

RESIDENTIAL INFILL DEVELOPMENT

Design Issues



Infill Task Force
February 21, 2008

Alexandria

Overview of Design Issues

- **Design in the Infill Context**
- Design vs. Bulk Approaches
- Design Incentives using Bulk Tools
- Historic/Conservation/Design Districts
- Design Pattern Books

Design in the Infill Context

An owner's/architect's/builder's sensitivity to the neighborhood context is the single most important ingredient in ensuring that additions and new construction are compatible with the character of the existing neighborhood



Design in the Infill Context

Task Force Member Observations from Field Trip:

- “We need to find a way to encourage compatible development”
- “Compatibility of design is a major factor. Good design hides many sins”
- Pattern books – helpful as an education tool – but might limit design alternatives
- “There should be incentives to encourage front porches”



Design in the Infill Context

Sample Comments from Community Forum:

- “Design issues – looks industrial”
- “Out of character – design, façade”
- “Mix of materials doesn’t work”
- “Good design”
- “In keeping with neighborhood”
- “Doesn’t fit the neighborhood”
- “Works well on the corner”



Design in the Infill Context

What's Important? - Attention to Detail:

- Neighborhood character & architectural context
- Architectural styles
- Street setbacks & spacing from adjacent homes
- Building footprint & massing – horizontal & vertical expression
- Roof slope & design
- Door & window openings
- Decorative details
- Materials selection & paint
- Outbuildings & landscaping



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Design vs. Bulk Approaches

Design Approach:

- Subjective or interpretive
- Mandatory or voluntary
- May be decided administratively – time consuming
- May have review body

Bulk Approach:

- Objective – regulatory standards
- Mandatory
- Administrative decision
- Appeals to BZA

Design vs. Bulk Approaches

To assist in handling infill issues:

- Both design & bulk approaches can be used together to achieve a beneficial result
- It does not have to be one approach or the other

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Design Incentives using Bulk Tools

Incentives for good design can be achieved through the adjustment of height, setback, and FAR requirements



Design Incentives using Bulk Tools

Issue: Prominence of garage & cars in the front



Design Incentives using Bulk Tools

Issue: Prominence of garage & cars in the front

<u>Design Incentive</u>	<u>Regulation Option</u>
Encourage detached single car garages in the rear yard	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Exempt from FAR calculations• Side yard driveway exemption
Reduce visual impact of car parking	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Permit tandem parking
Reduce prominence of front garages	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Require garages facing the street to be set back at least 5 ft from the front face of the residence• Require attached garages to be side-loaded

Design Incentives using Bulk Tools

Issue: Unfriendly front appearance

Good front porch, but because the basement is so high above ground, the appearance is not neighborhood friendly



Design Incentives using Bulk Tools

Issue: Unfriendly front appearance

<u>Design Incentive</u>	<u>Regulation Option</u>
Encourage covered (but not enclosed) front porches	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Exempt from FAR calculations
Encourage front entrance to be close to street level	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Require basements to be 3 ft or less above grade level to be exempt from FAR requirements• Make the threshold height legislation permanent

Design Incentives using Bulk Tools

Inviting front appearance



Design Incentives using Bulk Tools

Advantages:

- Targeted to solve a specific design problem
- Objective

Disadvantages:

