



PRESERVATION

2020 - 2021

Report on the State of Historic
Preservation in the City of Knoxville

2020-2021 HISTORIC ZONING COMMISSIONERS

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STATE OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION IN THE CITY OF KNOXVILLE, 2020-2021

Executive Summary

The City's Charter, as amended in 2002, requires that a report on the state of historic preservation within the City of Knoxville be reviewed by the Knoxville-Knox County Planning Commission and presented to the mayor. This report covers two years of historic preservation activities within the City: 2020 and 2021.

The purpose of this report is to highlight historic preservation activities within the City. The topics covered include general City initiatives in historic preservation, a summary of Historic Zoning Commission activity, and action items for the following years.

MAJOR PRESERVATION INITIATIVES FROM 2020-2021 INCLUDE:

- Adapting to constraints of COVID-19 pandemic
- Completion of the Oakwood Overlay Report
- Programmatic Agreement project reviews
- Support for the City of Knoxville's Historic Preservation Fund
- Design review by the Historic Zoning Commission and staff

2020 – 2021 Historic Preservation Initiatives

COVID-19 ADAPTATIONS

The onset of the global COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020 called for rapid changes to administrative routines and public meeting practices. The City of Knoxville zoning ordinance requires the Historic Zoning Commission to grant certificates of appropriateness within thirty days of receiving a complete application, effectively requiring a monthly meeting if any Commission-level applications have been received. To adapt, Knoxville-Knox County Planning (Planning) implemented new application processes, including digital applications, an online application tracking system, and an online or phone-based payment system. From late March 2020 through April 2021, Governor Bill Lee issued a series of emergency orders permitting virtual public meetings. The Historic Zoning Commission met virtually for one year, holding the monthly public meeting via Zoom Webinar from April 2020 to April 2021. Despite being unable to gather in-person, the Historic Zoning Commission continued to serve property owners, residents, and community members without interruption.

OAKWOOD OVERLAY REPORT

A primary action item identified in the previous *Preservation Annual Report* (2020, covering 2018-2019), was “supporting the ongoing historic or neighborhood conservation overlay process for the Oakwood neighborhood.” Planning staff revised draft guidelines in response to community input and held another public meeting in January 2020. A follow-up meeting was scheduled for late March 2020, but was cancelled due to the pandemic. This gave staff and neighborhood proponents of the overlay an opportunity to step back, review the extensive public outreach completed over the last four years, and identify goals moving forward. Planning staff prepared an *Oakwood Overlay Report*, which provides an overview of research, public outreach, and preservation planning efforts in the neighborhood. The report also summarizes a 2019 architectural survey and ultimately recommends a neighborhood conservation (NC) overlay for Oakwood. The NC overlay would serve as an incremental approach to preservation in Oakwood, providing less restrictive guidelines than an historic overlay, while ensuring that future development is respectful of the neighborhood’s unique character. Planning will continue to support the neighborhood as they seek the most appropriate preservation tool to maintain Oakwood’s unique character.

PROGRAMMATIC AGREEMENT

Under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, federal agencies (or local agencies using federal funding) must take into account any effect the project may have on historic properties. Section 106 Review is a consultative process between the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), agencies receiving federal funding, and any other consulting parties, and must be completed for each property that is over forty-five years old. The City of Knoxville’s Housing and Neighborhood Development utilizes HUD funding to complete hundreds of small-scale rehabilitation projects per year, and due to the nature of the City’s housing stock, many of these houses are over forty-five years old. The time required to submit individual requests for review to the SHPO for each property can cause significant delays in these necessary projects. In early 2020, Planning staff coordinated a Programmatic

Agreement between the City of Knoxville, the SHPO, and the federal Advisory Council on Historic Preservation. The Programmatic Agreement was effective on May 5, 2020.

