

CHARACTER MANAGEMENT OPTIONS FOR DESIGN REVIEW

Over the past twenty years, protecting and enhancing neighborhood character has evolved as a key part of community planning that it is now considered necessary by many communities. As a tool for implementing character management policies, historic district ordinances have become quite popular. A recent survey conducted by the National Alliance of Preservation Commissions tells us that today, more than 2,300 local preservation commissions operate across the country. Of these, approximately 75% have some form of design review.

Even though historic preservation programs—noted for their use of historic district designation and design guidelines—are popular tools for character management, there are many cases when this option is not available. For example, a community may not contain a sufficient percentage of historic resources, or politically, support may not exist for historic district designation. The government also may be concerned about the administrative burden of increasing the number of designated historic properties to the city's design review responsibilities. Other places are newer, developing communities where a preservation approach would not apply.

In these cases, fundamental urban design goals and objectives can be met through the use of conservation districts, zoning and urban design plans. No matter what tool is being considered, these neighborhoods and communities all have one similarity: A desire to enhance livability and protect property values. This paper illustrates how these different character management tools can be used by planning departments, redevelopment associations, and neighborhood associations.

Historic Preservation Ordinances

Local governments typically create design review ordinances under local zoning regulations, within the framework of appropriate state enabling legislation. The courts have upheld this legal basis for design review, to the extent that they clearly have the right to adopt design review regulations as a part of historic preservation ordinances; they also have a responsibility to see that such powers are fairly and consistently administered.

Historic Districts

It is important to distinguish a city's designation of historic districts through its local ordinance process from designation to the National Register. The National Register of Historic Places is a list of sites and properties of historic significance. Properties so listed may have national significance, but they may also be listed if they are determined to have significance at a state or local level.

Properties listed in the National Register are also protected from federally-funded projects which might harm or alter the historic character. Such federal projects must be reviewed for their potential impact. Otherwise, alterations are not reviewed if the property owner is not seeking the federal income tax incentive or if no federal actions are involved.

By contrast, the local designation process is established through the police powers of the city's zoning ordinance. Criteria for designation are set forth in the city code and designated properties are subject to protections outlined in the ordinance, including demolition and design review.



Telluride, Colorado

Conservation Districts

Conservation districts are typically used in newer areas where historic district designation is not feasible or even when support does not exist among neighborhood residents for such designation. For example, in Memphis, Tennessee, Winter & Company helped the city create guidelines for a conservation district in the southeastern part of the city. A new ordinance adopted by the City enables neighborhoods to be designated as conservation areas.

Special Districts

In other cases, a community may adopt a design review district by special ordinance to accomplish conservation objectives. In downtown Boulder, Colorado, for example, Winter & Company helped the city establish a design advisory system with a review committee that is separate from the Landmarks Board. Wichita, Kansas, established the Old Town District in a similar way, with staff review.



Boulder, Colorado



Salt Lake City, Utah

Design Guidelines

Design guidelines provide for unbiased and uniform reviews of proposed works. They provide consistent standards by which all projects are evaluated. Design guidelines should not, however, dictate design by formula. Instead, they should identify key features of the historic resources that should be respected when planning any repairs, alterations or new construction. They also serve as an educational and planning tool for property owners and their design professionals who seek to make improvements that may affect historic resources. These may be adopted as a free-standing document, or as part of a land development code.

Winter & Company has assisted over 60 communities throughout the United States and Canada develop design guidelines for historic, conservation and special districts—both residential and commercial.



Greenville, South Carolina

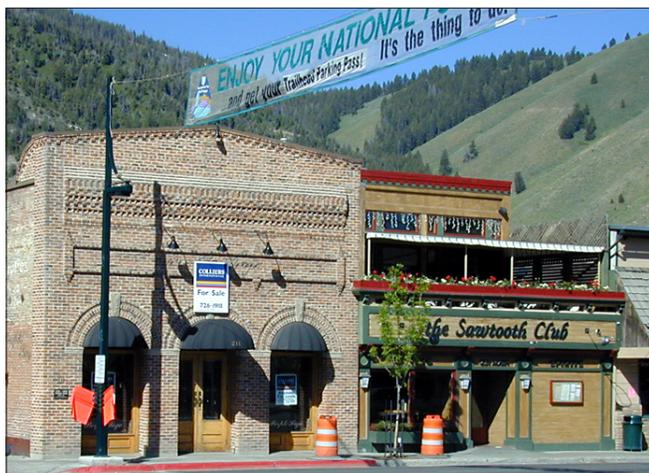
City-wide Design Review Systems

Some cities develop a neighborhood character management program as a part of their preservation activities, often combining both preservation and conservation tools in a single ordinance to cover a large part of the community. Administration is conducted by the preservation staff.

