

Policy Area 11: Historic Preservation



Key Words and Phrases:

Citizen Comments from Town Meeting (literal, unedited):

DESIRED FUTURE

Historic Preservation

- Historic preservation
- Preserve Saunders Inn & historical places
- Encourage historic preservation
- Preserve/rebuild historical buildings

UNWANTED FUTURE

Destruction of Historic Landmarks

- Destruction of historic landmarks

Town Council/Zoning Board Comments From Joint Kick Off Meeting:

Preserve Historic Assets

- Protect historic district and build on it to share with others
- Preserving & protecting historical areas & buildings



- Preserve local history

The above *key words and phrases* were gleaned from (1) the Town Meeting for the Comprehensive Plan (2) the Joint Kick-Off Meeting of the Town Council and Zoning Board. These key words and phrases were employed to generate the following **Common Objective** and related **Policies for Historic Preservation**.



Common Objective for Historic Preservation

The Town of Summerfield will strive to preserve the rural and small town heritage of the community. The Town and its Boards and Committees will continue to work with property owners toward the identification, designation, restoration and preservation of individual buildings, sites and areas that contribute to the historic foundations and quality of life in the town. In addition to buildings and sites, the Town will also support efforts to document and share the unique cultural history of the area.

Policies for Historic Preservation

Policy 11.1: The identification, restoration, and active use of structures, buildings, monuments, landmarks, sites, and neighborhoods of **HISTORIC OR ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE** should be encouraged to safeguard the heritage of the town, and to enhance their educational, economic, and cultural value to the community and state.

Policy 11.2: The **DESTRUCTION OF ARCHITECTURAL, HISTORIC, AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESOURCES** of the Summerfield community should be strongly discouraged.

Policy 11.3: **MULTIPLE AND ADAPTIVE REUSE OF HISTORIC RESOURCES** should be encouraged. Examples include the conversion of an historic building to a restaurant or coffee house, small retail shops, office space or a bed and breakfast. The new use should be appropriate to the location.

Policy 11.4: Appropriate development of the town's **ARCHITECTURAL, HISTORIC, SCENIC, and NATURAL RESOURCES** should be encouraged.

Policy 11.5: New development, redevelopment, and rehabilitation of structures and sites should occur in a manner that is consistent with the **NEIGHBORHOOD AND ARCHITECTURAL CONTEXT** of the immediate area and supportive of Summerfield's rural, small town heritage.

Policy 11.6: Owners of historic properties should be encouraged to take advantage of **STATE AND FEDERAL TAX CREDITS** when restoring their properties.

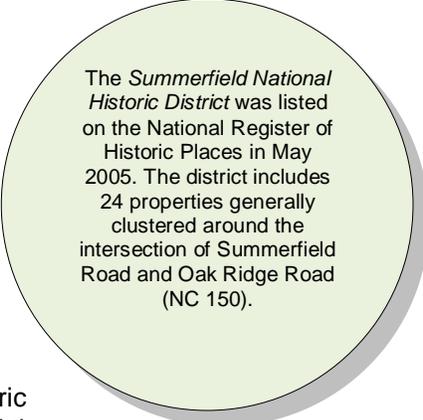
Policy 11.7: Local efforts to document and share the unique **CULTURAL HISTORY** of Summerfield should be supported and encouraged.



Notes and Commentary:

Historic Preservation in Summerfield

Summerfield's Town Council-appointed *Historic Committee* was established in 2001, just five years after the Town was incorporated. In doing so, community leaders recognized the significance of preserving the Town's historic architectural resources as a vital community asset and barometer of the town's future image and quality of life. In May 2005, after much work by the Historic Committee³ and others in the community, the US Department of the Interior, National Park Service approved the Town's request for the establishment of the *Summerfield National Historic District* by listing the district on the National Register of Historic Places. The district includes 24 properties generally clustered around the intersection of Old Summerfield Road and Oak Ridge Road (NC 150). The official map of the district shows 33 contributing buildings and 17 non-contributing buildings. Most of the non-contributing structures are small outbuildings.



