor work projects. They include changes from the original design or material, or replacement, alteration, or removal of an original feature. Examples of major work project include but are not limited to new residential or commercial construction, additions, demolition of any structural part of a building except as authorized under minor works, changes to roof lines, replacement of architectural details when there will be a change in design or materials from the original or existing details, etc.

What is the review process for making changes to structures or site improvements to properties located within a local historic district?

It is strongly encouraged that property owners reach out to town staff prior to beginning work. If it is determined that a COA is required, an application for COA must be submitted with a detailed description of the work, photos of existing conditions, photos of proposed materials, and a site plan (where applicable). The COA application fee is \$75. The HPC or staff will review applications for COA. If staff cannot approve the request, it will be forwarded on to the HPC for review. Ten days prior to the HPC hearing, staff will notify adjacent property owners of the request and place a sign on the subject property. The meeting is public and property owners will be given the opportunity to speak on the request. If the COA is approved, then the applicant must submit all required permits before commencing work.

Will it cost me more to make improvements to my property?

Local historic district designation does not require that you make improvements to your property. It does require that changes be compatible with the district as a whole. Applications for COAs require a \$75 review fee in addition to typical permitting fees.

Can I demolish a structure on my property?

The demolition of a structure located within the local historic district requires a COA. Demolition of deteriorated accessory buildings which are not original to the site or otherwise historically significant may be approved as a minor work by staff. Any other demolition is considered a major work and must receive a COA from the HPC in accordance with the Davidson Historic District Design Guidelines. The HPC may delay demolition of a structure for up to 365 days to allow time for thorough exploration of alternatives to demolition.

Are there benefits to owning property within a local historic district?

Historic district zoning may help to improve property values by stabilizing and enhancing the neighborhood's character, and it benefits property owners by protecting them from inappropriate changes by other owners that might destroy the special qualities of the neighborhood. Exterior changes to historic properties must comply with the Historic District Design Guidelines which help to ensure that changes are compatible with the overall character of the district.

Who serves on the Davidson Historic Preservation Commission (HPC)?

The Board of Commissioners appoint Davidson residents to serve on the HPC. A majority of the commission members must demonstrate a special interest, experience, or education in history, architecture, archaeology, or other related fields. The HPC is assisted by town staff in their responsibilities. The HPC meets the third Wednesday of every month, immediately following the 7:00pm Design Review Board meeting.

3. PROCESS & NEXT STEPS

- **Spring & Summer 2019:** Survey fieldwork conducted by historic preservation consultant
- **September 2019:** Draft designation report completed by the consultant for North Main Street extension
- **October 2019:** Draft designation report reviewed by the State Historic Preservation Office
- **November 2019:** Draft designation report accepted by the Davidson Historic Preservation Commission
- **January 22, 2020:** Informational open house for property owners within the proposed district expansion area
- **February 11, 2020:** Board of Commissioner work session
- **February 25, 2020 (Tentative):** Public hearing
- **March 30, 2020 (Tentative):** Planning Board recommendation
- **April 28, 2020 (Tentative):** Possible decision by the Board of Commissioners

4. RESOURCES & ATTACHMENTS

- General Information on Historic Preservation Initiatives:
<http://townofdavidson.org/1172/Historic-Preservation>
- Resources: Links to referenced policy documents.
 - Davidson Planning Ordinance (2015):
<http://www.ci.davidson.nc.us/DocumentCenter/View/8499>

- Davidson Historic District Design Guidelines:
http://townofdavidson.org/DocumentCenter/View/8094/Section-22-update-HDguidelines-DRBedits-fonts_20150409?bidId=
- Minor vs. Major Works List (Adopted 1.15.20):
http://townofdavidson.org/DocumentCenter/View/9802/20200115_HPC-WorkLists-Adopted
- Town Staff Contact: Lindsay Laird, Planner - llaird@townofdavidson.org