

Frequently Asked Questions

Remapping and the Streetside Historic Overlay District (HOD-S)

Historic Glenwood-Brooklyn Neighborhood Association

What is “remapping?”

Remapping refers to the process of assigning new zoning designations to neighborhoods in the City of Raleigh. These new designations follow the Unified Development Ordinance (UDO), which came into effect in September 2013. The UDO is in turn derived from the City’s Comprehensive Plan, a vision of what the city would/could look like a generation from now.

It’s very important we get these zoning issues right because the decisions being made now will be with us for the next 30 years.

What do all these letter+number combinations mean?

R-30, Special R-30, RX-3... these are all zoning designations. The ‘R’ stands for residential and the number indicates how many units (houses, apartments, etc.) are allowed on one acre under that designation. “RX” refers to residential mixed-use, which in certain circumstances allows for commercial use of the building on the first floor. The number in RX designations refers to the maximum number of stories allowed. Other zoning designations include neighborhood mixed use (NX), office mixed use (OX) and various residential designations (R-2, R-6, R-10, etc.) each with its own rules about building height, setbacks, etc. and how they can be used.

How is our neighborhood zoned currently?

Most (around 85%) of the residential properties in Glenwood-Brooklyn are zoned Special R-30 (SpR-30) with a smaller group zoned R-30. The Planning Commission has recommended that most SpR-30 properties be remapped to R-10 but some would become RX-3. All R-30 properties will be remapped to RX-3.

What does the “special” in SpR-30 mean?

This zoning was created in the 80s as a variant of R-30 that includes certain protections against teardown development. For example, under SpR-30, development is limited to 50% of the lot, which makes large multi-unit structures less viable.

What do R-10 and RX-3 zonings mean for us?

R-10 is a common residential designation that approximates the density we already have “on the ground” in the neighborhood. It has some restrictions on building size, but lacks other provisions that appear in SpR-30.

RX-3 is a residential mixed-use designation that allows for commercial use on the first floor (if the property is on a corner) with residential units above. It allows for a maximum building height of up to 50 feet with a total of 3 stories. There are 29 properties in Glenwood-Brooklyn slated to go to RX-3. Many of these (18) were originally built as single-family homes, though most of those have since been subdivided into apartments.

However, these 18 buildings still look like houses and in our view should be treated as such and be remapped to R-10. Expanding the potential size and use of buildings on these sites would encourage

exactly the kind of teardown development that we are trying to avoid, not to mention the impact on parking, traffic, etc.

What are “HODs” and what’s the difference between them?

HOD refers to a historic overlay district. There are two kinds, HOD-G (general) and HOD-S (streetside). All of the historic districts in the city today are the former—we would be the first HOD-S. While both designations seek to preserve the historical character of a given neighborhood, HOD-S regulates only the front half of the building and the first 25% of the lot. HOD-G rules apply to the entire property.

For new construction, such as infill of a vacant lot, 100% of the structure and the front 25% of the lot are subject to review under HOD-S. The limitations are mostly aimed at preserving historic building features and overall appearance from the street.

HOD-S also plays a role in new construction, placing limits on overall size relative to surrounding homes, roof shape and other aspects of the proposed new structure. The main goal is for new homes to be broadly consistent with the existing neighborhood, but the rules do not stipulate a building must be of a certain architectural style.

What does HOD-S NOT do?

HOD-S does not regulate most kinds of work done on the rear side of a home. Back decks, rear additions that don’t expand the width of the house, and roof changes (e.g., addition of dormers) that don’t impact the front half of the structure—all of these are examples of projects NOT regulated by HOD-S.

The RHDC is also going to implement a “text change” that will eliminate paint color as a regulated factor, though there has not been a single project rejected on the basis of color in the past six years.

Nothing on the interior of the building is regulated by HOD-S or HOD-G.

What can/can’t I do to my house?

There isn’t much that HOD-S specifically prohibits, and most of the restrictions have to do with the 50% of the home closest to the street. Everything farther back that falls within the existing “envelope” of the house is not subject to review. In practice, HOD-S is actually less rigid than the terms of most homeowner associations in suburban developments, and it is administered by the city, not other residents.

If a project is subject to review, the property owner will need to obtain a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) from the RHDC. Since 2008, the RHDC has processed over 1400 such applications and approved 98% of them. Most were handled by staff and did not even go to the full commission, and of those that did, the majority were OK’ed after one meeting.

How do I know if my project is subject to review under HOD-S?

The RHDC web site has a long list of potential home improvement projects and indicates which ones, and under what conditions, will require a COA.

How does HOD-S specifically affect teardowns?

Once the Raleigh Historic Development Commission (RHDC) votes that the proposed district meets the criteria for designation of a HOD, no demolition permits can be issued without obtaining a COA. Demolitions cannot be denied, but the RHDC may require an up to 180-day delay. This allows time for the property owner RHDC and others to explore other options such as restoration. If the HOD-S is adopted the possible demolition delay is increases to 365 days.

An HOD designation also indirectly affects teardowns because of what can be built on a given site as new construction. For example, a 4,500 square foot modern home with a flat roof would likely not be allowed on a street lined with one-story bungalows since its size and shape would be markedly different from what currently exists in the neighborhood. However, a modern home with a roofline and scale that are in line with the surrounding homes might well be OK'ed.

How are remapping and the historic overlay district (HOD) related?

Remapping simply has to do with what planners call “base zoning.” Once we move to R-10 under the new zoning system described by the Universal Development Ordinance (UDO), we will lose some of the unique provisions that our current zoning (SpR-30) offers.

The HOD-S adds a layer of regulation on top of base zoning, regardless of what that might be, for properties within the boundaries of the HOD, which the planning department recommended would be the best way to keep our protections after the new zoning takes effect.

So, while R-10 has some compatibility standards (e.g., front setbacks), the HOD goes into more detail and covers things that are not considered under R-10 (e.g., roof shape, building materials).

What if we simply accept the proposed R-10 zoning?

The R-10 designation recommended by the Planning Commission does offer some protections against inappropriate development (e.g., height limits, setback requirements, use limits). However, it will not deter the kind of tear-down-and-build-bigger development that is already eating away at the historic character of our neighborhood. A Streetside HOD offers a compromise between unfettered development and the more stringent “general” historic overlay district. We see this as the best way to balance the interests of development and preservation.

What are we asking the City for?

Most neighborhoods map easily from the old to the new, but our current zoning does not have an equivalent under the UDO. That makes us... “special” (i.e., problematic for city planners).

Our goal is to preserve the history of this place, and there are three elements to achieving this:

1. Establishing a Streetside Historic Overlay District
2. Delaying remapping so that our new zoning is put in place simultaneously with the HOD-S
3. Remapping RX properties, or at least the 18 that were/are single-family homes, to the same zoning as the rest of the single-family homes in the neighborhood.

What's next?

The Planning Department will make its final recommendations to the City Council, and eventually the Council will vote on how to proceed. In the meantime, we and the City have more work to do around the HOD-S process, hence our desire to synchronize remapping with the HOD-S.

For our part, we will complete our survey of property owners' support for the HOD-S and submit it to Planning Department staff. It will likely be early next year before everything is finalized and we have our new zoning and, if approved, our HOD-S in effect.