

IN THE DISTRICTS

A newsletter published by the Raleigh Historic Districts Commission

Volume II, Issue 1 • Winter/Spring 1996

■ GUIDELINES

Landscaping in the Districts

In preservation, context is a crucial concern. While the commission's efforts most often involve maintaining building integrity, an equally important consideration is the building's larger environment—those features that comprise the landscape.

History provides a solid basis for assessing new landscape proposals. Victorian yards typically featured manicured lawns, edged by showy, formal flower beds with specimen trees and shrubs providing bold focal points. As the 20th century dawned, less labor-intensive, more naturalistic designs came into vogue. Utility joined beauty (e.g., fruit trees used as ornaments), with an emphasis on minimal maintenance (more ground covers and perennials).

Other landscaping concepts have remained relatively constant. Front yards are considered more decorative (public), and backyards more utilitarian (private). The architectural styling of outbuildings usually echoes that of their associated houses. Street trees and the neighborhood tree "canopy" have always been highly valued, for both their aesthetic and cooling properties.

The RHDC's *Guidelines and Standards for*

Rehabilitation acknowledges historical precedent while leaving room for contemporary innovation. For example, 6-foot, treated-lumber privacy fences have been approved, but only in back

or side yards, thereby maintaining the traditional openness of front yard space.

Recently

the commission adopted new procedures for reviewing Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) applications involving landscaping. Large-scale proposals (e.g., changes to more than 25% of a front yard or 50% of the sides

and back) will now be reviewed by the COA Committee, thereby bringing them to public hearing. Smaller-scale landscaping projects will remain Minor Work, which are reviewed by staff.

A copy of the revised COA list is available for the asking from the RHDC office. As always, if you are considering (con't. on p.3)



*E. Jones Street, Oakwood H. D. (above);
S. Boylan Avenue, Boylan Heights H. D. (below).*



The Guidelines acknowledge historical precedent while allowing innovation.

■ PROFILE

Capitol Square Historic District: Stability and Change

Established in 1976, Capitol Square is Raleigh's third locally-designated historic district. It encompasses not only the state's most historic government buildings, but also many of the city's oldest properties, some of which are individually listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Two properties—the 1840 State Capitol and 1854 Christ Episcopal Church—are designated as National Historic Landmarks. The area just east of Blount Street, along New Bern Avenue, includes a significant collection of late-18th century and 19th century residences; a series of historic church complexes fills much of the area west of the capitol.



The 1840 State Capitol forms the heart of the historic district.

Yet even such steadfast institutional structures are subject to change. Groundbreaking for the new \$30 million Museum of Natural Sciences, which will adjoin the Agriculture Building, the museum's present location, took place last fall. In addition, two government properties on Salisbury Street—the old Education Building and old Revenue Building—are now undergoing extensive renovation, readying both historic structures for a new century of service to the people of North Carolina. ■

The district encompasses historic government buildings and many of the City's oldest properties.

■ UPDATE

The RHDC publication *Culture Town: Life in Raleigh's African American Communities* can now be purchased at many local bookstores. The award-winning book is available at the shop at the North Carolina Museum of History, Quail Ridge Books, Blacknificent Books and More, Village Book & Stationery, and

Barnes & Noble at Crabtree Valley Mall. Copies can also be purchased at Nubian Books, the shop at Mordecai Historic Park, the Raleigh City Museum, Simon of Cyrene Christian Book Store, and Wellington's Books in Cary.

The culmination of the RHDC's African American Studies Project, *Culture Town* blends oral and architectural history to trace the development of eight Raleigh neighborhoods. Included are the recollections of dozens of long-time residents, plus more than 160 illustrations, including rare family photos. The hardcover book is also available from the RHDC office.

