

# 2012-13 ANNUAL REPORT

## Raleigh Appearance Commission

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The Raleigh Appearance Commission is pleased to present its 2012-13 Annual Report and 2013-14 Work Program request

### **APPEARANCE TRENDS AND ISSUES:**

In its capacity of providing professional critique for proposed development, the Appearance Commission has an opportunity to see recurring patterns in site plan and building design. The Commission has summarized the design issues observed in the past year and has provided recommendations for how they may be addressed.

#### **Trends:**

- **Sidewalks and Connectivity:** Site plans continue to show a heightened focus on accommodating the automobile and generally are not oriented toward the safe and comfortable pedestrian experience. This is repeatedly seen in the lack of separation between street and curb when sidewalks are located along high volume roads, a lack of logical pedestrian connections between site features adjacent sites and the public right of way. There is a strong bias toward promoting vehicular traffic over enhancing the safety and functionality of pedestrian circulation.
- **Stock design:** Site plans for franchise and chain businesses are almost exclusively "out-of-the-drawer" typical design with no relationship to the site, context or the City of Raleigh. Our current code and review process does not promote the use of quality products and petitioners rarely return to the Commission after receiving recommendations with better plans. If they return for a second review they have only minimally improved design features.
- **Sustainable materials and construction:** Non-sustainable, non-durable building and plant material and the resulting construction methods are often prescribed along visible and active spaces, signifying that the projects are not built for the future rather they imply that they are built only for 'today'. We review a substantial amount of projects where residential-style lap siding and panelized cementitious fiber board (like hardiplank) are being used in multistory wood-framed apartment buildings. Many of the horizontal joints are caulked and the finish is paint. We are concerned about the long-term appearance of these structures due to the potential frequent need of maintenance and care.
- **Urban Multifamily Residential:** The current market rate urban residential projects that have come before the Commission, while very positive in terms of bringing greater population to our activity centers, almost universally lack higher quality architectural features and street level interest. The uniformity of these projects in their program, architectural

modulation and materiality will be a test of their longevity and the ability to “age gracefully”.

- Surface Parking: A strong focus on surface parking along street fronts

**Issues:**

- UDO: The new code will address some of the Commission’s concerns in regards to general design standards (like transparency, building massing and frontage) but we remain unclear on its effect on the aesthetic results that are commonly the focus of our review comments (like the inclusion of public amenities, art, sustainable landscaping, stock design improvements and many others supported by the Comprehensive Plan Urban Design Guidelines.
- Trends: Who will be the watchdog for the next trends? The Commission has provided this service to the City Council in the past but with its changing role in the UDO, we remain unclear on whether this service will continue given the limited amount and scope of site plan and zoning case review that is currently scheduled to appear before the commission. Under the new process of administrative review, there appears to be no mechanism for identifying building design and site improvement trends that could result in positive change in future versions of the development code.

We have highlighted, and over the years, championed changes to our code that assist in improving the visual built environment in Raleigh and will continue to provide that service, as our role allows within the confines of UDO in the upcoming year.

The following four sections provide a brief description of the Commission’s current efforts and activities during the past year, followed by an outline of Work Program items we wish to pursue in the coming fiscal year.

**I. REVIEW**

Among the Commission’s chief functions is review of the appearance and environmental aspects of proposed developments. This effort encompasses site plans and also design-based zoning proposals. Additionally, the Commission provides input regarding design components of public projects, as special reviews requested by Council. The number of site plans and rezoning cases that returned for a second review, after considering the Commission’s recommendations has increased.

**II. Preliminary Site Plans:**

Since last year’s report to City Council, the Commission has provided comment on a total of 26 site plans. While the volume of site plans is lower than previous years, the number of cases reviewed appeared to gain momentum during the fourth quarter. The site plans can be grouped primarily into existing facility

expansions, urban residential infill and suburban highway commercial development.

