



# Community Character

## What is Community Character?

A community's character is defined by a number of tangible and intangible elements such as historical events, the residents, and unique assets like beautiful environmental features or a special attraction. A community's character is also defined by components of the built environment including land use, design, and transportation. To assess the character of your community's built environment consider the following:

1. What types of land uses (residential, commercial, institutional) are present in your community?
2. Where are the land uses located in relation to one another? For example, are residential uses separate from or mixed among nonresidential uses?
3. How tall are the buildings throughout your community? Are buildings taller in one location versus another? (HEIGHT)
4. Are buildings setback from or built close to the street? (SETBACK & BUILD-TO-LINE)
5. Are buildings spaced close together or far apart from one another? (SPACING & YARDS)
6. Do buildings face or front the major streets, rear alleys or other buildings? (ORIENTATION)
7. Do the majority of buildings include specific features like a front porch or a front-loading garage? (ARCHITECTURAL FEATURES)
8. How wide are the majority of streets? Do the streets permit two-way or one-way traffic? (STREETS)

9. Is there on-street parking along the streets? Where is the majority of parking permitted (Private driveways, parking lots located between buildings and the street, parking lots located behind or to the side of buildings)? (PARKING)

10. Are there sidewalks along one or both sides of the street? How wide are the sidewalks? (SIDEWALKS)

11. Does the streetscape include a hardscaped amenity zone or a grassy planting strip? (BUFFERS)

## Historic Preservation

Historic Preservation is one of the most well-known tools for protecting community character. It is the practice of protecting and preserving sites, structures, or districts which reflect elements of local or national cultural, social, economic, political, archaeological or architectural history. In other words, historic preservation protects places (typically 50+ years old) that contribute to a community's distinctiveness and character. It protects places that give communities a sense of identity, history, and authenticity - all of which are an important competitive advantage for today's economy.

### Preservation at the National Level

The National Register of Historic Places, administered by the National Park Service, is the nation's official list of districts, sites, buildings, structures and objects deemed worthy of preservation. Income producing properties listed on the National Register may qualify for a 20% tax incentive in exchange for preserving the site. The City of Charlotte currently has seven neighborhoods listed on the National Register:

- Croft
  - Elizabeth
  - North Charlotte
  - Pharrsdale
  - W. Morehead St. Industrial District
  - Dilworth\*
  - Wesley Heights\*
  - Hermitage Court\*
- \* Designated as both National Register Historic District and Local Historic District

The National Trust for Historic Preservation is a non-profit advocacy organization that protects and celebrates America's history. The Trust is a great resource for information about historic properties as well as guidance for saving your community's historic places.

## **Preservation at the State & Local Level**

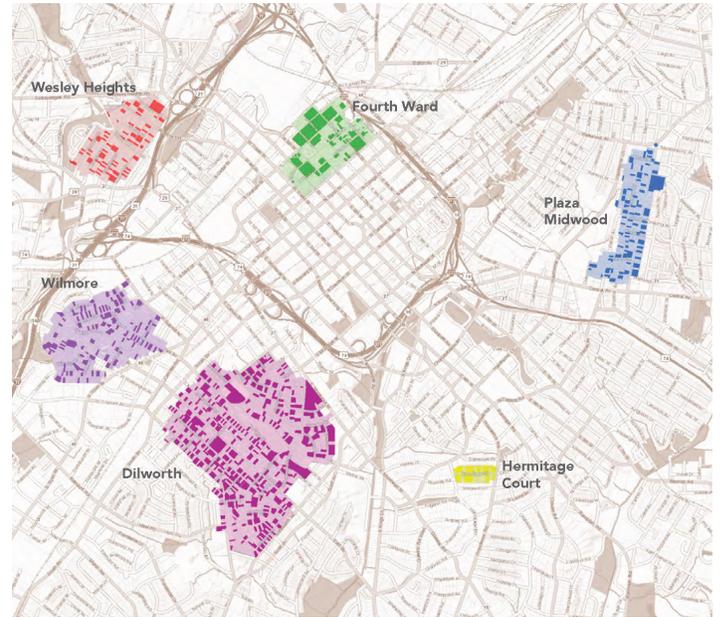
Similar to the national level, North Carolina has a government department, the North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), that assists with the identification, evaluation, protection and enhancement of significant properties within our state. Both income producing and residential historic properties are eligible for state tax incentives. North Carolina also have a state-wide non-profit advocacy organization, Preservation North Carolina, which helps place protective covenants on properties and maintains a database of historic properties available for purchase.