The Programmatic Agreement (PA) streamlines the review process by delegating most reviews to the Historic Preservation Planner, instead of requiring all projects to be submitted to the SHPO. The Historic Preservation Planner reviews the property to receive rehabilitation and the scope of work proposed, alongside the property’s status on the National Register of Historic Places and the activities considered “exempt” under the PA. If a project is determined to be exempt under the PA, it may move forward without further review. Common exempt projects include roof replacements, HVAC repair and replacement, and interior accessibility modifications. Projects which are frequently not exempt include lead-based paint remediation (which typically involves replacement or encapsulation of original features) and new exterior ramps.

Planning staff maintains records of each property reviewed, its historic status, the scope of work, and determination. Planning staff also prepares and submits an Annual Report to the SHPO on behalf of the City of Knoxville. Overall, this process results in a more efficient use of HUD funds, City time, and allows more homeowners to receive assistance for critical home repair projects. The Programmatic Agreement will remain in effect until May 2025, at which point it may be extended, modified, or terminated, upon review by the City of Knoxville, Planning, and the SHPO.

A breakdown of the total projects reviewed under the PA is below.

Time period	Total reviews	Exempt	Not exempt
May - June 2020	30	23	7
July 2020 - June 2021	259	155	104
July - December 2021	121	72	49

HISTORIC PRESERVATION FUND

Mayor Madeline Rogero created the Historic Preservation Fund (HPF) with an initial commitment of \$500,000 in the 2014-2015 budget. City Council funded additional annual sums of \$500,000 each year, up until pandemic-induced adjustments to the budgets in 2020 and 2021. For perspective, the \$500,000 funding amount is almost double what the Tennessee Historical Commission (the SHPO) receives from the federal Historic Preservation Fund and must spread throughout the entire state. The HPF is intended to help fill financing gaps for rehabilitation of historic properties within city limits. The HPF has successfully provided financial support for a wide array of historic residential and commercial rehabilitation projects. A major benefit of this fund is its flexibility; the HPF is not held to the same stringent federal standards for eligible properties as the State’s funding, so properties that are considered “eligible” for either local historic overlays or the National Register of Historic Places can qualify for assistance. This allows a broad array of properties to access funding.

In 2020, Mayor Kincannon and the City Council were forced to make major budgetary adjustments due to the pandemic. The Historic Preservation Fund did not receive a new round of funding in the 2020/2021 budget. Moreover, supply chain issues, the rising cost of construction materials, and labor

challenges have forced many larger projects to pause. However, some projects were awarded funding in January 2020 and have moved forward successfully. At the Bijou Theatre, the HPF supported new period-appropriate exterior canopies, electrical repair, and masonry repair.

Planning staff assists in the evaluation of properties' eligibility for the HPF, review of grant applications, and offers technical assistance and design review for ongoing projects, especially those within local historic overlays. Knoxville's Historic Preservation Fund is a statewide model for a successful local preservation grant program, and stands as a unique example of local support for historic properties. Planning staff encourages the continued funding and development of this program.

Historic Zoning Commission Design Review

Local historic zoning is the primary method of protecting a neighborhood's historic features. The creation of local historic districts and related design guidelines have been used to encourage community revitalization in Knoxville for almost thirty years. In 1991, residents of Mechanicsville joined forces to create the city's first residential H historic district overlay. Old North Knoxville followed suit in 1992. These districts were followed by Edgewood-Park City (1997), Fourth and Gill (1999), and Market Square (2001). A small section of Lyons View Pike received H designation in 2002. Another form of overlay zoning, designed to protect historic buildings from demolition and ensure new construction is compatible with the existing area, is called a Neighborhood Conservation Overlay (NC). The NC overlay protects the existing character of Tazewell Pike (est. 2000), Fort Sanders (2000), Fairmont Park (2002), sections of Scenic Drive in Sequoyah Hills (2006), and Gobbler's Knob/Sherrod Road in South Knoxville (2008).

The Knoxville Historic Zoning Commission (HZC) is a quasi-legislative board of nine members, appointed by the Mayor and subject to confirmation by City Council. Under Tennessee's state legislation, one member must be an architect, one must represent a local patriotic or historical organization, and the remainder are members of the community who have interest or experience in preservation. Members serve five-year terms.

