



## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW BOARD  
**FROM:** Kate Schwartz, Historic Resources Planner  
**DATE:** May 5, 2021 (for the May 10, 2021 meeting)  
**RE:** Historic District Design Guidelines Update

### **ISSUE**

The City of Fredericksburg proposes to amend the design guidelines for the Old and Historic Fredericksburg District, which are used to interpret and apply the standards in City Code §72-23.1 Historic District - certificates of appropriateness. This update is a complete revision of the existing Historic District Handbook.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

Open the public hearing and accept public comment on the draft Historic District Design Guidelines. Hold the public hearing open until May 24, 2021. After considering public comment, recommend approval of the draft to the City Council.

### **DISCUSSION**

In 2018 and 2019, the Historic Preservation Working Group identified and examined key issues associated with both the legal basis and practical application of preservation in Fredericksburg. The group members include representatives from the City Council (Councilors Matthew Kelly and Timothy Duffy, Ph.D.); Architectural Review Board (Jonathan Gerlach and Carthon Davis, III (now Helen P. Ross)); National Park Service (John Hennessy); University of Mary Washington (Christine Henry, Ph.D.); Fredericksburg, VA Main Street (Sophia Constantine); Historic Fredericksburg Foundation, Inc. (David James); local development community (Jon Van Zandt); and Economic Development Authority (Mitzi Brown). The issues identified emerged from the participants' assessment of the current preservation program as well as those identified in City Council work sessions and the 2010 Preservation Plan. Taking a holistic approach to updating the City's preservation policies, the group systematically reviewed the 2010 Preservation Plan, Historic District Handbook, and City Code, and made recommendations for all.

Over the course of two years, from 2018 to 2020, the working group structured its research and discussions with the goal of generating recommendations that would result in a cohesive, integrated package of ordinances, preservation plan, Historic District Handbook, and practices; all intended to reflect the community's commitment to preservation, provide consistent guidance and standards for property owners and developers, assure the preservation of the distinctive character and fabric of Fredericksburg, and contribute to the community's continued evolution and development. The group took a measured and methodological approach to discussion and consensus-building on each of these topics.

After conducting a thorough review of the existing Historic District Handbook, the working group directed staff to seek Certified Local Government grant funds for the project and to hire a consultant to produce an updated document. Once grant funds were awarded in summer 2019, consultant Commonwealth Architects was selected in the fall of 2019 to assist the City with the project. Beginning in January 2020, the consultant conducted several site visits to Fredericksburg and met with staff and the working group. Public outreach efforts in February and March 2020 included distribution of an online survey about the functionality of the current handbook and needs for an updated version as well as several public meetings. One was held immediately following HFFI's annual meeting and another was held with the goal of reaching

developers and business owners in the district. Staff worked with the consultant through the rest of 2020 to draft the revised document.

Initial comments have already been received from members of the ARB and the Working Group and revisions have been incorporated into the draft. Though the guidelines provided a substantial amount of educational information and resources for property owners, it was determined that the amount of information provided limited the usability of the document. As a result, much of the maintenance or other background information has been removed from the draft guidelines and will later be included in a separate resource document that would serve as a historic property handbook. The focus of the draft guidelines under consideration at this time is instead on the actual criteria used by the ARB to evaluate applications and by applicants to design a project. The document should be evaluated under this context.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Draft Historic District Design Guidelines