- May have unintended results if not carefully crafted

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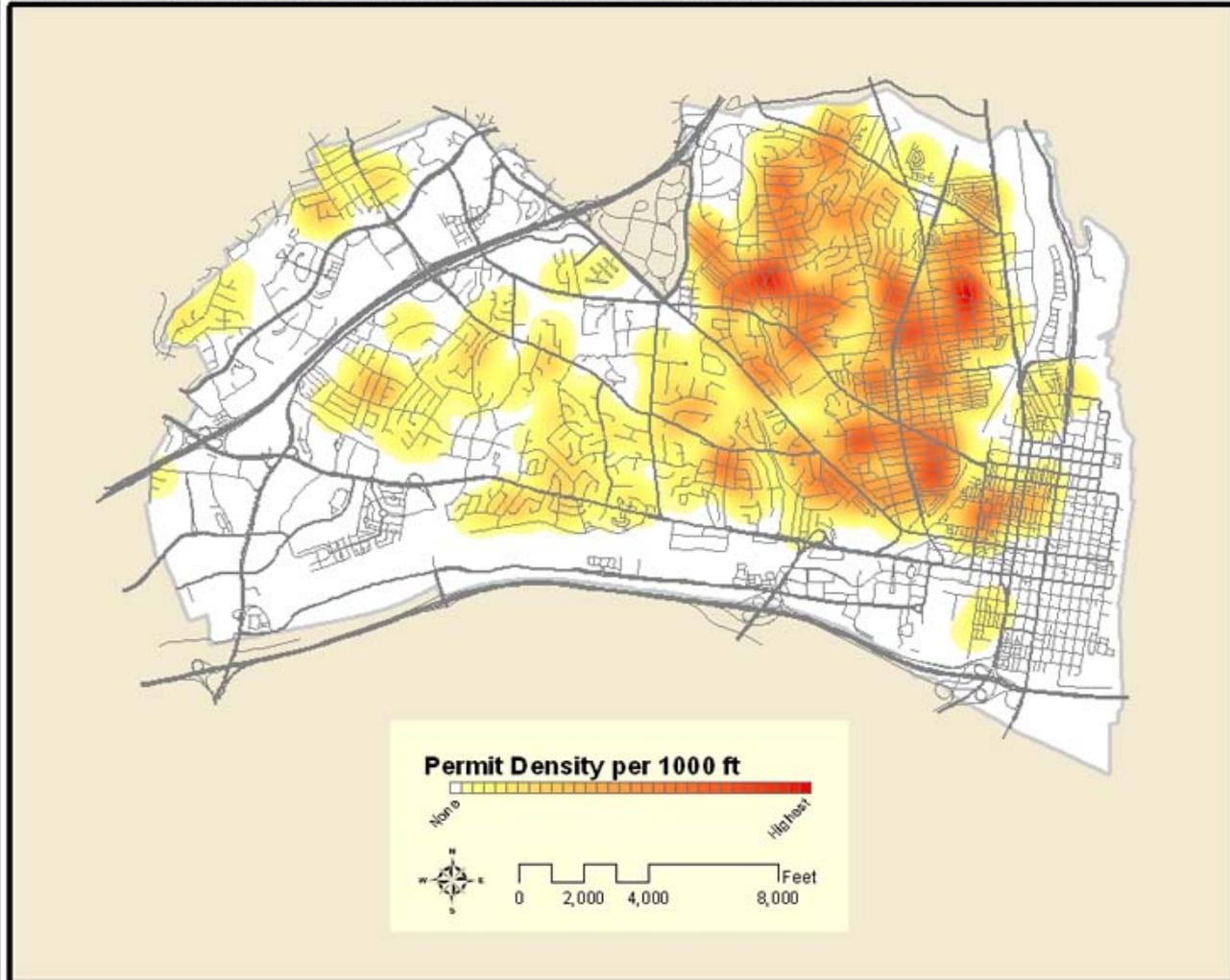
Historic/Conservation/Design Districts

Purpose:

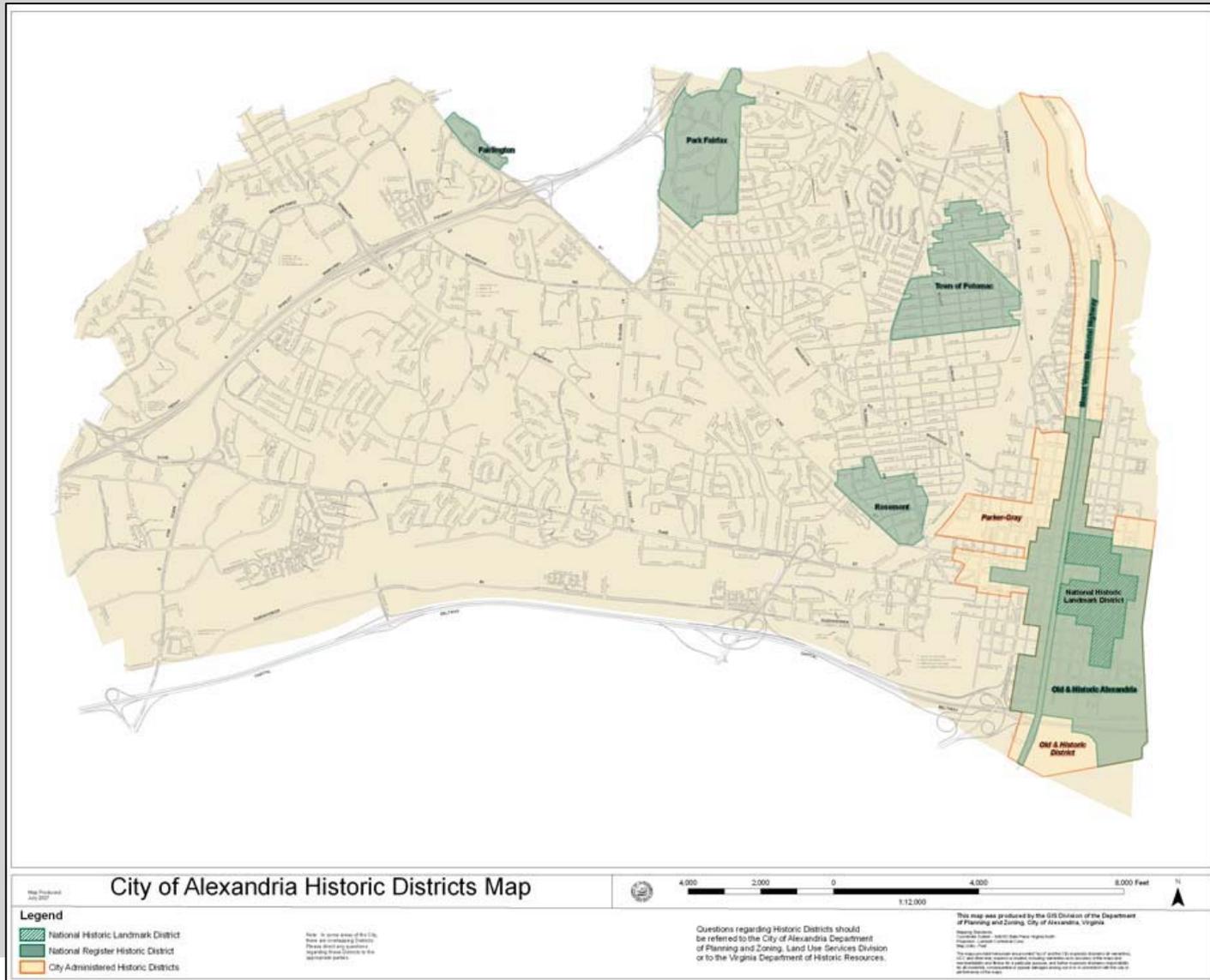
- To identify a specific geographic area:
 - to provide protection for historic or precious resources
 - to conserve valuable neighborhood residences
 - to control design of additions or new construction

