

City of Charleston

DESIGN DIVISION

REPORT 05

NEW CONSTRUCTION & THE BAR PROCESS



MARCH 2015

NEW CONSTRUCTION & THE BAR PROCESS

March 2015

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WELCOME

During the month of March, 2015, the City of Charleston contracted with a consultant to comment upon our architectural review processes and new construction on the peninsula. This report summarizes the City's intent and goals and was produced by the City's Design Division.

CITY OF CHARLESTON

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Planning, Preservation & Sustainability

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HISTORIC CHARLESTON FOUNDATION

Katherine Robinson, President and CEO

Winslow Hastie, Chief Preservation Officer



WELCOME

New Construction and the BAR Process

On Friday, September 19, 2014, the architect and urban planner Andres Duany visited Charleston City Hall for a meeting with Mayor Joseph P. Riley, Jr., City Planning Director Tim Keane and Design Division Director Jacob Lindsey. Riley, Keane and Lindsey spent 45 minutes explaining the challenges and expectations of maintaining an architectural standard in Charleston. Mayor Riley then asked for Duany's help to improve the ongoing design of new buildings in the historic districts, as well as to improve the country's oldest historic district regulations. Duany said he would consider it, and left.

Mayor Riley then called Kitty Robinson, President and CEO of the Historic Charleston Foundation and asked if the Foundation would co-sponsor Duany's work. The Foundation, Kitty and HCF President Foster Gaillard shared similar concerns, so the Foundation agreed to contribute.

Downtown Charleston is poised for unprecedented growth over the next 10-15 years, bringing about the design and construction of many new and large buildings on principal streets like Meeting, King, East Bay and others. Mayor Riley and his team were concerned about how each new building will contribute to the beauty and charm of the city while still remaining vibrant and inviting. It had become evident that the process that preserved the city for generations was seemingly not able to provide a standard by which new buildings could be measured.

Andres Duany is globally recognized for dissecting planning and design problems with incredible insight. Furthermore, he can clearly explain the problem and prescribe compelling solutions.

Charleston is a city where every new building matters. Duany's firm, DPZ, was asked to step outside their expertise in remaking suburban America to concentrate on what makes our city streets and architecture work. Downtown Charleston has moved beyond the basics of urban design and needs to continue refining the details of new urban architecture. This is an historic moment for Charleston architecture: an opportunity to step back and evaluate everything essential about the next 50 years of preservation.

Timothy J. Keane, Director

City of Charleston

Department of Planning, Preservation and Sustainability

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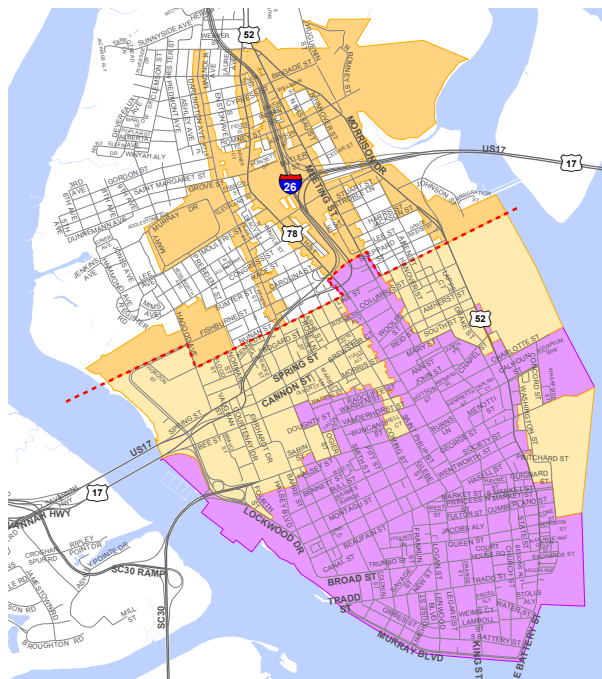
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CHARLESTON'S ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW

Unlike many cities, the exterior design of downtown Charleston's buildings are reviewed by an appointed citizen board, which is a key step toward gaining permission to build. This process is separate from zoning or building permitting, and exists solely to protect architectural quality. The board is composed of 7 members and 2 alternates, with a quorum of 4, and meets on alternating weeks. To obtain approval, projects must pass three separate reviews before the board: Conceptual, Preliminary, and Final, with increasingly rigorous requirements.