The HZC meets monthly to review applications for Certificates of Appropriateness (COAs) within Knoxville's H and NC overlays, requests for designation as new H or NC overlays, and nominations to the National Register of Historic Places. The HZC is expected to review relevant design guidelines, visit properties under review, and read reports on each project prepared by Planning staff. To support the HZC and the City's broader preservation initiatives, Planning employs a professional planner with a focus in historic preservation. This planner is tasked with accepting and processing applications for COAs, reviewing projects for conformance with neighborhood design guidelines, preparing staff reports on each project, and supporting HZC meetings.

Certificates of Appropriateness (COAs) serve as documentation of the proposed scope of work's conformance with the relevant design guidelines, and completion of the design review process. COAs must be received before building or demolition permits can be issued. Planning staff may issue some COAs without Commission review for minor work, including repair to historic elements or replacement of some features with features of identical material and design (in-kind), along with other scopes of work which clearly meet the design guidelines. Staff-issued COAs are described as Level I. All other

scopes of work are reviewed by the Historic Zoning Commission. Level II projects include major repair or replacement of architectural features, additions to an existing building, and construction of accessory structures. Level III projects review construction of a new primary building. Level IV reviews demolition or relocation of a contributing structure.

Workshops with the HZC are a helpful tactic for future applicants proposing new construction to gather comments from the Commission prior to submitting a formal application. Workshops are typically scheduled for the end of a regular monthly meeting and come at no cost to the applicant. In 2020, the HZC held seven pre-application workshops. Seven more workshops occurred in 2021.

A breakdown of the different Levels of Review in COAs issued in 2020 and 2021 is below.

Level of Review	2020 COAs	2021 COAs
Level I	55	40
Level II	47	38
Level III	5	6
Level IV	1	0
TOTAL	108	84

Certificates of Appropriateness (COAs) issued in 2020 and 2021 are broken down below by district.

District	2020 COAs	2021 COAs
Old North Knoxville (H)	29	26
4 th & Gill (H)	24	17
Individual H Landmarks	18	10
Edgewood-Park City (H)	13	11
Market Square (H)	8	9
Fort Sanders (NC)	9	4
Tazewell Pike (NC)	3	1
Scenic Drive (NC)	1	3
Fairmont-Emoriland (NC)	2	0
Mechanicsville (H)	1	2
Sherrod Road/Gobblers Knob (NC)	0	1
Lyons View Pike (H)	0	0
TOTAL	108	84

Featured Properties

The following section explores preservation progress in 2020 and 2021 at historic properties and neighborhoods within the City of Knoxville. These properties represent success stories in rehabilitation, new construction, and adaptive re-use, or represent opportunities for improvement.

South High School | 835 Tipton Avenue | Complete



After sitting vacant for more than two decades followed by a multi-year rehabilitation project, South High Senior Living opened in July 2020. The one-story, brick masonry building was designed by Charles Barber, constructed in 1937, and operated as a junior and senior high school until 1991. After acquiring the property via the demolition by neglect ordinance in 2015, the City requested proposals for the building's reuse. Dover Development started rehabilitation in 2017, converting the building to an assisted living and memory care facility with approximately sixty rooms.

Hull-Dobbs Ford, Fountain City | 4683 Old Broadway | Rehabilitated



The automobile showroom building at 4683 Old Broadway was opened as a “Fountain City branch” of the Hull-Dobbs Ford dealership originally located at 835 N. Central Street (now Axle Logistics, another historic overlay property). The building was constructed in 1951 with a barrel roof, steel bow trusses inside the showroom space, and a glass-paned storefront façade characteristic of midcentury car dealerships. The building served a number of auto-related uses until 2016, but it was structurally deteriorated and enclosed with a number of non-historic alterations. Doug White purchased the building, placed a landmark historic overlay on the property in January 2020, and began an extensive rehabilitation campaign. The historic overlay allowed the owners to craft an adaptive re-use and rehabilitation respectful of the building’s historic features, without making costly floodplain-related updates. 4683 Old Broadway opened as On Broadway Event Center in November 2021.