■ TECH

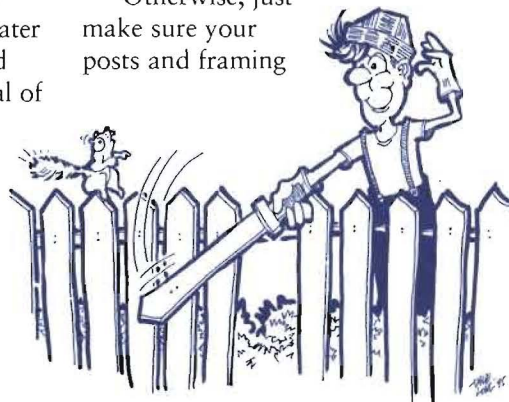
CORNER

Q. There may be a fence in my yard's future. What construction details should I keep in mind?

A. As with any structure, the primary goal is protection from the elements. The greater longevity of pressure-treated lumber makes it the material of choice for wood fences. The trick is to minimize potentially-damaging conditions. When setting posts into postholes, for instance, always seat the ends on gravel, then secure them with a concrete collar. Cupping

them in concrete will only invite water pooling and rot. Also, if you want to paint your fence, assure good paint bonding by letting the wood dry out a season or two before applying a primer/sealer. (If you want to paint right away, buy treated lumber that has been kiln-dried *after* being treated.)

Otherwise, just make sure your posts and framing



are substantial enough for the job at hand. But don't overdo it either. Match the type of fence to the overall need. Is it to keep in pets? Provide privacy? Dress up the yard? In any case, "keep it simple" should be the guiding rule.

For front yards (which are essentially part of the public streetscape) low, decorative fences are appropriate. Backyards, due to their more private setting, can feature taller, more utilitarian fences (typically wood or woven wire but *not* chain link).

Remember, though, that traditionally, historic district yards were largely open to each other. In siting, size, and choice of materials, consider your neighbors. Other maxims aside, a good "de-fence" usually provides the least offense. ■

**Commission Members:
On Task**

In addition to their commission duties, RHDC members are often called upon to serve on specialized city task forces. These ad hoc groups typically address larger design and land use issues which may impact historic resources.

The past year offers diverse examples. Last winter, RHDC members assisted in the development of the Blount-Halifax Small Area Plan, a Planning Department study seeking to chart that neighborhood's future. The plan looks to minimize development pressure on the Blount Street and Oakwood Historic Districts, while encouraging adaptive use of the Pilot Mill property, a designated Raleigh Historic Landmark.

Commission members also provided guidance to the downtown Bridge Replacement Project, with the goal of balancing the need to raise the West Morgan and Hillsborough Street bridges (to accommodate future high-speed rail service underneath) with preserving historic views of the State Capitol.

Design advice was also given to the Downtown Visibility Task Force and to the Community Development Department's Housing Prototype Committee. The former group has developed a unified directional signage system for downtown services and destinations. Trial signs are now being tested. The latter has assisted in the development of single-family affordable housing, designed to be architecturally compatible with surrounding historic East Raleigh neighborhood. The three basic models each feature a front porch, rear deck, and historical detailing.

■ WITHIN THE

COMMISSION

City Revolving Fund Helps Save Oberlin Home

Local preservation quietly but dramatically entered a new era last fall. Thanks to the efforts of the RHDC, the city's new revolving fund for historic preservation was utilized for the first time, to aid in the stabilization and renovation of a landmark Raleigh home.

The Plummer T. Hall house, a Queen Anne style cottage, dates from the early days of Oberlin, a community established by freed

African Americans after the Civil War. In mounting the home's renovation, the RHDC was joined by a coalition of public and private preservation and housing groups, including the city Community Development

Department, Preservation North Carolina, and Capital Area Preservation. Thanks to these combined efforts, work on the property is expected to be completed later this spring.

The city's preservation revolving fund was established in 1991 as an



emergency reserve for rescuing historic resources. Through the fund, cash loans are made to non-profit preservation organizations; in return, renovation work is carried out to federal preservation standards, and permanent protective covenants are attached to the historic property.

The house renovation closely follows the adoption of the Oberlin Village Neighborhood Plan, which aims at maintaining the low-rise nature of the community's remaining residential areas. The RHDC helped provide the impetus for the plan's development by the city Planning Department, petitioning the City Council to authorize its preparation. ■

The effort marks the first time the revolving fund has been applied.