At the local level, Charlotte has two municipal agencies that oversee historic properties. The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission (HLC), a county agency, oversees the nomination and preservation of individual sites. HLC also has a revolving fund to purchase properties and apply protective covenants before reselling them. The Charlotte Historic Districts Commission (HDC), a city agency, oversees nomination and preservation of local historic districts. The designation of both individual sites and historic districts must be approved by the Charlotte City Council. The Charlotte Museum of History is the local non-profit advocacy organization responsible for promoting and celebrating Charlotte's history.

## **Charlotte Historic Districts**

In Charlotte, historic districts are designated by an act of City Council through the rezoning process, after public review and comment. Once approved, the designation functions as a zoning overlay and exterior changes to a structure within the district are subject to the Historic District Design Guidelines and review by the

Charlotte Historic Districts Commission and staff. The Commission is a body of citizens appointed by the Mayor and City Council to administer the guidelines, as outlined by the Charlotte Zoning Ordinance.



*Above: Charlotte's six historic districts include Fourth Ward, Dilworth, Plaza Midwood, Wesley Heights, Wilmore, and Hermitage Court.*

Alterations eligible for staff review include:

1. Rear additions (neither taller nor wider than the existing structure and less than 50% increase in square footage)
2. Accessory buildings
3. Restoration
4. Fences/Walls
5. Decks/Patios
6. Windows/Doors
7. Mechanical Units
8. Tree Removal (Dead)
9. Landscaping

Alterations that require review by the Commission include:

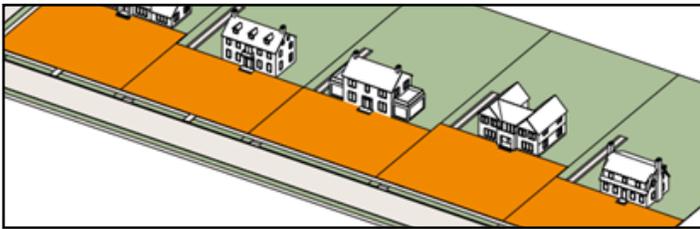
1. Demolition
2. Additions taller and wider than the existing structures and more than 50% increase in square footage
3. Changes to the front facade
4. Painting of unpainted masonry
5. Tree Removal (healthy)
6. New Construction

Staff and the Commission may not regulate:

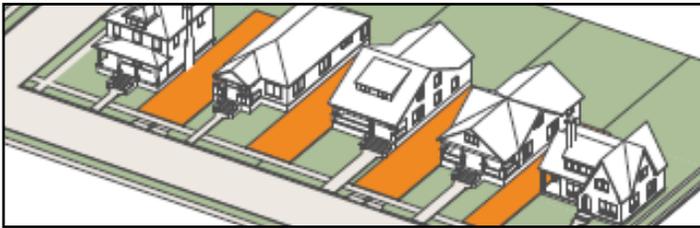
1. Demolition beyond delay for 365 days
2. Color (except unpainted brick)
3. Architectural style of new construction

While the architectural style of new construction can not be regulated, the Historic District Design Guidelines provide guidance for the appropriate form and pattern of new construction within a historic district. Essentially, new construction should be consistent or compatible with the following elements as established along a street.

