



DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

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LITTLE ROCK HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION

AGENDA

Thursday, September 5, 2024, 4:00 p.m.

Board Room, Little Rock City Hall, 500 W. Markham

I. Roll Call

Members Present:

Amber Jones, Chair
Christina Aleman, Vice Chair
Jonathan Nunn
Tom Fennell
Scott Green
Dr. Thomas DeGraff III

Staff Present:

Hannah Ratzlaff
Raeanne Gardner

Citizens Present:

Missy McSwain
Ray Wittenberg
Stark Legon
Joesph Flaherty
Brian Minyard
Tricia Bean
Siraj Asfahani
Douglas Karre

II. Finding a Quorum

A quorum was present being six (6) in number.

III. Citizen Communication

No citizen chose to speak during this time.

IV. Minutes

1. July 3, 2024 Minutes
2. July 19, 2024 Minutes
3. August 7, 2024 Minutes

The minutes were presented to the commission. Commissioner Fennell made a motion to approve the minutes as submitted. Commissioner Nunn seconded. The minutes were approved by voice vote as submitted.

V. National Register Nominations
None

VI. Deferred Certificates of Appropriateness
None

VII. New Certificates of Appropriateness
None

VIII. Other Matters

1. MacArthur Park Design Guidelines and Presentation by The Lakota Group

Item One	Little Rock Planning and Development Department Staff Report MacArthur Park Design Guidelines (Attachment B) Roughly bound by Capitol Avenue, Ferry Street and McGowan Street, E. 15 th Street, and Scott Street and Cumberland Stree
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OTHER MATTERS NO.: ONE MacArthur Park Historic District Design Guidelines

NAME: MacArthur Park Historic District Design Guidelines

LOCATION: MacArthur Park Historic District, roughly bound by E. Capitol Avenue, Ferry Street, E. 15th Street, Scott Street, and Cumberland Street

APPLICANT: Little Rock Planning & Development Department

CONSULTANT:

The Lakota Group
One East Wacker Drive
Chicago, Illinois 60601

A. BACKGROUND

Context

The MacArthur Park Local Historic District (“District”) sits adjacent to Little Rock’s historic downtown and is 192.6 acres of remarkably well-preserved early residential and neighborhood commercial development with surviving built heritage predominantly from the Victorian to Great Depression eras, with several instances of post war development. Platting of the area occurred primarily from 1822-1920 and surviving development occurred primarily from 1840-1960. The development of Interstate 30 and Interstate 630 from the 1960s through the 1980s sliced through Little Rock’s established neighborhoods, including MacArthur Park, effectively disconnecting communities. The historic preservation effort in Little Rock of the 1960s was largely a response to the development of the interstate system through its downtown area and historic neighborhoods.

The District was first listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1977 with a period of significance from 1842-1960. Its southern section is divided by the unnatural physical barrier of I-630. The District was last fully surveyed in 2007. The survey identified 279 sites with 169 contributing structures, 22 independently listed structures, and one National Historic Landmark—the Little Rock Arsenal/MacArthur Park Military Museum. The District has a total of 30 vacant lots, excluding parking lots. Three blocks of the southwestern portion of the district overlap the Capitol Zoning District, an area regulated by the State’s zoning commission. Predominant architectural styles of the MacArthur Park Local Historic District are Greek Revival, Italianate, Queen Anne, Folk Victorian, and Colonial Revival. Secondary styles are Craftsman and International.

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The District is home to multiple private and public entities of various scales, such as: UALR William H. Bowen School of Law, Arkansas Museum of Fine Arts, MacArthur Museum of Arkansas Military History, Little Rock Firehouse Hostel & Museum, Stone's Throw Brewing, Fassler Hall, and Quapaw Quarter Association, and a number of small local businesses, including law firms, a violin shop, a veterinary clinic, doctors' offices, and home businesses.

The last decade has brought significant investment to the District contemporaneous with the revitalization efforts of Little Rock's adjacent historic commercial core and proximal historic districts. Additionally, it is anticipated that several major investments will bring increased tourist and commuter activity to the area: the Arkansas Museum of Fine Arts has invested \$155 million in a newly renovated facility (which opened in April 2023), the Arkansas Department of Transportation is spending \$1 billion on changes to Interstate 30 (the District's east physical boundary), and the City of Little Rock ("City") has been awarded a \$2 million planning grant for a raised park above I-30 along the District's eastern border. Concurrently, the City adopted the Downtown Little Rock Master Plan on July 18, 2024 which includes most of the District in its planning boundaries.