(con't. from p.1)· landscape work involving a historic district property, remember the RHDC staff can readily provide guidance. ■

FURTHER READING (available in the commission library):

Kunst, Scott L. "Post-Victorian Landscapes and Gardens," *Old House Journal*, April, 1986; pp. 128-135.

Scott, Frank J. *Victorian Gardens Part I: Suburban Home Grounds* (1870; reprinted by American Life Foundation; Watkins Glen, NY: 1982).

Weishan, Michael. "Planting Around a Victorian Foundation," *Old House Journal*, January/February, 1996; pp. 24-26.



Raleigh Community Development Dept.'s new housing prototypes.

■ AROUND THE RHDC

RHDC Meetings

RHDC Business meetings:

2/20; 3/19; 4/16; 5/21; 6/18; 7:30 AM,
Rm. 305, Avery C. Upchurch Govt. Complex

Certificate of Appropriateness Comm.:

Application deadline & meeting date:
2/19 for 3/4; 3/18 for 4/1; 4/22 for 5/6;
5/17 for 6/3; 6/17 for 7/1; 4:00 PM,
Rm. 305, Avery C. Upchurch Govt. Complex

Public Relations/Education Comm.:

2/15; 3/21; 4/18; 5/16; 6/20; 8:30 AM,
Rm. 317, Avery C. Upchurch Govt. Complex

Research Committee:

2/1; 3/7; 4/4; 5/2; 6/6; 12:00 Noon,
Rm. 317, Avery C. Upchurch Govt. Complex

Contacts

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Boylan Heights Association:	
Rhonda Maurer, Pres.	834-6991
Downtown Raleigh Development Corporation:	832-1231

■ CASE IN POINT

Buildings on the Move

If circumstances prevent preserving a building in place, the second-best option is relocation. It's a rare occasion, however—and a big project—that calls for moving not one but five historic structures.

Last December, as part of the construction of the Western Boulevard Extension, the city trucked two endangered Dorothea Dix Hospital properties over Rocky Branch and up the campus hill, to join a group of existing offices and residential facilities. The two-story doctor's house and bungalow-style gatekeeper's cottage were first underpinned with I-beams, raised off their foundations, set on wheels, and finally hauled to their new locations outside the boulevard's right-of-way. Still to come is the moving of three frame bungalows further west on Dorothea Drive by a private contractor.



■ A B R O A D E R

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Within Wake County, more than two dozen non-profit and governmental organizations are involved in preservation activities. Their interests are diverse—from researching antiques to providing municipal preservation planning. At times, however, conditions call for collec-

tive action. To improve communication and coordinate group efforts, the Preservation Roundtable of Wake County was established in 1994.

Twice a year, the roundtable hosts a county-wide gathering for discussing local preservation issues. The spring meeting emphasizes education on a current topic; the fall meeting has more of a social focus. Both events include guest speakers and updates on the recent activi-

ties of individual organizations.

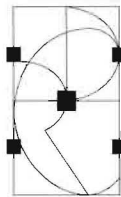
The next Preservation Roundtable meeting will be held on March 30, 1996, at the Page-Walker Hotel in Cary. The theme for the event will be "Strategies and Partnerships for Preservation Success"; attendance is open to all. For details, contact Robin Quinn, Program Committee Chair, at 856-6327.

COA Tally

Major work (comm. review):	Sept 95	Oct 95	Nov 95	Dec 95*
Approved as submitted		2	2	-
Approved w/conditions	3	3	-	-
Denied		1	-	-
Withdrawn			1	-
Minor work (staff aprvd.):	15	7	12	13

*NOTE: no major work applications rec'd in Dec.

Staff support for the RHDC is provided by the City of Raleigh Planning Department



RALEIGH HISTORIC DISTRICTS COMMISSION

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The mission of the RHDC is to serve as City Council's official historic preservation advisory body to identify, preserve, protect and educate the public about Raleigh's historic resources.