In addition to the appointed citizen Board of Architectural Review, there is a staff of 5 City employees who administer architectural regulation. They are led by the City Architect, whose role is to approve all changes to buildings within jurisdiction. This includes details such as signage or paint colors, which are approved by the staff with no board review required, up to larger new developments. City staff often consult with project owners and architects many times prior to BAR review and after final approval has been granted.

BAR JURISDICTION MAP



2014 ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW

**TOTAL NUMBER OF
BAR APPLICATIONS:**

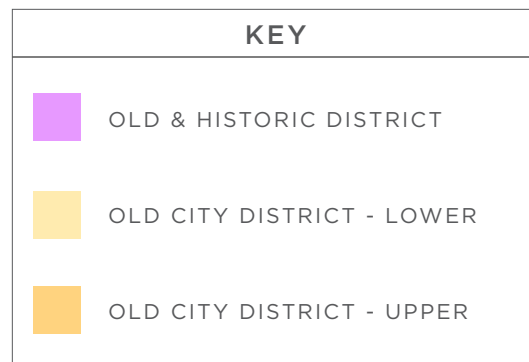
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**TOTAL REVIEWED
BY BAR IN
PUBLIC HEARINGS:**

389

*Source: City of Charleston Division of Design, Development and Preservation

The Board has purview over new construction in all areas south of Line Street on the Charleston peninsula and on major commercial corridors north of Line Street. Other areas of the city are not under BAR jurisdiction, but may be subject to design review from other boards, such as the Design Review Board.



PREPARING FOR GROWTH

In 2010, the population of the Charleston peninsula was 34,636 people, and is forecast to increase to 60,000 by 2027. This growth is proportional to the region's growth, which will increase from 664,607 to 1,000,000 during the same time period. As the geographical, cultural, and tourist center of the region, downtown Charleston will see new construction on most vacant or underutilized properties over the next 15 years. The vast majority of this new construction will be within BAR jurisdiction.

WHY CHANGE THE BAR?

PROBLEMATIC NEW BUILDINGS

- Large programs and wide orientation to the street as opposed to traditional thin building facades along the street
- New buildings often lack architectural detail

BOARD AND STAFF WORKLOAD

- Volunteer board members often serve through very lengthy meetings
- A small group of City staff handle thousands of applications per year

UNPREDICTABILITY

- Architects and owners fatigued by an unpredictable process
- Economic development can lag as a result



A modern building in Charleston.



Upper King Street's historic scale.

THE CONSULTANT PROCESS

DPZ'S CHARRETTE

The skills required to modify our architectural review processes go beyond the Design Division's ability. The task required outside expertise, and Andres Duany's firm of DPZ is known for their skill in writing codes and review processes that yield architectural excellence. While they are often associated with neo-traditional new towns, their work has also resulted in modern architecture and codes for existing city centers.

DPZ was retained for a 5-day charrette, held at the Design Division at 85 Calhoun St. During that time, the team interviewed many constituents, including architects, developers and BAR members, in addition to a series of public presentations. Their work culminated in a final presentation and a set of written recommendations.



Formal meetings and interviews



Informal meetings and chance encounters



Team workspace at 85 Calhoun Street



Public presentations held at the Charleston Museum

NEXT STEPS

The City will review DPZ's recommendations and respond by writing a new set of guidelines for the BAR and the review of new construction. These recommendations from City staff will be formed as a response to DPZ's report, but will modify their recommendations as needed to improve architectural review in Charleston. These final changes will be made publicly available, ultimately resulting in a City Council resolution.

THE CITY'S GOALS

- FACILITATE A HIGHER QUALITY OF ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN
- CREATE A PREDICTABLE PROCESS
- ENABLE MODERN AND TRADITIONAL DESIGN TO BE FAIRLY REVIEWED
- REDUCE TIME BURDEN ON BOARD MEMBERS



25 Calhoun St.



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