Previous Actions

The last major revision of the design guidelines for the District occurred in 2016 and focused on infill/new construction and sustainable technologies. The 2016 guidelines have been periodically updated with the last piecemeal update occurring in April 2022. Coupled with intensive investment in the area, surrounding municipal master planning initiatives, downtown housing demand, and only one City staff member dedicated to historic preservation in the City, there is an imperative need for user-friendly, consistent, and effective design guidelines for the MacArthur Park Local Historic District.

In September 2023, the City of Little Rock Planning & Development Department, in partnership with the Little Rock Historic District Commission ("Commission"), began a comprehensive update of the *MacArthur Park Historic District Design Guidelines* ("Guidelines"). The purpose of the comprehensive update is to improve the effectiveness of the design guidelines as a regulatory and educational tool for improving properties within the MacArthur Park Local Historic District, a local ordinance historic district. The goal of a local ordinance historic district is to protect and preserve the unique and valued qualities of such an area, its urban design, architectural character, and historic materials in buildings and in landscapes.

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Design guidelines assist in administering a municipality’s local preservation ordinance for local ordinance historic districts. Design guidelines provide a set of regulations, design criteria, and recommendations aimed at preserving the historical and architectural integrity and character of a historic district and ensuring that any new construction, alterations, demolitions, additions, or site changes within the historic district visible from the public right-of-way are in keeping with the area’s character and history. Design guidelines must adhere to the City’s Preservation Code and, per the City’s Certified Local Government agreement with the State of Arkansas, the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation.

Property owners in the MacArthur Park Local Historic District are subject to municipal law, codified in Little Rock Code at Chapter 23, Sec. 76-160, that is largely based on Arkansas State law. Any exterior alterations, including the erection, alteration, restoration, relocation, or demolition of a structure or site feature within the District requires the issuance of a Certificate of Appropriateness (“COA”) that is either administratively approved by staff or reviewed by the Little Rock Historic District Commission at its regular monthly, public meetings. Design guidelines are a vital tool for the Historic District Commission, City staff, and the local community for decision-making within the COA application review process.

This project is funded by the City of Little Rock with assistance from the Historic Preservation Fund, which is administered by the National Park Service, Department of the Interior, and the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program, an agency of the Division of Arkansas Heritage through a Certified Local Government (“CLG”) grant awarded in February 2023. On September 25, 2023, the Lakota Group was hired as a result of the City of Little Rock’s competitive procurement process, responding to a Request for Qualifications (Bid Event # 2194).

Community engagement for this project kicked off in December 2023 with two focus group meetings held at the Arkansas Museum of Fine Arts where property owners and stakeholders met with Planning & Development staff and the Lakota Group to discuss key challenges and opportunities for the new design guidelines. A draft outline and a summary of community feedback and consultant observations were provided to the Commission in February 2024. The *Memorandum: MacArthur Park Design Guidelines Engagement Meetings: Key Observations and Issues* is attached hereto as Attachment A. The Lakota Group presented these findings and a draft outline of the updated Guidelines to the Historic District Commission at its March 7, 2024 regular meeting.

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A draft of the Guidelines was provided to the Commission and made available to the public on July 2, 2024. The Commission held a public working meeting on July 19, 2024 to review the Guidelines and provide feedback.

Community engagement was crucial in the update of the Guidelines. Community engagement throughout the project period included:

1. The creation of a project website which served as the main clearinghouse of updates, draft documents, maps, and meeting materials.
2. Periodic social media posts including a thirty day highlight of sites in the historic district leading up to the August 7, 2024 public hearing.
3. An interactive digital scavenger hunt was created as an interactive community engagement tool in partnership with Our Little Rock to invite neighborhood residents and visitors to explore the historic district, answer survey questions, gather input on new construction projects, and identify character-defining historic architectural and streetscape features.
4. Postcards sent out to all 200+ property owners requesting public comment of the first draft of the design guidelines.
5. Yard signs with QR codes directing to the project website placed at various intersections within the District during the public comment period.
6. The creation of the MacArthur Park Local Historic District viewer. The interactive map viewer leverages GIS technology, displayed as an ArcOnline Instant App, to connect users with the historic assets and cultural landscape of the neighborhood. A comprehensive repository of documents and historical photos for 378 sites—existing and lost—made accessible in a user-friendly and engaging format. The viewer will remain available to the public as a digital tool for the neighborhood.
7. Informational project flyers were made available at the office of the Planning & Development Department and at every Commission meeting since December 2023.
8. Letters were sent out to all 200+ property owners one week prior to the September 5th meeting inviting participation in the Guideline adoption process.

