



Built Environmental Characteristics Report

North Hills

Background

In February 2017, residents of the North Hills neighborhood in Midtown Raleigh submitted a petition to City Council requesting consideration for a neighborhood built environmental characteristics analysis. This analysis is the first step in the potential creation of a Neighborhood Conservation Overlay District (NCOD). NCODs are zoning overlays that preserve and enhance the general quality and appearance of neighborhoods by regulating built environmental characteristics such as lot size, setbacks, and building height. NCODs generally apply more restrictive standards than base zoning districts. As stated in the citizens' petition, the intent behind the request is to maintain the current built character of the area and prevent subdivision of existing lots.

Per City Council's direction, Planning staff has completed an analysis of the particular built characteristics requested by the North Hills residents: lot size, lot width, primary street setback, and building height. The petition also requested analysis of lot width at the building setback line, but this characteristic was removed from the analysis—with consent from the author of the petition—since the city's zoning code already requires that minimum lot widths extend for the entire depth of a parcel (section 1.5.2.C). This report presents results of the analysis.



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Study Area Overview

The North Hills NCOD study area is located immediately north of the I-440 Beltline and is bounded by Lassiter Mill Road to the east, Northbrook Drive to the north, and Tyrell Road to the west. Nearby major streets include Six Forks Road to the east and North Hills Drive to the west. Four hundred forty three lots comprising approximately 175 acres are included in the study area.

These properties front on the following streets (see Figure 1):

- Burke Street
- Catawba Street
- Currituck Drive
- Davidson Street
- Gates Street
- Lassiter Mill Road
- Macon Place
- Northbrook Drive
- Pamlico Drive
- Pitt Street
- Richmond Street
- Rockingham Drive
- Rowan Street
- Sampson Street
- Tyrrell Road
- Union Street
- Wilkes Street
- Yadkin Drive

The only use in the study area is single family residential, and the average lot size is approximately 0.40 acres. The majority of houses were constructed in the 1950s and 1960s.

There are eight vacant properties within the study area. The zoning for all properties is Residential-4 (R-4) which allows up to 4 dwelling units per acre. R-4 permits smaller lot sizes and lot widths compared to the current build-out of the neighborhood.

Although not required at this step in the process, the area does demonstrate initial compliance with the locational guidelines for areas to be rezoned to an NCOD:

- Minimum 15 contiguous acres; the requested study area is approximately 175 contiguous acres.
- Rezoning application must be signed by a majority of property owners; though this is required only at the rezoning stage, the citizens' petition included signatures of support from over 230 property owners in the study area.
- At least 75 percent of the lots must be developed: 8 of 443 lots in the study area are vacant.
- Located in an area in which City Council has adopted specific neighborhood built environmental characteristics and regulations into Section 5.4.3.D of the UDO: though this guideline only applies at the rezoning stage, the residents have initiated the process of adopting specific built environmental characteristics and regulations into the UDO.

Figure 1. North Hills NCOD study area



Analysis

City code directs staff to assess properties within the study area for each of the built characteristics requested by residents. Specifically, the code asks staff to identify the “specific built environmental characteristics and regulations that reflect the predominant representation of the lots within the neighborhood study area.” In this context, “predominant” is defined as the metric for each characteristic that can be met by 75 percent of lots in the study area.

Using Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping tools, staff calculated the predominant built characteristics—lot size, lot width, side street setback, and primary street setback—that were requested by residents. Staff also conducted a visual inventory of building height using a laser guided Rangefinder.

Figure 2 summarizes the predominant values for these built characteristics and provides other relevant quantifiable information. For four of the characteristics—lot size, lot frontage, primary street setback, and side street setback—the residents specifically requested analysis in terms of minimum values. Stated simply, a minimum built characteristic can be thought of as an exclusive regulation, which encompasses values at the upper-end of the range and excludes those near the bottom. In this case, the minimum value identifies the lot size, lot frontage, primary street setback, and side street setback held in common by the 75 percent of properties that exhibit larger built characteristics (excluding properties in the bottom quartile with the smallest built characteristics).

Figure 2. Built environmental characteristics summary

Characteristic	Predominant Character (75th Percentile) minimums	Predominant Character (75th Percentile) maximums	Range (min-max)	Average	Median
Lot size	14,271.3 sq. ft. or .33 acres	18,865.9 sq. ft. or .43 acres	10,037.1 sq. ft. – 44,417.6 sq. ft. or .23 acres – 1.02 acres	17,208.3 sq. ft. or .40 acres	16,193.2 sq. ft. or .37 acres
Lot width	91.6 ft.	115.5 ft.	45.7 ft. – 213.7 ft.	106.6 ft.	101.0 ft.
Primary street setback	39.2 ft.	51.2 ft.	16.7 ft. – 86.4 ft.	45.7 ft.	44.9 ft.
Side street setback	30.7 ft.	46.7 ft.	15.1 ft. - 74.9 ft.	39.3 ft.	37.1 ft.
Building height	16.3 ft.	21.7 ft.	11 ft. – 39.6 ft.	19.6 ft.	19.2 ft.



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Although there is a fairly wide range of values for these characteristics, the fact that the 75th percentile, average, and median figures are close together shows that there is a relatively uniform development pattern in the area today.

Another point of consideration for the NCOD would be to regulate the side street setback. Side street setback was not specifically requested in the petition, however it is an important characteristic to consider. Side street setbacks apply when a house occupies a corner lot, with one street being primary and the other being the side street. The predominant character for primary street setback is 39.2 feet. Under R-4, the side street setback is 15 feet. In all residential zoning districts, primary street and side street setbacks generally differ between 5 to 10 feet. Establishing a front and side street setback that are closer together will result in a more uniform streetscape at intersections.

Impacts

The predominant built character of this area differs from the minimum standards that currently apply in the R-4 zoning district (see Figure 3). Minimum lot size, lot width, and primary street setback standards are significantly smaller in the R-4 zoning. Within the current zoning, 13 properties meet the minimum standards for subdivision. If new standards based on the predominant built character of the area were applied through rezoning, the resulting NCOD would effectively prohibit the subdivision of lots.

In addition to restricting the opportunity to create smaller lots, an NCOD would impact changes to existing buildings and properties. Any additions, changes, expansions, or alterations to existing structures would have to comply with the overlay district regulations. If the desired alterations exceeded district standards, the property owner would have to apply for a special use permit with limitations on the amount of expansion.

Next Steps

A neighborhood meeting will be held on April 26 to discuss the results of this analysis. All property owners within the study area have been invited to attend. Following this meeting, city staff will present the results of the analysis and the neighborhood meeting discussion to City Council. Council will then consider whether to authorize a text change to the UDO to incorporate the neighborhood built environmental characteristics and regulations. If the text change is approved, property owners will then be able to petition for a rezoning to apply the built environmental characteristics and regulations to the North Hills area through an overlay district. A majority of property owners are required to sign the rezoning petition that would apply the NCOD.

Figure 3. Comparison of existing zoning standards and predominant built character

Characteristic	Current Standard (R-4 District)	Predominant Character (75th Percentile)
Lot size (min)	10,000 sq. ft.	14,271.3 sq. ft.
Lot width (min)	65 ft. (interior) 80 ft. (corner)	91.6 ft.
Primary street setback (min)	20 ft.	39.2 ft.
Side street setback (min)	15 ft.	30.7 ft.
Building height (max)	40 ft.	21.7 ft.

