
2007-08 ANNUAL REPORT

Raleigh Appearance Commission

The Raleigh Appearance Commission is pleased to present its 2007-08 Annual Report and 2008-09 Work Program request. In the coming year the accommodation of increased urban development and its visual and emotional impact on our community will continue to be major issues for the Commission. We will strive to gain a deeper and better understanding of these issues so that the Commission may facilitate the City Council's work, by making thoughtful, reasonable and cogent recommendations. This will set the stage for what we hope will be a highly productive year, in which Raleigh's quality of life remains strong and healthy, and the City moves ever closer to becoming what its citizens clearly desire: an even more beautiful place to live, work, and play.

I. REVIEW

Among the Commission's chief functions is review of the appearance and environmental aspects of proposed development. This effort encompasses both **site plans** and design-based **zoning proposals** (Planned Development District [PDD] Master Plans, Pedestrian Business Overlay Districts, cases with concept plans, and those located within the Downtown Overlay District). Recommendations regarding these proposals chiefly fall to the commission's Development Review Committee (DRC). Additionally, the Commission provides special review as requested by Council, bringing the commission's collective expertise to local issues of design.

Preliminary Site Plans

Through the Development Review Committee, the Appearance Commission reviews all site plans subject to public hearing. Its recommendations are forwarded to applicants as part of the Staff Comment sheets.

In the past year, the plans reviewed covered a gamut of projects, both large and small, both in outlying areas and downtown. Among the proposals considered:

Downtown—III Seaboard, The Hillsborough (Reynolds project), City Site One (pending), *Observation:* The need for more detailed information regarding street level design.

Other large-scale projects—Glenwood Avenue Apartments (adjacent to the Brookhaven neighborhood), Wal-Mart Triangle Town Center, Plantation Point Apartments, WakeMed Parking Deck, Meredith College Student Apartments, WakeMed Patient Tower, Stanhope Village Student Housing.

School expansions—Lacy Elementary, Poe Elementary, Bugg Elementary, Athens Drive High School modular, Dillard Drive Elementary & Middle School modulares. *Common comment:* Upgrade walkway canopy appearance.

Banks—SECU facilities: Poole Rd., Departure Dr., & Strickland Rd.; Crescent State Banks: Creedmoor Rd. & Six Forks Rd.; Southern Community Bank; North State Bank (Falls of Neuse); First Citizens Bank (Creedmoor Rd.).

Notable trend: “Green” components are increasingly being incorporated into building design (e.g., green roofs—Pullen Memorial Baptist Church Addition, and WakeMed Patient Tower; LEED certification—Meredith College Student Apartments; rainwater catchment—Stanhope Village Student Housing parking deck).

Zoning Cases

2007-'08 zoning cases reviewed by the commission have included:

- Z-14-07 PDD — NCSU Biomedical Campus (Blue Ridge Road/Hillsborough Street)
- Z-26-07 DOD — State government parking deck (Jones Street)
- Z-49-07 PDD — Arco Corporate Dr. office buildings/ parking decks (Brier Creek)
- Z-12-08 Peace Street PBOD expansion (Hinsdale Street)
- Z-19-08 DOD expansion (Hargett/ Bloodworth/ Martin/ East streets)
- Z-24-08 Brier Creek PDD modification (Bruckhaus & Alm streets)

As stated in the North Carolina General Statutes, the commission is called upon “to provide leadership and guidance in matters of community design and appearance.” In site plan and zoning review, we encourage developers to maintain the highest standards for user friendly buildings. We also recognize that good design goes beyond what a project looks like to passers-by, to how the occupants of a building enjoy their environment.

Trends and Issues Report

As part of its 2007-08 work program, the Commission produced its inaugural Appearance Trends and Issues Report. This report highlighted major appearance issues discussed by members throughout the year, and at our annual retreat, held in September, 2007. The primary topics identified were visual impacts of structured parking downtown and surface parking in shopping centers, and the recommendation of the formation of a new major projects review body.

Special Assignments

This past year, the Appearance Commission was requested by the City Council to appoint a member to the Tree Conservation Task Force (TCTF). Tree conservation has long been a major area of interest of the Commission. Over the past year, the TCTF has assessed whether the Ordinance enacted in 2005 is achieving its original goals, and to propose any modifications deemed necessary.

Other notable Commission assignments of the past year were participation in the City Plaza design discussions, review of design modifications to the North Carolina Fallen Firefighters Memorial in Nash Square, the Downtown Wayfinding Project, and the proposed changes to the Hillsborough Street Streetscape.

In addition, the Commission was honored to provide a representative to the Jury for the new Raleigh Environmental Awards.

II. OUTREACH

The Appearance Commission actively pursues public awareness and education initiatives on a variety of fronts, frequently through collaborative partnerships. The following outlines the commission's major public outreach efforts during 2007-08.