The second draft of the design guidelines was sent to the Commission and made available to the public on July 31, 2024. Public notification was made in anticipation of the August 7, 2024 public meeting. In order to provide additional time for public comment and review of the proposed Guidelines in its final format, the item was deferred to the September 5, 2024 meeting.

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B. PROPOSAL/REQUEST/APPLICANT’S STATEMENT:

The adoption of the proposed comprehensive update of the *MacArthur Park Historic District Design Guidelines*, Attachment B.

C. EXISTING CONDITIONS:

The last major revision of the design guidelines for the District occurred in 2016 and focused on infill/new construction and sustainable technologies. The 2016 guidelines have been periodically updated with the last piecemeal update occurring in April 2022. The existing MacArthur Park Historic District Design Guidelines are available on the City’s website.

D. NEIGHBORHOOD COMMENTS:

At the time of distribution of the staff report, there were no public comments received for the final draft Guidelines. Comments received during the request for public comment period, from July 3, 2024 to August 28, 2024, regard the first draft of the Guidelines and are found in Attachment C. All neighborhood associations registered with the City of Little Rock with areas intersecting the MacArthur Park Local Ordinance Historic District and all property owners within the historic district were notified of the September 5th public hearing.

E. ANALYSIS:

According to City of Little Rock Code Chapter 23, Sec. 100 Duties generally.:

(a) Historic district guidelines.

(1) The historic district commission shall adopt design review guidelines for each local ordinance historic district established pursuant to this article. The guidelines should provide the commissioners with an objective standard for decisions concerning the appropriateness of a project in relation to the architectural and historical character of the district.

(2) Design review guidelines shall be reviewed periodically by the historic district commission for needed revision to ensure that the guidelines are well adapted to the respective local ordinance historic district.

Staff finds that the proposed Guidelines meet the requirements of municipal code.

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In updating the Guidelines, the City of Little Rock, the Historic District Commission, and focus group attendees tasked the Lakota Group with the following outcomes:

1. Apply national best practices and innovations to the context and challenges of the historic district.
2. In addition to a regulatory guide, the new guidelines should be a resource to property owners, developers, and contactors for maintenance and repair as well as incentives and assistance resources.
3. Clarify the treatment of “non-contributing” resources in the historic district.
4. The guidelines should correct gaps in existing guidelines, such as regulations for historic and non-historic detached accessory structures.
5. The appropriate use of artificial materials for various project types, including new construction, alterations to existing structures, additions, site improvements, etc.
6. Consistency and clarity throughout the document.
7. Establishing an efficient and consistent process for administrative approvals.
8. Preservation and replacement standards for historic streetscape features.

Staff finds that the proposed Guidelines have met these goals and outcomes.

F. STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends approval of the proposed MacArthur Park Historic District Design Guidelines.

G. COMMISSION ACTION: _____ (August 7, 2024)

The consideration of the proposed Guidelines was deferred to the September 5, 2024, public meeting in order to provide additional time for public comment and review of the proposed Guidelines in its final format. Commissioner Fennell made a motion to defer the item. Commissioner DeGraff seconded. The motion passed with 5 ayes, 0 noes, 1 absent (Nunn), and 1 vacant position.

COMMISSION ACTION: _____ (September 5, 2024)

Staff made a presentation to the commission. The Lakota Group made a presentation to the commission. Commissioner Nunn expressed gratitude to the Lakota Group for their work, particularly highlighting the inclusion of paint color recommendations in Section 3, which had been previously requested. Commissioner Fennell noted that the final document successfully serves both educational and regulatory purposes and inquired about its comparison to other design guidelines produced by the Lakota Group. Siraj Asfahani, Vice President of the Lakota Group, responded that there is a

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growing demand for design guidelines to include educational components. He emphasized that the proposed guidelines are distinctive for their separation of non-regulatory best practices from regulatory guidelines through innovative formatting and color coding.

The commission opened the floor for public comments. Brian Minyard, Interim Director of the Quapaw Quarter Association, stated that the QQA voiced strong support for the proposed guidelines, praising their accessibility and the use of graphics. He said these attributes are certainly present in the proposed Design Guidelines. He noted that the proposed Design Guidelines included improvements such as life cycle comparisons for traditional and contemporary building materials, guidelines for disaster preparedness, paint color recommendations, and hyperlinks to easily navigate the document digitally.

Commissioner Jones raised a concern regarding the mention of fiber cement siding as a substitute material for historic structures. Staff clarified that the subsection regarding substitute material and life cycle comparisons was intended for educational purposes regarding contemporary materials, with regulatory sections in subsequent sections discouraging non-original material replacements. The floor was opened for further public comments.