Historic/Conservation/Design Districts

Single Family Residential Additions, 2003-2007 Building Permit Density

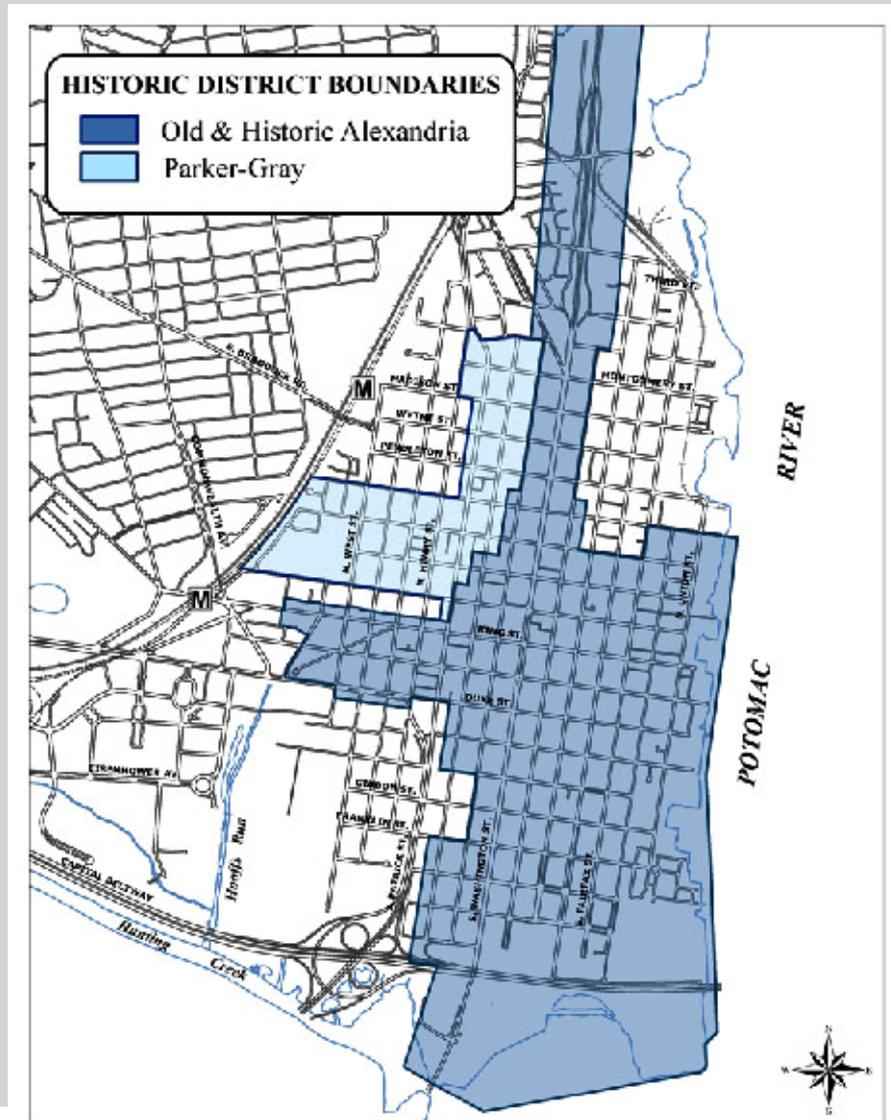


Historic/Conservation/Design Districts



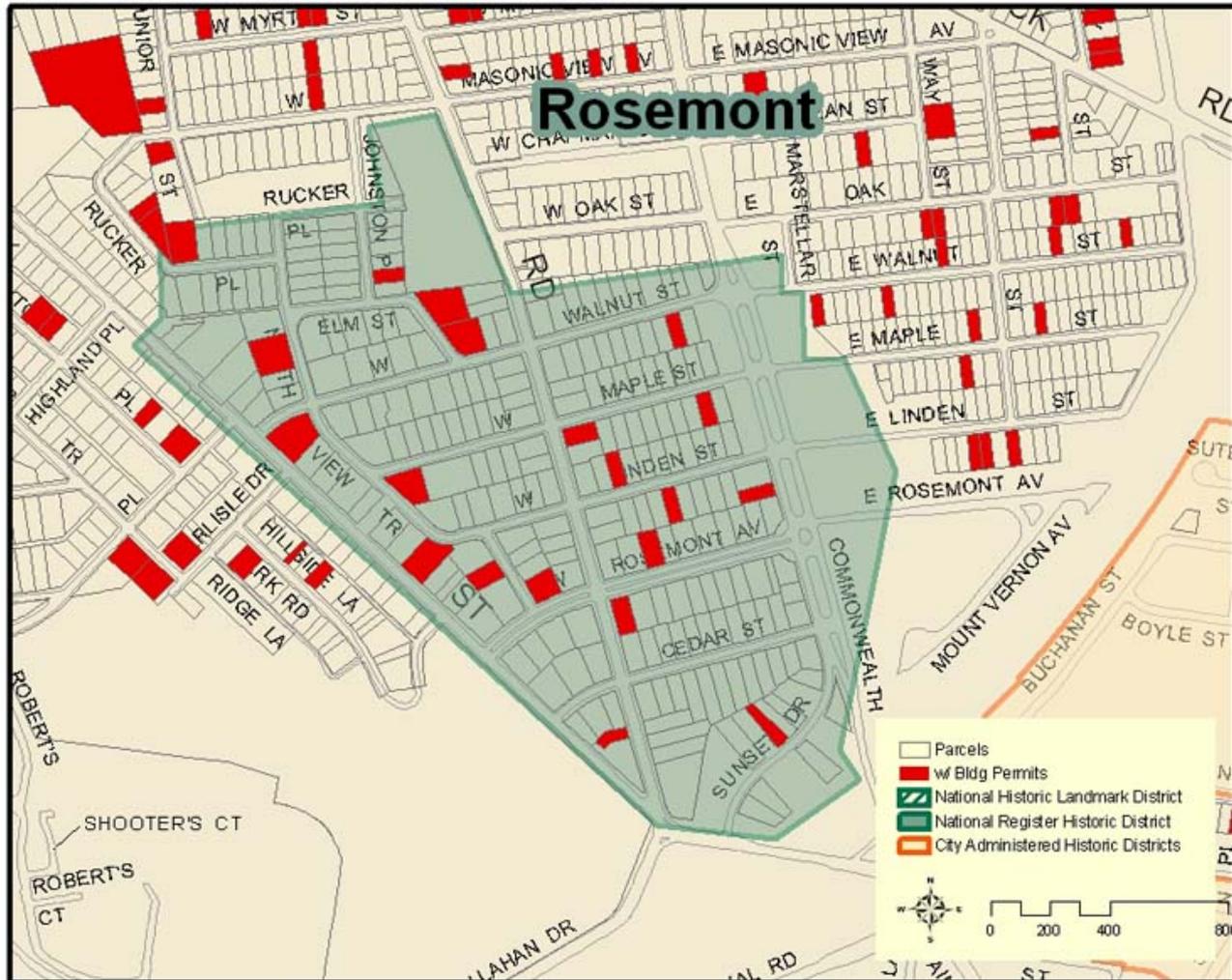
Historic/Conservation/Design Districts

Locally regulated historic districts in Alexandria



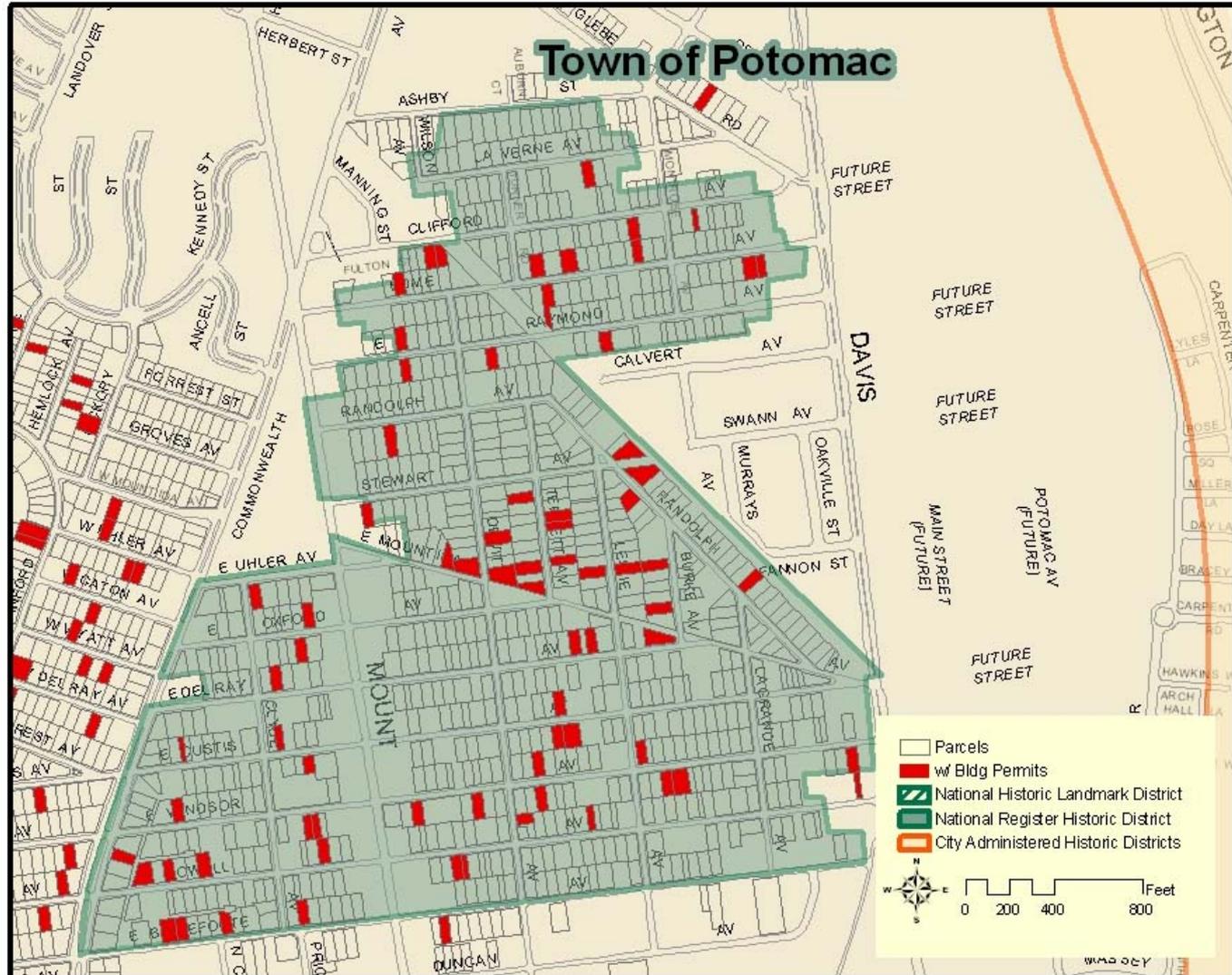
Historic/Conservation/Design Districts

Single Family Residential Additions, Building Permits 2003-7



Historic/Conservation/Design Districts

Single Family Residential Additions, Building Permits 2003-7



Historic/Conservation/Design Districts

Can teardowns be prevented or discouraged?

Under a “district” regulatory approach:

- A review board (e.g., BAR, BZA, new entity) could deny a demolition
- This decision could be appealed to the City Council & then to Circuit Court