**Site plans reviewed in the past year have included:**

- Glenwood Vintage 1 and Glenwood Vintage 2
- Edison Apartments+
- 401 Oberlin+
- Bainbridge (Six Forks)
- Wake Technical Community College Parking Lot G
- 513 W. Peace Street+
- Watts Chapel Baptist Church Parking Expansion+
- Carmax-Raleigh
- Skyhouse Apartments+
- Sheetz (Dixie Forest)
- Passage Home - Coleman Street
- Sheetz (E. Millbrook Road)
- 2604 Hillsborough Street
- Waffle House (Dixie Forest)+
- Dillon Warehouse Redevelopment (Citrix)+
- Hayes Barton Family Life Center+
- Family Dollar (Mitchell Mill Road)
- Family Dollar (Rock Quarry Road)
- BB&T (Litchford Road)
- Link Apartments
- Jones Grant Apartments
- Southbridge Fellowship Church+
- Crabtree Commons+
- Learning Services
- Grammercy Apartments

*+ Applicant elected to return to the Commission for a second review to present improvements and changes reflecting Commission recommendations.*

**City-initiated Projects:**

The commission provided comment on several sets of City-initiated streetscape plans, among them:

- Jones Sausage-Rock Quarry Road Landscape Plans
- Perry Creek Road Landscape Plan
- Martin-Person Property Redevelopment Overview
- Site 4 Hotel Development

**Zoning Cases:**

Currently, the Appearance Commission provides review and comment regarding all rezoning proposals within districts for which there are specific design guidelines. Such cases include Planned Development Districts (PDDs, which are

required to submit a Master Plan), cases within Pedestrian Business Overlay Districts (PBODs, which require compliance with Streetscape & Parking Plans), and cases within the Downtown Overlay District (to which Downtown Urban Design and Façade Grant Guidelines apply).

This past year, ten zoning cases came before the commission:

- Z-34-12 (Ashe Park PBOD)
- Z-13-11 (Dorothea Drive Re-Zoning)
- Z-19-12 (Crabtree Village PDD)+
- Z-35-12 (Oberlin Road PBOD)
- Z-40-12 (TW Alexander Dr. and ACC Blvd PDD)
- Z-36-12 (Hillsborough Street PBOD)
- Z-37-12/MP-2-12 (Stanhope Center PDD)+
- MP-1-13 (Stone's Warehouse PDD)
- Z-5-13 (MP-4-12 Falls of Neuse Road)
- Z-14-13 (Six Forks Road PBOD)

*+ Applicant elected to return to the Commission for a second review to present improvements and changes reflecting Commission recommendations.*

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### **Other Projects:**

Courtesy Reviews:

- Police Memorial Plan
- I-440 widening review request from City Council
- Person Street Rowhouse\*
- Edison Apartments\*
- 401 Oberlin

*\*Applicant requested a courtesy review by the Commission in addition to or subsequent to the required site plan review.*

Transit Planning:

- Union Station Project Overview

Legislative Actions:

- HB150
- Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) update and process introduction

## **II. OUTREACH**

The Appearance Commission actively pursues public awareness and education initiatives on a variety of fronts, frequently through collaborative partnerships. The following describes the commission's major public outreach efforts during 2012-13.

- 2012 Sir Walter Raleigh Awards

Held at Museum of Natural Sciences Research Center, Oct 9, 2012. 15 awards were presented and approximately 150 citizens attended—awards were presented to a range of projects representing the best in Residential, Sustainable, Commercial, Industrial and Institutional Design as well as Historic Rehabilitation, Volunteer Initiatives and Landscape Conservation. Notable projects that received awards in 2012 were the NCDENR Headquarters and Nature Research Center, affordable housing projects Meadowcreek Commons and State Street Development and the Pullen Amusement Center.

### **Collaboration**

The Appearance Commission is sometimes called upon to provide expertise to other City of Raleigh initiatives. Most recently, this service has included:

- Environmental Awards— Commissioner Jedidiah Gant served as a jury member for awards program and gained valuable insight on the format and production of the program to inform the ongoing effort to update the SWR Awards program.

