



Form-Based Overlay Introduction

In December 2018, the Highland Park Neighborhood Association (HPNA) decided to move forward with exploring the creation of form-based overlay protection for the Highland Park Neighborhood's historic character. This decision was made based on a formal survey of residents in December 2018. At its January 8, 2019, meeting, HPNA officers unanimously approved the formation of a committee to further study and work with governmental authorities to develop a form-based overlay and the committee's operating guidelines.

Purpose & Need

HPNA's History & Preservation and Physical Improvements Teams determined through a nine-month research effort that residents care about community character and want to see Highland Park's history preserved. A neighborhood survey (December 2017) revealed that historic character is the top reason survey respondents initially moved to the Highland Park Neighborhood and it is also the primary reason why they like the community. Property maintenance and the potential loss of historic character are identified concerns.

Current zoning regulation (R-1) that exists in the Highland Park Neighborhood does not adequately address residents' identified concerns for preserving the historic nature and character of Highland Park. As such, the concept of a form-based overlay is introduced as a tool to help ensure that new investment in the neighborhood complements the Highland Park aesthetic and recognizes its history.

While we think of most of the work in Highland Park as restoration and remodeling, we have seen new construction resulting from tear-downs and fire. Remodeling and extensive renovation projects are the norm. Within the last five years, a new construction was proposed on Shawnee circle that would have resulted in a suburban tract type house landing in the middle of the existing homes. It surely would have been a nice house, but it would have been at odds with the street and neighborhood. Fortunately, we were able to learn of the plans prior to construction and the neighborhood expressed its opposition to an inappropriate design.

In this case, the developer was willing to alter his original design and build a single-family home that is better suited for its context and contributes to the character of the street. This developer, however, was not legally required to acquiesce to the design preferences of neighboring residents nor can it be assumed that the next time a developer or property owner proposes new construction he/she will consider Highland Park's character in designing the new structure. An overlay would provide direction for future development.

What is a form-based overlay?

A form-based overlay is a geographically defined area over an existing zone or zones which contain land development regulations designed to foster predictable built results and a high-quality public realm by

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using physical form as the organizing principle (rather than segregation of uses which is conventional zoning). Form-based codes address the relationship between building facades and the public space (e.g. streets and sidewalks), the form and mass of buildings in relation to one another, and the scale and types of streets and blocks. Form-based codes are a response to the modern challenges of urban sprawl, deterioration of historic neighborhoods, and neglect of pedestrian safety in new development. The Form-Based Codes Institute provides a wealth of information, <https://formbasedcodes.org/>.

Developing and adopting a form-based overlay is essentially creating an additional level of zoning review for exterior projects occurring in Highland Park. The current R-1 zoning classification will remain as the base zoning; an overlay is special provisions on top of the base zone. Special provisions COULD pertain to building setbacks, roof pitches, architectural details (e.g. materials, window transparency, porches, etc.), garage locations and loading, and/or other physical features.