Community Appearance Survey

In 2006, the second phase of the Community Appearance Survey was conducted by NCSU's Center for Urban Affairs and Community Services (CUACS) under the direction of the Appearance Commission. The first phase, a city-wide telephone survey, was conducted the previous year, and garnered statistical data on citizen views as to specific appearance issues. The second phase, a series of focus group sessions, explored open-ended questions to help identify appearance matters of greatest concern, and greatest pride, to a cross-section of residents. An overview of survey results has been produced and is being made available online, through the commission's web page.

2007 Sir Walter Raleigh Awards

Each year, the Appearance Commission coordinates the Sir Walter Raleigh Awards, which celebrate the city's best new design and development projects. In 2007, the awards program marked its 25th year with a silver anniversary celebration at the Fletcher Opera Theater of the Progress Energy Center for the Performing Arts. This special commemoration included a multi-media presentation spotlighting past award recipients, displays on 2007 winners, and a reception. Sixteen projects and individuals received awards, ranging from the renovated Seaboard Station retail area to the Free Expression Tunnel at North Carolina State University. The awards ceremony was held in conjunction with the City of Raleigh's Planning Department "Designing a 21st Century City" lecture series. The speaker was Bill Spikowski, who spoke on "Creating Urban Form: Conventional and Form-Based Codes." A commemorative booklet honoring the landmark 25th annual Sir Walter Raleigh Award recipients is being made available in print and online. One measure of the awards' impact: within a week, one firm published a full-page ad in a local newspaper insert noting their project had been recognized.

Comprehensive Plan Update

The Appearance Commission, both as a body, and through individual members, has taken an active interest in the update to the City's Comprehensive Plan. As part of those efforts, in February, 2008, Planning Director Mitchell Silver and Deputy Director Ken Bowers met with the Commission. The Commission produced and submitted a memorandum summarizing its comments from this meeting. Individual members of the Commission have attended the public workshops and look forward to participating in coming discussions.

Joint City Council/ Commissions Tour of New Urbanist Communities

This project is planned for later this spring. The tour will offer an opportunity for key officials to see how other cities and towns have applied New Urbanist regulatory and design standards toward developing new strategies for directing urban growth. Stops will include locations in Huntersville, Cornelius, and Davidson. Participants will include members of and staff support for City Council, Planning Commission, Appearance Commission, Environmental Advisory Board, and the Parks, Recreation & Greenways Advisory Board.

2008-09 WORK PROGRAM

Raleigh Appearance Commission

Our proposed 2008-2009 Work Program outlines the goals of the Commission for the coming year. Some projects are ongoing from the 2007-2008 year; others are new initiatives in our continuing effort to ensure that Raleigh develops to its best. The Work Program includes:

1. Two major initiatives: continued work on the comprehensive plan update including participation in public workshops and providing direct assistance to the City Planning Department in this regard, and the inaugural presentation of the Sir Walter Raleigh Awards at the new convention center.
2. Annual report on emerging appearance issues and trends in Raleigh.
3. Commission review of appearance-related text changes.
4. Continuing service as assigned by the City Council.

I. MAJOR INITIATIVES

Comprehensive Plan Update

The Commission views this work is a key component of its mission. We are ready for continued service in this regard and look forward to assisting the City Planning Department where our expertise may be its most effective.

Sir Walter Raleigh Awards for Community Appearance

In 2008, the City's annual salute to outstanding design and development will be held in September, during the opening week of the Raleigh Convention Center. To mark this unique occasion, the commission is requesting adding program and publicity funding in the 2008-09 budget. Well-received features from past years' celebrations will be continued such as live music and an exposition area where nominees and winners can display information about their projects. The deadline for 2008 nominations is June 5.

II. REVIEW

In the next year the Commission will continue its review of site plans and those zoning cases with specific standards of design. We also wish to follow up on two initiatives from this past year's work program:

2008-09 Appearance Trends and Issues Report

As provided for the first time in 2008, the Commission will present a summary of current appearance issues and trends in Raleigh, as they have surfaced over the past fiscal year in our deliberations. This report will note any recurring areas of concern, toward possible text changes or other responsive action.

Review of Appearance Related Text Changes

The Commission hopes that its review of appearance-related text changes can be formally structured. Review responsibility would fall to the Strategic/ Outreach Committee, in complement to site plan review efforts by the Development Review Committee. Following up on initial conversation with staff, the Commission wishes to finalize specific parameters and standards for this duty.

III. CONTINUING SERVICE

As always, the Appearance Commission remains ready to undertake all service as assigned by the Raleigh City Council.

The Appearance Commission is honored to serve the City Council and the citizens of Raleigh. How the city looks is a direct reflection of how we view ourselves, and impacts significantly the quality of life of the city. The profile of Raleigh is rising in the United States, making this a crucial time for the work of the Appearance Commission. It is our goal that Raleigh maintains and expands upon the design qualities which have drawn so many here and earned us attention and acclaim. The appearance of our built and natural environment is integral to our future prosperity. We look forward to a productive and positive 2008-2009 fiscal year.

Respectfully submitted,



Mitchell Fluhrer
Chair