**III. OTHER INITIATIVES** The commission is undertaking 3 initiatives that directly relate to the design, livability and awareness of the appearance of Raleigh:

- **Community Conversation on Design Excellence**

#### **Mission:**

To promote a community dialogue about the role design plays in enriching and elevating the quality of life in Raleigh.

#### **Goals:**

1. The commission will develop *STRATEGIES* that focus on the positive impact good design has on the environment, the economy, and society.
2. The commission will *RAISE AWARENESS* of the affect that design has on the quality of our lives.
3. The commission will be an *INCUBATOR* or *HUB* for advancing design in our community.

#### **Strategies:**

1. SURVEY – to determine community awareness / opinion
2. EDUCATION - competitions, lecture series, journalism
3. SERVICES – design advice, policy overview / development
4. HUB – resources, links, blog, website, etc.
5. REFLECTION / EVALUATION
6. PROJECTS/ FACILITATORS
7. STRATEGIC OUTREACH - (SWRA)

The Raleigh Appearance Commission has mounted several citywide surveys over the years, to gain better understanding of citizens' views and needs regarding matters of community appearance. The Appearance Commission designed this year's survey to help initiate relevant discussions about ways to better understand the importance of design in Raleigh. Approximately 146 citizens provided feedback and a Commission work group is analyzing the results to determine the next steps in the Community Conversation on Design Excellence project.

- **Downtown Waste Collection**

The Commission undertook this project in order to research and recommend solutions to the overabundance of waste and recycling receptacles for private businesses that remain on our urban walkways and cause aesthetic, safety and space concerns. The working group is currently researching peer cities, inventorying existing conditions and discussing current operations with the DRA and City Solid Waste Staff.

- **Sir Walter Raleigh Awards Update**

The Commission is investigating a new vision for the Sir Walter Raleigh Awards. The awards are an integral part of celebrating the built environment of Raleigh. Plans may include design discussions, updating award categories, etc. This will be an ongoing discussion.

#### **IV. ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS**

In February of 2013 the Commission moved its bimonthly meetings to the City Council Chambers in order to formalize both the site plan and zoning review process; and to televise the proceedings in order to help educate citizens on the value of good design and planning.

A beautiful Raleigh is a healthy Raleigh, and the Commission's ultimate goal is to encourage the use of the public realm by all of Raleigh's citizens through raising the bar for a long-term, high quality, sustainable appearance. The Raleigh 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 2012-13, to continue to encourage and promote the highest standards of development for the Capital City.

# 2013-14 WORK PROGRAM

## Raleigh Appearance Commission

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The Appearance Commission looks forward to continued professional service to the City of Raleigh in the coming year. We stand ready to address any special tasks initiated by the City Council, along with performing our usual duties of development review, engaging in community outreach, and pursuing major initiatives.

### I. MAJOR INITIATIVES

- Community Conversation on Design Excellence
- Downtown Waste Collection
- UDO Process Training
- Case Studies of the City's Unified Development Ordinance (UDO)

### II. REVIEW

- Site Plan Alternates (New UDO)
- Preliminary Site Plans and Zoning Cases (old Code)
- City Initiated Projects & Streetscapes

### III. OUTREACH

- 2013 Sir Walter Raleigh Awards for Community Appearance
- Community Conversation on Design Excellence Events

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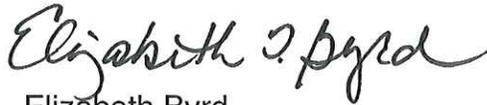
### ON-GOING SERVICE

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 pleasing urban form. It is unanimous within our group that sprawling parking lots, strip malls, covered streams, unbridled advertising, and car-focused development do not lead to a beautiful city. We want to see more people walking and bicycling, more greenways, all integrated with buildings, parks, and sustainable landscaping principles. These qualities make for a more beautiful—and livable—city. The Raleigh Appearance Commission stands ready to help make it happen.

We look forward to new service to City Council in the coming year, and eagerly await all tasks assigned.]

The Appearance Commission

Thank you for your support,



Elizabeth Byrd  
Chair



Bang Thanh Le, AIA  
Vice-Chair