Stark Legon, a property owner adjacent to the historic district, inquired about the implications of the proposed Design Guidelines for properties in the MacArthur Park Local Historic District and properties in the Capitol Zoning District and whether legal documentation of compliance would be necessary during property sales. Additionally, he asked if the City of Little Rock provided a determination of what nonconforming circumstances or violations existed.

Ratzlaff responded that if there was a current violation with the property and enforcement action was taking place, it would be a private matter, but likely to the best interest of the buyer, that the active violation was disclosed by the owner. If the property was currently nonconforming but was not in violation, the nonconformance would be allowed to remain until conformance was required, such as in the case of an owner applying for a major alteration where the nonconformance was included in the scope of work. Ratzlaff asked if this addressed Mr. Legon's question. Mr. Legon said it did.

Commissioner Aleman commended the proposed Design Guidelines and suggested minor copy edits, which Ratzlaff confirmed could be easily addressed without delaying the approval process. Aleman's copy edits included chapter numbering, photo captions, and grammar.

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Commissioner Fennell made a motion to approve the adoption of the MacArthur Park Historic District Design Guidelines as submitted, subject to the stated copy edits. Commissioner Nunn seconded. The motion passed unanimously with a vote of 6 ayes, 0 noes, and 1 vacant position.

VIII. Other Matters

2. MacArthur Park Local Historic District Viewer

Staff introduced a new digital resource for the commission, property owners, and the public: the MacArthur Park Local Historic District Viewer. This tool utilizes GIS technology to enhance the stewardship of the neighborhood's historic assets and cultural landscapes, merging historic preservation with geographic information systems. Presented as an ArcOnline Instant App, it prioritizes visual clarity and user-friendliness, providing a comprehensive repository of current and historical data for 378 sites, both existing and lost.

The app aims to educate users, assist with regulatory compliance, support research, and foster engagement with built heritage. It serves a diverse audience, including property owners, realtors, developers, investors, contractors, and historic preservation experts who regularly interact with MacArthur Park's historic sites.

On the administrative side, the integration of GIS with property and case file management allows City staff to maintain a dynamic database, including detailed historical context, past regulatory decisions, and potential future developments. The tool incorporates various digital and physical datasets from key contributors, including the Pulaski Area Geographic Information System, the Division of Arkansas Heritage, the Bobby L. Roberts Library of Arkansas History & Art, the Quapaw Quarter Association, and various City departments.

3. COA Inspection Process

Staff announced that the Planning & Development Department has integrated formal Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) inspections into the permit portal process. Applicants will now be required to schedule a COA inspection at the end of their project, rather than staff conducting informal drive-bys or meetings. This formalization aims to identify enforcement issues early and provide better assistance to property owners regarding changes in scope or materials during construction. This proactive approach will enable staff to collaborate with applicants to find solutions before the final building permit inspection occurs.

4. Grant Project Updates

Staff updated the commission on the 2024 CLG grant project to resurvey a section of the Hillcrest Historic District. Ratzlaff reported that Phase 3 has been completed, and Phase 4 is set to begin this fall pending contract approval with the selected consultants, which is scheduled for the Board of Directors' review in September.

Additionally, staff provided information about the Underrepresented Communities Grant, which is currently in the contract negotiation stage with the chosen consultant. This grant will facilitate research, preparation, and submission of an updated National Register nomination for the Paul Laurence Dunbar School. The aim is to elevate the site's significance to a national level and to comprehensively reflect its historical themes, significant individuals, and events related to African American history. The grant is funded by the Historic Preservation Fund, administered by the National Parks Service. Following the contract agreement, the consultant is expected to commence archival research and fieldwork in October or November.

5. Ordinance Amendment: Administrative Approvals – Update on status

The ordinance amendment was passed by the Historic District Commission on July 3rd and approved by the Board of Directors on September 3rd.

6. CAMP Training, October 4, 2024

Ratzlaff reminded the commission of the upcoming opportunity for commissioner training in Hot Springs on October 4th.

7. Enforcement Issues

418 E 15th Street—unpermitted installation of fencing

Assistant City Attorney, Raeanne Gardner, provided an update to the commission stating the case was still in environmental court with an upcoming report date set for November 18th.

8. Certificates of Compliance

HDC2024-024—1305 S Cumberland Street—reroof

HDC2024-025—500 E 9th Street—HVAC replacement

HDC2024-026—518 E 7th Street—reroof and pipe chimney replacement

HDC2024-027—1401 S Cumberland Street—rear staircase and porch repair

IX. Adjournment

There being no further business for the Commission, the meeting was adjourned at 5:08 P.M.

Attest:

Chair

Date

Secretary

Date