- If the appeals are denied, the owner can accept this as a final decision and the residence cannot be demolished.
- However ...

Historic/Conservation/Design Districts

Can teardowns be prevented or discouraged?

- However, if the appeals are denied and the owner still wants to pursue the demolition, the provisions of Virginia Code Section 15.2-2306 apply:
 - The residence cannot be demolished for one year
 - The owner must make a bona fide offer to sell the property for the year at fair market value
 - A purchaser can buy the property at the offering price, if willing to preserve the residence
 - If no purchaser steps forward, the residence can be demolished

Historic/Conservation/Design Districts

General Process & Procedures to Establish a District:

- Identify a specific area (e.g., Rosemont, Town of Potomac) that warrants additional protection
- Community outreach
- Determine design standards to be applied
- Develop administrative procedures
- Identify review body for appeals
- Determine staff resource requirements
- Planning Commission & City Council approve an overlay district

Historic/Conservation/Design Districts

Design standards and administrative procedures can be complex & detailed or can be short & cover only certain specific concerns. For example:

- Old Town Alexandria Historic District – detailed guidelines, BAR review
- Roanoke Neighborhood Design District – general guidelines, staff review

Historic/Conservation/Design Districts

Carlyle/Eisenhower East Design Review Board

- Five member board established by City Council
- Reviews concept & final design proposals requiring a special use permit
- Meets every other month



Historic/Conservation/Design Districts

Advantages:

- Good way to protect threatened residential neighborhoods
- Demolition can be denied or delayed
- Clear design standards
- Can be handled administratively
- A review body handles appeals

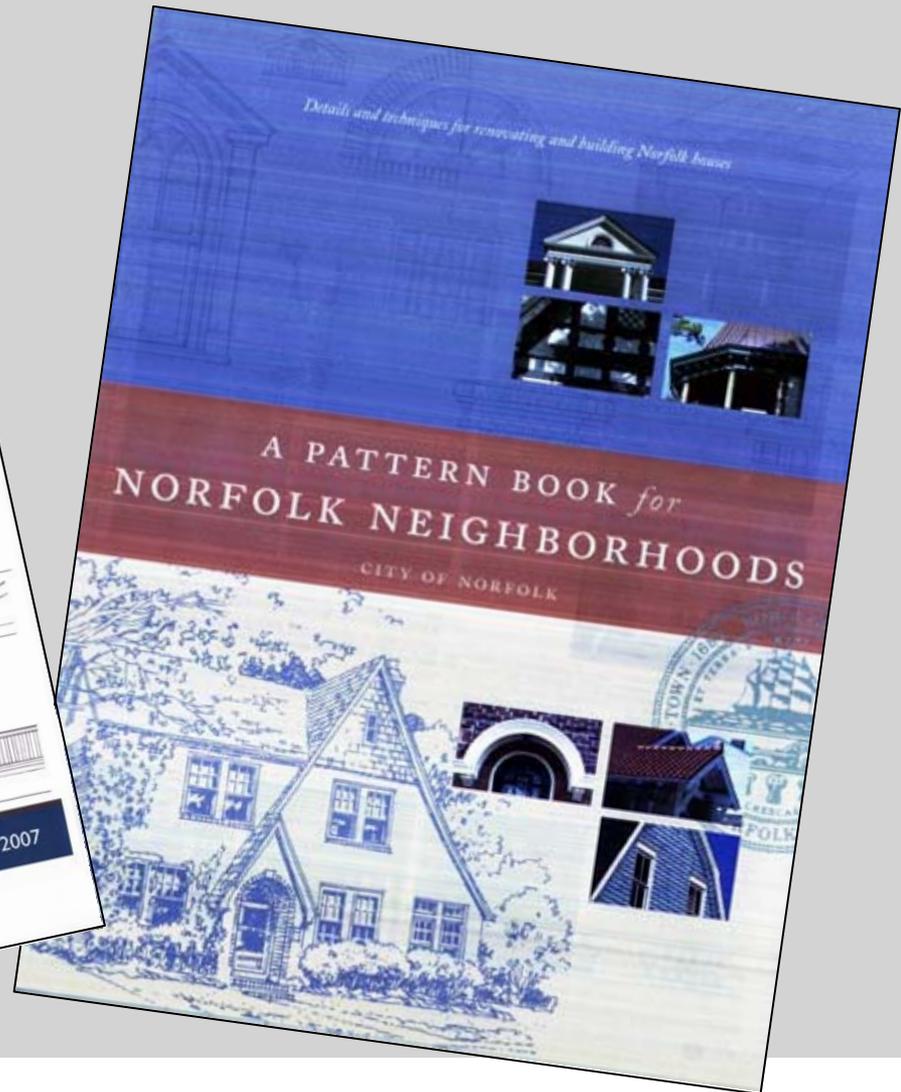
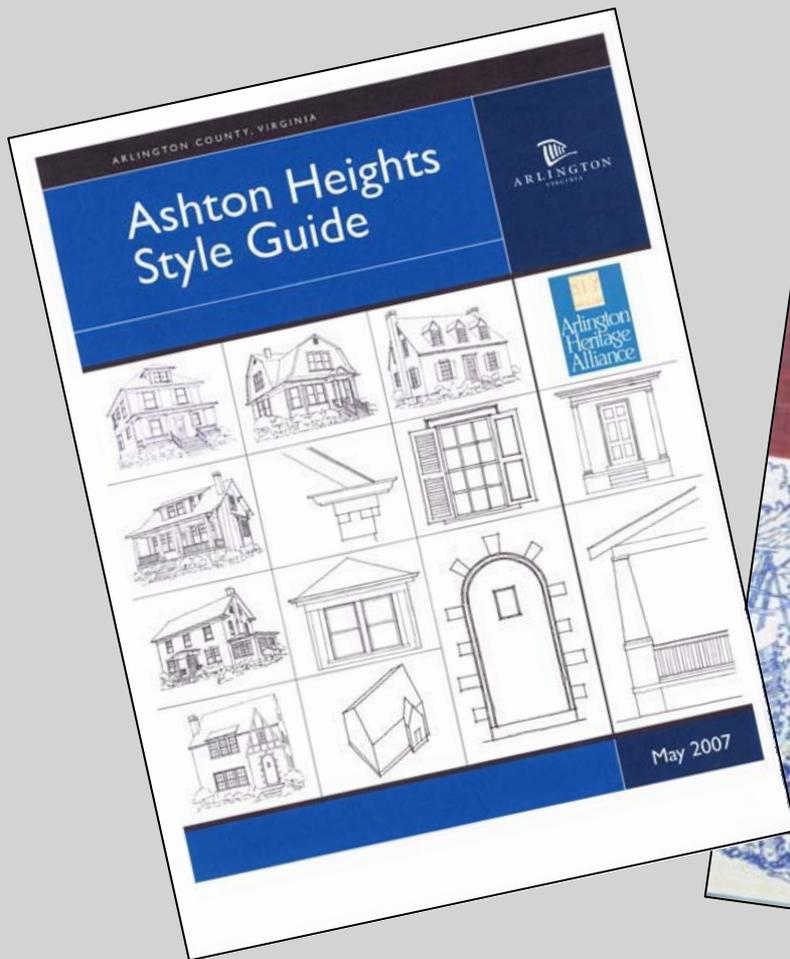
Disadvantages:

- A strong community outreach effort is necessary
- Administratively time consuming to provide advice & handle cases
- May not be readily accepted by all homeowners

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Design Pattern Books



Design Pattern Books

Purpose

- Provides useful information on the styles of houses in the neighborhood
- Shows how additions to existing homes in the neighborhood can provide additional space for the occupants while staying with the context of the original style of the home
- Shows how new homes can be built to be compatible with the neighborhood

Design Pattern Books

Can be useful to:

- Homeowners
- New residents
- Architects
- Builders



Design Pattern Books

Can address:

- Neighborhood character
- Architectural styles & details
- Guidelines for additions
- Guidelines for new construction
- Site & landscaping guidelines



Design Pattern Books

General Process to develop a Pattern Book:

- Understanding the context—past & present
- Developing the palette—documenting characteristics
- Defining the patterns, community—architecture & landscape
- Production—produce the Pattern Book

Design Pattern Books

Advantages:

- Voluntary
- Provides a vision for the neighborhood
- Can help to unify the neighborhood community
- Non-intrusive

Disadvantages:

- Not regulatory
- Depends on personal good-will
- Cannot prevent a demolition

Summary

- There are a variety of design tools available:
 - Design incentives using bulk tools (regulatory)
 - Historic/Conservation/Design Districts (with a range of regulatory approaches)
 - Design Pattern Books (voluntary)
- Design incentives using bulk tools are useful to target a specific design objective – can be applied to all single-family residential areas or particular zones

Summary (cont.)

- Geographic areas for special protection need to be identified under the regulatory “District” approach – an appeals process necessary
- The voluntary Design Pattern Book approach can be applied Citywide or for specific neighborhoods

Summary (cont.)

- The selection of design tool to use (regulatory, voluntary) can be based on:
 - A judgment about the portion of owners who are sensitive to the neighborhood context and would follow voluntary guidelines
 - The importance of the geographic area
 - The importance of the problem

Conclusion

- There are two single-family historic areas (Rosemont, Town of Potomac) that are experiencing a high level of change
- Recommend that at least these two areas be considered for design controls
 - Need for staff outreach & participation from area residents
 - Additional staff resources will be necessary