

# Preserving Neighborhood Character



A Community Conversation about Conservation and Growth!





# Welcome neighbors and fellow residents!



- I. Introduction
- II. Neighborhood Character, Pattern Books, & Conservation Districts
- III. Community Conversation
- IV. Stay Informed and Spread the News

This is an informal community gathering NOT a public meeting being held in association with any official business of the city.

Welcome! We are so glad to see so many of our neighbors, friends, familiar faces from the grocery store, and new ones in the crowd tonight. Thank you for taking the time to join HFFI in a discussion about the potential for Conservation District zoning in FXBG.

My name is Danae Peckler, and I am the Preservationist staff with HFFI. I am also a SOI-qualified Architectural Historian and Historian by trade who has worked in the academic, public, and private sectors of historic preservation. I also served on HFFI's Board of Directors for 7 years before I began working for the organization last fall.

For those who don't know much about HFFI, we are the sole City-wide advocacy organization for historic preservation in the region—established in 1955. We have a long track record in this field, and our mission is to protect, preserve, and revitalize the distinctive built environment of the Fredericksburg area.



# What does Historic Preservation (Heritage Conservation) do for you?

People care about older places for various reasons:

- They give our community a look, feel, and identity that's unique and meaningful.
- They tell the story of our community.
- They're interesting. They have stories. Often, they're part of our stories.
- They're the setting for our daily life and connect us to each other.
- They remind us that we belong to something bigger than ourselves.
- They spark emotions that we often can't describe but that affect us deeply.
- We take comfort in their familiarity.
- They're already here, and reusing what we have just makes sense.



What do you value about the built environment in your neighborhood?

What makes you want to live there or somewhere else?

What do you want to preserve within the community for future residents?

Preservation is a tool to make life better for people in different ways, connecting many important issues to the older and historic places we care about.

Conserving and reusing our existing building stock supports affordable housing, is good for the environment, plays an essential role in boosting the local economy, and can foster greater equity in planning for growth.



# "Distinct" Benefits of Older Neighborhoods

## GOALS FOR RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORHOODS AND HOUSING

### GOAL 1: NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTER

Preserve the character of the City's neighborhoods, by respecting and maintaining their functional design (sidewalks, alleys, street trees, etc.).

### GOAL 2: NEIGHBORHOOD QUALITY

Enhance the quality of the City's residential areas, to promote livability and a sense of community. Livability is defined as safe and walkable, with a variety of housing choices and ready access (walking, biking, transit, automobile) to work, shopping, and services.

### GOAL 3: DISTINCT AND ATTRACTIVE NEIGHBORHOODS

Ensure the residential areas of the City continue to comprise a collection of distinct and attractive neighborhoods, each possessing a sense of place, history, and shared identity.

### GOAL 4: ADEQUATE PUBLIC SERVICES AND FACILITIES

Ensure that residential neighborhoods are adequately served with efficient and multi-modal transportation, available parking, street trees, and public services.

### GOAL 5: ENHANCED CONNECTIONS

Support inclusive neighborhoods for the elderly and persons with disabilities, through multi-modal transportation that enhances connections between affordable and accessible housing, places of employment, other neighborhoods, and services.

### GOAL 6: COMPATIBLE DESIGN AND FUNCTIONALITY

Ensure that development and redevelopment is visually compatible with the overall character of the City as well as functional for all citizens, with visitability standards that ensure a basic level of access to all new housing, such as no-step entryways, wide hallways, and other features that allow homes to be adapted to persons with disabilities.

### GOAL 7: AFFORDABLE HOUSING

All persons who live and work in Fredericksburg should have the opportunity to rent or purchase safe, decent, and accessible housing within their means.

### GOAL 8: VARIETY OF HOUSING

Provide a variety of housing opportunities throughout the City that respect the character of the community.

### GOAL 9: HOMEOWNERSHIP

Encourage homeownership opportunities and seek to achieve a homeownership rate within the City of at least 40 percent.

### GOAL 10: HOUSING MAINTENANCE AND UPGRADE

Maintain and protect the City's housing stock, through proper enforcement of state and local codes, to ensure an adequate supply of housing that is safe and healthy.