For example, Winter & Company helped the City of Atlanta develop a tiered system of landmarks, historic districts, and conservation areas. In Salt Lake City, UT; Pasadena, CA; Telluride, CO; and Greenville, SC, we established an umbrella system of design review to which guidelines for individual neighborhoods can be attached, including some that are effectively conservation areas. Carmel-by-the-Sea, California, applies guidelines city-wide to protect its "design traditions."



Carmel-by-the-Sea, California



Ketchum, Idaho

Zoning Overlay

More recently, some cities have adopted special zoning overlays for neighborhood character management. In many cases, these are administered at the planning department counter by staff. Denver, Colorado, uses an overlay approach in which a neighborhood can be designated for conservation. A simple formula for calculating mass and bulk can be administered at the county be city staff.

Underlying Zoning

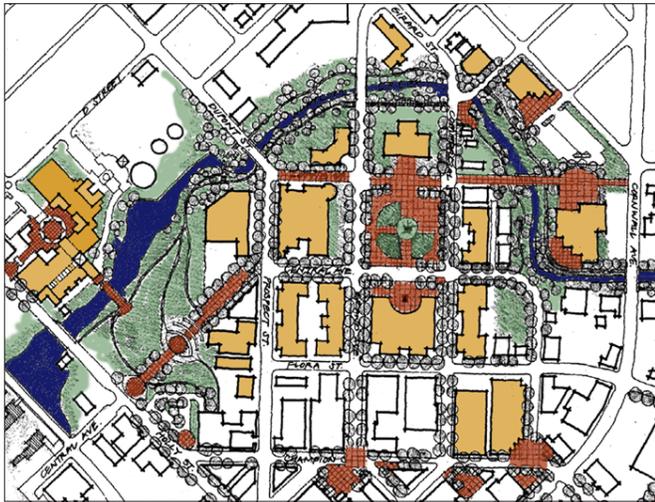
Perhaps the most direct way to address basic design concerns is simply to modify the underlying zoning to more accurately reflect the traditional characteristics that the community seeks to protect. In Fort Collins, Colorado, for example, Winter & Company helped the city develop amendments to the residential zoning code that applies to the core area neighborhoods. These are administered at the counter by planning staff. A more detailed set of advisory design guidelines supplements the regulations and applies to more complex projects. Winter & Company also developed zoning amendments addressing building mass and orientation for Ketchum, Idaho. Flagstaff, Arizona, and Logan, Utah, conduct design review city-wide for specified land use categories, as well.



Flagstaff, Arizona

Urban Design Plan

Some communities will use urban design or neighborhood plans to guide development within an established context of special scenic resources or historic structures. Many places are faced with the problem of how to improve the function of their neighborhoods while simultaneously enhancing their livability. Another concern is how to enhance the pedestrian environment, making it more friendly and inviting to visitors and residents. In each case clients need imaginative plans that will build on existing resources and guide future investments strategically. Winter & Company has coordinated the efforts in design, marketing, economic development and transportation to provide a multi-faceted blueprint for improvements in Bellingham, WA; Rolla, MO; Flagstaff, AZ; Memphis, TN; Lexington, KY; and Little Rock, AR. These plans provide overall direction for character management.



Bellingham, Washington, Civic Center Plan detail

.....
: **Winter & Company**, an urban design and historic :
: preservation firm based in Boulder, Colorado, spe- :
: cializes in assisting communities develop creative :
: strategies to manage their unique character and his- :
: toric resources. :
: **www.winterandcompany.net** :
:
:

Winter & Company

Urban Design • Historic Preservation • Design Review

Winter & Company is one of the country's leading consulting firms in the area of design review and creating design guidelines. Services include urban design plans, preservation plans, renovation feasibility studies and cultural plans, as well as the creation, review and implementation of design guidelines and/or with the training of clients in design review and the use of design guidelines. Enhancing community livability, protecting cultural and historic resources and providing delight in the urban experience—these are the focus of design services at Winter & Company, often in resort communities and other towns with special character. Individuals at Winter & Company offer more than 25 years of experience in historic preservation, design review and design guidelines, building renovation, and urban design.

Winter & Company has refined procedures for identifying community character and for creating policy documents that are effective, practical character management tools. Our focus is on providing information in a format that is easily understood by laymen who make design decisions in the field. The Company is well-known for the easy-to-use, practical handbooks it produces. The firm consults nationwide to public agencies, downtown improvement committees, nonprofit community organizations and private property owners. Projects span more than 100 communities in over 40 states. The firm was established in 1982 and is based in Boulder, Colorado.

Effective design guidelines require considering the goals for preservation, design and economic development—particularly with respect to heritage tourism—and how historic character contributes to the quality of life in a community. Historic preservation and design guidelines which reinforce it are specialties of Winter & Company, not sidelines. We strive to help communities develop policy documents that are practical tools that they can use on a daily basis. We use a process for developing guidelines that have been tested and proven in a variety of communities throughout the country—a process that is educational, as well as technical.