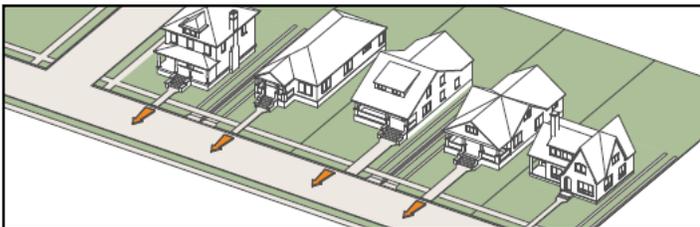
**Setback:** is the distance between the building wall and the property line or right-of-way boundary at the front of the lot.



**Spacing:** refers to the side yard distance between buildings.



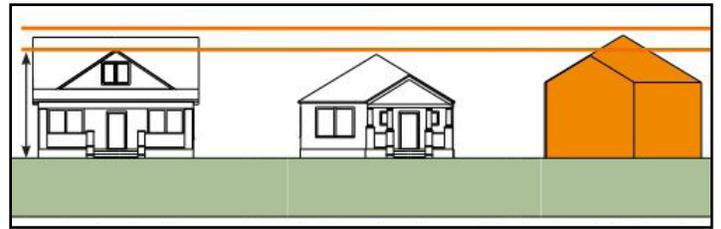
**Orientation:** refers to the direction in which the front of the buildings face.



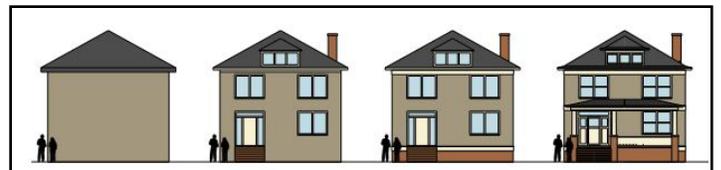
**Massing & Complexity of Form:** the overall massing of a building relates to the organization and relative size of the building sections or parts of a building in relationship to each other and other buildings on the street. A building's mass can be simple (a box) or complex (a combination of many boxes or projections and indentions).



**Height & Width:** the height, how tall a building is, and the width, how wide a building is, are the two primary considerations for determining if new construction is an appropriate size for the established character.

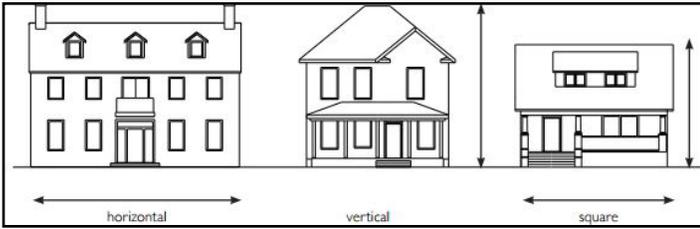


**Scale:** the relationship of the human form to the building. Height and width are the beginnings of creating scale; however, other elements such as cornices, porches, windows, etc further define scale. Scale is also the relationship of the building to buildings around it.



*Features such as windows and doors, foundation articulation, porches, and materials create scale that relates a building to the human scale.*

**Directional Expression:** the relationship of height and width of the front elevation of a building mass provides its directional expression. A building may be vertical, horizontal, or square in its proportions.



**Foundations:** are the base of the building. When built on a concrete slab without a visible foundation, new buildings may appear shorter and out of scale with surrounding historic buildings.



**Roof Form & Materials:** the pitch and orientation of gables and hips should reflect those of surrounding structures.



**Cornices & Trim:** are used to define eave and cornice lines of roofs, articulate areas of openings and siding on walls, create porch elements, and define the edge of a wall and foundation.



*Left: Many bungalows have large decorative brackets for supporting overhangs. Right: Half-timber framing decorates the eave of Tudor house. New construction should take cues from surrounding buildings on the appropriate use of trim.*

**Doors & Windows:** the size, proportion, rhythms, pattern and articulation of door and window openings help give buildings its individual style and character.



*Left: Colonial Revival  
Middle: Bungalow  
Right: Tudor Revival*

**Porches:** have traditionally been a social gathering point, as well as a transition area, between the exterior and interior of a residence. Historic Districts in Charlotte have a rich variety of porch types and styles from which design cues may be taken.