## LIVABLE COMMUNITY

The city's older, well-established neighborhoods are the ideal and most efficient models of urban planning. They commonly have/are:

- Density at a human scale
- Walkable and accessible
- Diverse housing options
- Mixed property uses
- Visually attractive
- High-quality durable construction
- Mature trees and greenspace

The most densely populated part of town, FXBG's Historic District, covers just 0.5-square miles of the 10+ square miles in our city limits—roughly 1/20th of the town. The Historic District is not the only part of town with important history and cultural meaning in our community; yet it is the only place where the demolition of any building requires anything more than a single-page form and a soil test.

The College Terrace neighborhood contains 0.17 square miles. This is roughly the same area encompassed by the Mayfield, Canterbury, and residential section of Airport subdivisions.



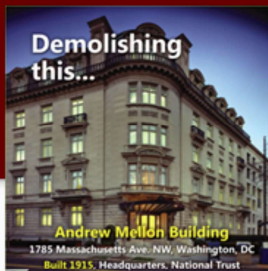
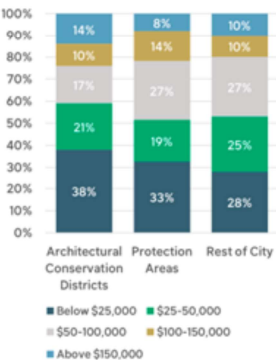
# Benefits of Preservation

“Older, Smaller, Better...”

- Economic
- Environmental
- Density
- Affordability
- Health and well-being



Household Income in Columbia, SC (2020)



**Preservation is Sustainability!**

- Promotes reuse & recycling
- Reduces landfill
- Saves embodied energy
- Creates local jobs



**Negates the benefits of recycling**

**78,000,000 aluminum cans**

**Fredericksburg**



Economic Benefits: Conserving and reusing historic places strengthens the local economy. It revives commercial areas, multiplies the economic effects of investment, creates jobs, supports small businesses, stabilizes property values, conserves resources, and attracts visitors and events. History sells!

- **Repairing and renovating historic places keeps money in the local economy and spends more on labor** than materials compared with new construction. It also generates and maintains well-paying local jobs.

- Property value increases: Even a modest degree of protection for the historic character of a district has repeatedly been shown to increase property values. Properties in designated local historic districts outperformed comparable properties outside of them on most every metric on a per square-foot basis. It is true that higher values usually mean higher property taxes. For those with modest resources or living on fixed incomes, that can create difficulties. Yet a rise in property values is an overall wealth enhancement, and the same studies have found this short-term cash flow problem is offset 40 to 67 times by increased wealth.
- Rehabilitations give property owners a marketing edge with buyers paying a premium for the property's unique features and stories.
- **Protecting local historic districts can enhance business recruitment**



**potential across the community.** Vibrant commercial cores and charming neighborhoods with character attract new business and quality industry.

Environmental Benefits: Preservation is conservation. It focuses more on the built environment than the natural one, but it often includes both!

- Modernizing existing buildings greatly reduces greenhouse gases, keeping tons of material out of landfills and reducing the need for new construction, which typically generates far more carbon emissions than conservation and reuse.
- Reusing buildings and making them more energy efficient plays an essential role in meeting goals for sustainability and climate resilience.
- Many older buildings—especially those built before WWII—were designed to be naturally efficient, with built-in ventilation, natural light, and durable materials.

Density: Older neighborhoods often have higher density than newer ones. The lots and units are typically smaller, and many have a mix of building types such as duplexes, fourplexes, rowhouses, and courtyard apartments. They may also have mixed uses and even ADUs.

- Older residential neighborhoods can add density through compatible additions and new construction. Tools such as conservation districts zoning can help guide new growth in these areas while keeping their distinct culture and identity.

Affordability and Housing Benefits: The most affordable house is already standing, was built more than 50 years ago, and is what some planners call “naturally occurring affordable housing” or NOAH.

- Older and smaller is often better.
- Most of the country’s existing affordable rental housing is unsubsidized, privately owned, and at risk. Rehabilitating our existing housing stock keeps these buildings safe and maintains greater affordability at a fraction of the cost of new construction.
- Size matters: Square footage plays a significant role in a property’s valuation as does age. Thus, larger newer houses can contribute to the displacement of lower income residents in older neighborhoods without some degree of conservation.
- Older neighborhoods are also home to what has been labeled “missing middle” housing—duplexes, triplexes, and small-scale apartments.