Pryor Brown Garage | 322 W. Church Avenue | At Risk



Constructed around 1929, Pryor Brown Garage is among the earliest parking garage structures still extant in the United States, and one of Knoxville's earliest examples of mixed-use buildings. Pryor Brown is also an example of a local landmark whose historic significance and unique nature may be obscured by the modest exterior and current condition. Pryor Brown Garage is of the few historic properties downtown with no plan for redevelopment, and the structure continues to deteriorate. The City closed off sections of Market Street and Church Avenue in September 2021 after a citizen reported cracks in the exterior wall. The northwest corner of the roof has collapsed, leading to substantial cracks in the masonry parapet. Adaptive reuse of the garage, including the ground-floor retail space, could be a creative element of a redevelopment project on the entire block.

Cal Johnson Building | 301 State Street | Complete



The Cal Johnson building is named for a Knoxville businessman who was born into a family of enslaved persons in 1844 and rose to prominence as a saloon owner, politician, and owner of a horse racing track. Johnson constructed the building in 1898. An historic overlay was placed on the building in 2016, and the City provided financial support for rehabilitation through the Historic Preservation Fund and a PILOT agreement. Conversion Properties also successfully used federal historic tax credits. In June 2020, the building reopened as eight high-end residential apartments and a ground-floor commercial space.

Kress Building | 417 S. Gay Street | In Progress



The c.1925 Kress Building received new owners in fall 2020 and extensive rehabilitation work commenced soon afterwards. The building, which has been under-utilized for several decades, will ultimately host a coffee shop and cocktail bar on the first floor, with office or residential space located on upper levels. The Kress Building is emblematic of the flexibility of historic commercial buildings, which can accommodate a wide array of uses.

Infill Housing Overlay | Lonsdale, Edgewood Park, Oakwood-Lincoln Park



The Infill Housing (IH) overlay was established between 2005 and 2007 to protect the existing neighborhood character of Lonsdale, Edgewood Park, and Oakwood-Lincoln Park. While these neighborhoods may not be eligible for (or interested in) historic or neighborhood conservation overlays, all three demonstrate consistent housing patterns and lot sizes. The IH overlay demonstrates Knoxville’s commitment to preserving the character of older neighborhoods populated by modestly-sized, affordable houses and many vacant lots. In 2020, design review within the IH overlay moved from a staff committee to the Design Review Board. This change allows Planning staff to provide thorough guidance to applicants in advance of formal meetings and delegates design review to an appointed board of design professionals and neighborhood advocates. New construction on vacant lots in the overlay ballooned in 2021: the Design Review Board reviewed 33 new primary structures and 25 additional cases (such as additions, secondary structures, and subdivision plats). The IH overlay is a vital tool to support historic neighborhoods on a smaller scale.

Summary and Action Items for 2022

As demonstrated in the previous sections, the City of Knoxville has a wide variety of tools at hand to achieve success with historic properties. From design review by the Historic Zoning Commission, to federal designation on the National Register of Historic Places, to partnering with non-profits such as Knox Heritage, the City of Knoxville has support for preservation initiatives on local, state, and federal levels. The City Historic Preservation fund is flexible, well-funded, and accommodating to a wide array of projects. Federal tax rehabilitation credits are another option for financial support for properties listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Finally, designation of historic places on a local level via historic or neighborhood conservation overlays can connect property owners with the expertise of the Historic Zoning Commission during design review.

In 2022, Planning staff aims to support historic preservation for our existing local districts through design review, HZC operations, and supporting neighborhoods or properties interested in new designation. Planning staff continues to work with neighborhoods on updating design guideline documents, many of which were written over two decades ago. Another continuing goal for 2022 is training for the HZC and staff to keep the Commission informed on best practices. Action items are listed below.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION ACTION ITEMS FOR 2022:

- Finalize revisions and adopt update of Edgewood-Park City Design Guidelines
- Continue update process for Old North Knoxville Design Guidelines
- Study potential establishment of a historic or neighborhood conservation zoning overlay for the Gibbs Drive neighborhood
- Coordinate trainings and continued education for City Historic Zoning Commission

APRIL 2022

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