The *Summerfield National Historic District* was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in May 2005. The district includes 24 properties generally clustered around the intersection of Summerfield Road and Oak Ridge Road (NC 150).

What is the difference between a National Historic District and a Local Historic District?

While Summerfield's Historic District has been listed on the National Register of Historic Places, it has not been designated a Local District. What is the difference? Generally, properties listed on the National Register are eligible for Federal and State tax credits, if restored according to rehabilitation standards set forth by the National Park Service, US Department of the Interior. If a *national district* is also designated a *local district*, then the district property owners have sought after and endorsed the establishment of a special historic district that protects the neighborhood from inappropriate or intrusive buildings, alterations and additions. This usually involves the appointment of a local *Historic District Commission* whose primary job is to review proposed building changes (exterior, not interior) in accordance with a set of locally approved historic district design guidelines. If the proposed addition or alteration is found to be in accordance with the design guidelines, then a "certificate of appropriateness" is issued.

Is there a less restrictive way to protect the architectural character of a neighborhood without the type of board reviews and approvals associated with a local historic district?

A planning tool that is becoming more common as a way to protect the essential character of a neighborhood without the detailed reviews of a local historic district is the *neighborhood conservation district*. A *neighborhood conservation district* works to protect neighborhood character by ensuring that new buildings or additions are compatible with the existing neighborhood at a broad level. A conservation district is often an overlay district that works with the underlying zoning to make sure that major features of any new construction match up well with surrounding properties. While some conservation districts employ a design review board (similar to an historic district commission) this plan recommends

³ The Town's 2009-2010 Budget makes note of the following additional activities undertaken by the Summerfield Historical Committee:

- continuing work on exhibits for the museum at Town Hall
- actively participating in Founders' Day
- pursuing a nomination of the Stone Gym for the National Register of Historic Places
- developing a Highway Markers program, when funded
- cataloging museum collection items.

that, if such a strategy were employed in Summerfield, a simple checklist of “yes or no” design features be developed for use at the staff level. This simpler approach is consistent with the Town of Summerfield’s position as a limited services local government with limited staff resources. It is also consistent with the idea that design approvals should be straightforward and objective rather than potentially onerous and subjective.

Some of the towns and cities in North Carolina known to employ neighborhood conservation districts include Apex, Boone, Chapel Hill, Durham, Greensboro⁴, and Winston-Salem. While the conservation districts in these communities operate with some differences, most of the basics are very similar. The property



owners in a proposed district come together, usually with technical assistance from the Town, to identify building and site features that are common elements of their neighborhood character that they wish to carry forward. These common features are normally less specific than those employed in an historic district but more descriptive than those used in a simple zoning district.

Examples of conservation district design features include house size, roof form (gabled or hip), presence or absence of porches, presence or absence walkways to the street, attached or detached garages, types of fences, trees preserved, etc. Each conservation

district is tailored to fit the character of the neighborhood, making it a useful way for property owners of existing neighborhoods to have a level of protection similar to that available to new neighborhoods with restrictive covenants. And, in much the same way that restrictive covenants are created for new neighborhoods, neighborhood conservation districts can be made available to all existing neighborhoods, regardless of style or historic status.

Of note, compared to an historic district, a neighborhood conservation district will typically regulate fewer features and will focus more on significant, character-defining features. Unlike historic districts, conservation districts rarely consider minor design features, such as the type of windows and doors, paint colors, trimwork, and decorative details. In neighborhood conservation districts, the property owners are primarily interested in getting the “big picture” features of a new building or major addition right. Finally, most conservation districts do not include demolition delays, a tool utilized in historic districts.

For all of the above reasons, this Comprehensive Plan recommends that the property owners of homes and businesses in the Summerfield Historic District work with the Town to explore whether a neighborhood conservation district might be a useful way to protect the very reasons why they choose to live in an historic neighborhood in the first place.

⁴ (A nearby example is the Westridge Road Neighborhood Conservation District in Greensboro)