Health and Well-Being Benefits: Older places also support our emotional and psychological health in multiple ways.

- We form strong emotional bonds with the places that shape us and provide the backdrop for our daily lives
- We take comfort in their familiarity, from the human scale to their walkability.
- Older places remind us that we're part of something bigger, connecting us to our past and with each other.
- They are a vehicle for education—a tangible link to the past that can bring greater empathy and meaning to people's lives.
- Shared history fosters a greater sense of belonging and pride of place within the community.
- Losing a place that is important to us causes psychological harm—not unlike root shock in an uprooted plant.



# How do you measure neighborhood character when is it historic, and why does it matter?

An area's distinctiveness is characterized by the tangible features of its design and appearance.

Places with built/cultural features more than 50 years old may be "historic," if determined to have gained some significance within area history.

Identifying historic character creates an objective evidence base to make informed decisions about what we keep, how we care for it, and how we accommodate change while maintaining the distinctiveness of a place.

A quantifiable analysis of character includes information about:

- Historical development of an area
- Historical topography and natural setting
- Character of the streets and greenspaces
- Character of buildings (ages, types, and styles); forms and materials; details
- Historical associations (people, events, traditions)
- Archaeological potential
- Historic significance and integrity/authenticity



Historic character makes every place unique and contributes to its significance, especially for local people.

"The historic character of a place has been shaped by the activities of people over decades and even hundreds of years. The distinctive qualities of a place resulting from its history occur in wayssimilar to those that form the character of a person. These can include its origins and significant periods in its history— how and why it developed and changed.

The evidence-based analysis of an area's historic character can be used in many ways. It can inspire regeneration activity, planning, development, and design to help sustain the distinctiveness of a place. It can also help us to make informed decisions about what we keep, how we care for it, and how we accommodate change... Development and redevelopment, regeneration and renewal can each either reinforce or undermine character. But, when these activities take into account the historic character of a place —and not just individual components — they are more likely to have a positive impact on local distinctiveness" (–Managing Historic Character, Cadw, Wales).



# Celebrating Character: Pattern Books and Design Guidelines

Patterns books look like our district guidelines:

- Identify the distinctive features and patterns of an area
- Support the compatibility of new construction
- Prevent character loss

Pre-designed or templated architectural drawings can encourage compatible new infill



### Designing Sensitive Additions and New Buildings

#### Typical Lot Site Plan

Many lots in Del Ray are generally 50 feet by 100 feet. Some of the older platted lots are 25 feet by 100 feet and were combined to build a house.

When considering a project, determine building locations and required front, side and rear yard setbacks for new structures. In some instances a garage or shed can be placed one-foot from the property line.

#### About Building Height

The height and scale of a building make a difference in the visual appeal of the street and the comfortable relationship among neighboring buildings.

In general, the height of a building should be similar to others and not vary by more than twenty percent. In the example below, a one-story ranch with a shallow pitch roof does not fit well with large two-story houses.

#### About Building Setbacks, Front Porches and Doors

Buildings have required front, side and rear yards that must remain open. This provides a consistent building setback pattern along the street. Building does not disrupt the look of the neighborhood with development of the building yard setbacks open. help maintain complementary

New buildings should align with existing ones.

Designing Sensitive Additions and New Buildings



# What's the difference?



Designing Sensitive Additions and New Buildings

**Guiding Tips for New Infill Development**

1. New infill development should fit within the existing house and roof forms on the street. Look at height, proportions, repetitive patterns, etc.
2. New houses should be similar in placement, mass, and size, and complementary in materials and detailing.
3. A front porch is strongly encouraged and the front door threshold should align.

**Some Notes about Del Ray Home Building Patterns:**

**Placement:**  
Most Del Ray houses are oriented to the street with uniform setbacks and minimal side yards between the houses.

**Mass and Size:**  
Most Del Ray houses are 1 1/2 to 2 stories in height.

Generally, Del Ray houses are simple square or rectangular forms, with only a few scattered examples of more complex massing.

**Things to Consider in Designing a New Infill Building**

- Roof Pitch
- Building Height
- Architectural Style
- Architectural Detail
- Front Door Threshold
- Porch Detail

**Examples of Sensitive New Infill Construction in Del Ray**

Designing Sensitive New Buildings 57

Two of these images show local examples of new infill in the historic district and two are not. Can you spot the difference?

How does the architecture of the infill affect a pedestrian's experience and perception of the street?



# What Are Neighborhood Conservation Districts?

*Using preservation planning to navigate change, not stop it.*

A Conservation District (CD) is a planning tool for zoning an area of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance.

More than 35 states in the U.S. have adopted Neighborhood Conservation Districts (NCDs) in the last 20 years.

Local jurisdictions are increasingly turning to neighborhood conservation district programs to protect viable older neighborhoods from development pressures and other threats.

What can NCDs do:

- 1) Reduce demolition of "contributing" buildings
- 2) Increase awareness of neighborhood's history and character
- 3) Identify the distinctive characteristics valued by area residents
- 4) Support compatible new construction

What activities require approval in an NCD?

- 1) Demolition of contributing buildings
- 2) New infill construction within the area/neighborhood
- 3) Sizable additions that will be visible from the public right-of-way



# Neighborhood Conservation Districts in FXBG? (it's not a new idea)

Since the mid-1990s, the City's strategic and comprehensive plans have repeatedly acknowledged the need to steward and protect the unique character of FXBG's older neighborhoods.

Conservation districts have been discussed by City staff since 2017, but picked up steam after 2019.

This zoning tool is included in several small area plans.

These amendments are to both Chapter 10 and Chapter 11 of the 2015 Comprehensive Plan and will formally adopt the new small area plan for Planning Area 6. Completing the Area Plan for Small Area 6 advances Council Priority 2, Small Area Planning. In addition, both the general land use plan chapter as well as the Small Area Plan for Area 6 advance several other City Council Vision priorities.

## Neighborhoods

1. Protect existing neighborhoods by updating zoning to reflect neighborhood patterns. Where supported by the neighborhoods, pattern books and conservation districts could be applied to reflect the architectural integrity of the area. *(Priority 14, Zoning Ordinance);*
2. Create opportunities to incentivize affordable housing to enable families to live and work within their neighborhoods. *(Priority 33, Housing Plan);*
3. Improve walkability with safer Route 1 crossing points *(Priority 12, Pathways);*

Small Area 7 (2019)	Downtown: (College Terrace, Hanover Heights, Old Fairgrounds/Fair View, Rising Sun)
Area 6 (2020)	Elmhurst/Canal Quarter
Area 5 (2023-2024)	College Heights
Area 10 (2023-2024)	Lafayette Boulevard/Confederate Ridge
Area 8 (2024-2025)	Mayfield/Airport

In the 2015 Preservation Plan (aka Chapter 8 of the City's Comprehensive Plan), one of the 15 initiatives laid out included, "Work with neighborhoods that may not be appropriate for historic district designation, but whose character is worth preserving through overlay zoning or other conservation measures" (p.113).

In 2019, the Streetsense (the hired consultant's) plan for Small Area 7 (encompassing all of Downtown) recommends National Register District expansion, local expansion of the tax rehabilitation credit [phased exemption] program, Conservation Districts, and Pattern Books.

A February 2019 staff memo to City Council for Small Area 6 noted its advancement of several "vision" priorities, including the "updating of zoning regulations to reflect neighborhood patterns, which could be further supported by pattern books and conservation districts to reflect the architectural integrity of the area."

And more recently, multiple discussions at Planning Commission and public meetings about Small Areas 10 and 5 have routinely mentioned using Conservation District zoning for residential neighborhoods therein.



# How might NCDs work here?

Three general types of review govern NCD overlay:

- Neighborhood-level commission
- Administrative and Architectural Review Board review
- Hybrid approach

City must adopt ordinance to permit creation of NCD zoning.

Neighborhoods must organize to compile documentation supporting their specific design guidelines

Majority of property owners must approve or reject the overlay zone.

## Neighborhood/Character Conservation Districts

Neighborhood Conservation Districts (NCD) are a planning tools commonly used to preserve distinct neighborhood characteristics threatened by new development. NCDs vary from jurisdiction but there are two basic categories: Historic Preservation Model/Historic Preservation Lite and Neighborhood Planning Tool. They are both usually established as an overlay-district rather than change to a base-zone.

### Historic Preservation Model/ Historic Preservation Lite

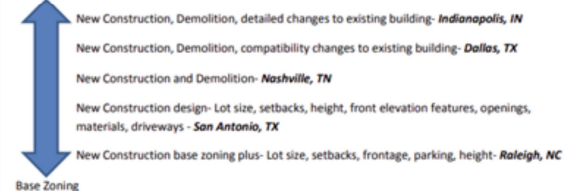
- Reviewed by Historic Commission and Historic Preservation Staff
- Nomination process with contributing/non-contributing
- Standards and Guidelines for all work
- Review of Demolition
- Often more flexibility to a historic districts

### Neighborhood Planning Tool

- Typically concerned with preventing wholesale demolition
- Preserving the use character
- Managing scale of new construction
- Not overly concerned with materials or architectural details
- Reviewed by Zoning Staff and if appeals allowed goes to a board/commission
- Often some additional land use regulations (ie placement or prohibition of parking lots)

While most Neighborhood Conservation Districts can be broken up into one of the two categories there is a spectrum of the level and amount of review and guidelines/standards that they must follow.

### Historic District



FXBG is using Charlottesville's ordinance as a model because it has been legally tested in Virginia courts. Charlottesville established its first NCD in 2009. Today, three residential neighborhoods are covered by such zoning.

The character of the neighborhood and relevant design guidelines may be reflected in a customized Pattern Book, but its worth noting that Charlottesville doesn't have any patten books. Rather, its NCD guidelines reference/use the same guidelines included in the architectural control district that apply to the specific architectural features each NCD's residents have chosen to protect/regulate.



## Save the Date!

City Council's Work Session on Oct. 22 will include a presentation by the City's Preservation Planner, Kate Schwartz, outlining the potential for NCDs in FXBG

What can you do to support Conservation District (CD) zoning in FXBG?

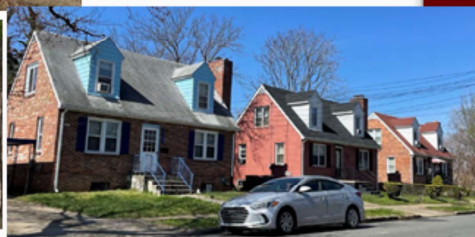
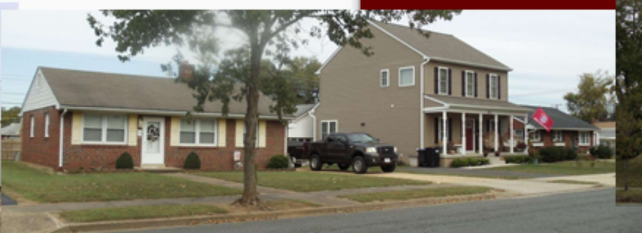
- Tell your city councilors of your interest in CDs
- Share your thoughts on preserving neighborhood character with Planning staff ASAP during Comprehensive Plan revision process
- Talk about Conservation District zoning with your neighbors and engage your neighborhood association in the discussion

Please be sure to complete our public input survey form and add your contact information email to the list to stay in touch with HFFI on this subject

Post-presentation addition—link to City Council meeting recordings to watch the October 22 discussion about NCDs: <https://www.regionalwebtv.com/fredcc>



What have we got to lose?



Historic character is what makes every place unique and contributes to its significance, especially for local people. It has so many benefits for our economy, environment, dense and affordable housing stock, physical health and mental well-being, civic pride, and sense of place.

The historic character of Fredericksburg's neighborhoods is what sets them apart from Anywhere, USA, and it's well worth preserving and conserving for present and future generations in our City.



Thanks for coming!

Questions?



*"To preserve, protect and revitalize the distinctive historic environment and cultural resources of the Fredericksburg area."*

*Preservation isn't the sole solution to pressing local issues, but we can't resolve them without it.*

*We can't build our way out of the housing crisis or bulldoze our way out of climate change.*

*We need to use every tool we have, including our existing places and infrastructure.*