

Neighborhood Conservation Overlays



What is a Neighborhood Conservation Overlay?

A neighborhood conservation overlay (NCO) is a tool that residents may use to recognize and conserve distinctive elements of their neighborhoods. An NCO allows neighborhoods to tailor zoning standards to reflect the special character of the area. By drafting neighborhood specific development standards, an NCO's regulatory framework may be detailed or broad based on collective neighborhood input.

An NCO serves to protect the broad characteristics that help to define each of Greensboro's unique neighborhoods. Residents work with city staff to determine the boundaries of an NCO as well as draft the guidelines that promote compatible infill in a neighborhood. Residents in an NCO will submit a work plan for exterior changes to their property that are addressed in the development guidelines. All work review forms are reviewed by city staff with the applicant to ensure that new development is compatible with the neighborhood's adopted standards.



What neighborhoods are eligible to have a Neighborhood Conservation Overlay?

As neighborhoods age, their original characteristics help set them apart from other areas of Greensboro. Often this unique community identity is viewed as an incentive for investment. In becoming an NCO, a district may ensure that new development is compatible with existing characteristics of the area. As each district is unique, no two will be alike and each set of guidelines will reflect the special characteristics and concerns of the area.

Interested areas need to be large enough to include at least all of the lots on one side of a block, but there is no limit as to how large an area may be. Also, 75% of the area must be developed at least 25 years prior to applying as an NCO. Eligible areas will have distinctive features that create a cohesive, identifiable setting, character or association.



Neighborhood Conservation Overlays



Neighborhood Conservation Overlay Basics

purpose	to conserve an area's distinctive character by providing clear development standards to exterior improvements and new construction
designation process	pre-application meeting with neighborhood representatives and city staff; submittal of application; creation of development guidelines; approval by majority of property owners; public hearing process with final action by City Council
petition signatures required	property owners representing 25% of land and parcels to proceed with application; 51% of land and parcel owners to approve drafted development standards to proceed to public hearing <small>*this only applies if a potential NCO district does not have an adopted neighborhood plan</small>
complexity of standards	neighborhoods decide the level of complexity for individual development standards
review process	most work review follows the existing City review process for exterior work and is administered by City staff
demolition regulation	none

Neighborhood Conservation Overlays



Examples of elements for NCO development standards



- lot coverage
- setbacks
- height
- stories
- structure width
- lot width
- building massing
- orientation
- building materials
- roofline and pitch
- dimensional requirements
- garage location
- parking & loading requirements
- porch enclosures
- screening
- paving
- driveway & parking location
- accessory structures
- entry steps
- landscaping
- fences & walls
- lighting
- signage

Examples of elements that cannot be included in NCO development standards

- demolition
- land uses permitted in the existing zoning district
- interiors of structures
- routine maintenance
- painting

Neighborhood Conservation Overlays



Frequently Asked Questions

What is a neighborhood conservation overlay district?

A Neighborhood Conservation Overlay (NCO) district is a zoning layer placed on top of the base zoning district that serves to protect unique features of a residential neighborhood. The zoning overlay is tailor-made to each neighborhood and reflects the special qualities of that place. The development standards protect elements visible from the public right-of-way and may vary from setbacks and building massing to distinct architectural features to special natural or environmental characteristics. An NCO also serves to facilitate compatible development or redevelopment.



What changes will happen when a neighborhood becomes a conservation district?

The purpose of an NCO is to maintain the existing setting and features of a neighborhood that give it its special character. A property owner will not have to change or alter the property due to the designation. If the owner wants to make changes that are addressed in the neighborhood design guidelines, plans will be reviewed by city staff to ensure that any alterations are compatible with the existing neighborhood guidelines.



Who will decide how the guidelines will affect my property?

Residents within the overlay district determine what is included in the guidelines. The neighborhood creates its own design guidelines and conservation plan with the help of City staff. The City serves to help property owners comply with the neighborhood's goals.

How will an NCO district help a neighborhood?

One of the goals of an NCO district is to stabilize and enhance neighborhood character by providing a clear plan and set of design guidelines that accurately reflect the neighborhood as a cohesive unit. By establishing a higher standard of development, NCOs typically stabilize property values and encourage quality new development and reinvestment in the area. Increased neighborhood pride, resident involvement, and a greater sense of community often result from this recognition as a unique and special place.



How are neighborhood boundaries defined?

Boundaries should reflect a cohesive built environment that represents common characteristics and the setting of the neighborhood. Boundaries can be as small as one block face and may be altered in the same manner that they are created. There may be multiple NCOs within a traditionally defined neighborhood boundary.

Neighborhood Conservation Overlays



Frequently Asked Questions

How do I know if my neighborhood is eligible?

A potential NCO must contain at least one block face and at least 75% of the land area must have been developed at least 25 years prior to the application.

How are the guidelines and plan written?

Districts will be studied by neighborhood residents with the assistance of City staff. The neighborhood residents and staff will assess the special characteristics of the neighborhood in order to create a plan that accurately reflects the goals and characteristics of the district.

Can a neighborhood be both a Conservation District and an Historic District?

No. Conservation Overlay Districts and Historic Districts serve different purposes. If a neighborhood is unsure of which direction to take, City staff will be happy to review the neighborhood and make suggestions.

Will being an NCO make me change the appearance of my property or rehabilitate it right now?

No. Property owners are not required to alter their properties upon designation. If, however, an owner wishes to alter property after designation, the owner would be required to follow any applicable NCO guidelines.

What sorts of things can the guidelines regulate?

Items such as, but not limited to: building height, massing, and orientation, principal elevation features, building materials, roofline and pitch, dimensional requirements, setbacks, lot size, lot coverage, parking and loading requirements, garage entrance location, driveways, landscaping, fences and walls, lighting, signage, general site planning for both primary and accessory structures.

What sorts of things can not be regulated by the guidelines?

Interior alterations, routine maintenance or repair of any structure or site feature, demolition of any structure, exterior paint colors and types of land uses permitted by the underlying zoning district.

Is there a design committee review or public hearing for alterations or for new construction?

No. All review is done by staff and the general public is not involved in the review process.

How long will review take and will there be a fee?

There is no additional fee for NCO plan review and design assistance to the normal fees associated with building permits. Major alterations and new construction follow the same timeline as any project requiring a building permit.

Can an NCO be used to exclude certain types of housing?

No. An NCO is used to maintain the character, setting and identity of a neighborhood and to promote quality, respectful investment. If a parcel is currently zoned for multi-family, an NCO will not change that current land use.

Neighborhood Conservation Overlays



Frequently Asked Questions

Will an NCO downzone my property or change its land use?

No, the existing base zoning will remain unchanged. Any vacant parcels will also maintain the range of uses permitted by the underlying zoning. The NCO may affect the dimensional standards (lot area, setbacks, building height, etc.), but not the use or density of the base zoning.

Will different land uses have different guidelines?

Sometimes commercial and multi-family areas have different characteristics and settings from their single-family neighbors even when they are located within the same neighborhood. In order to conserve these special characteristics, neighborhoods may have different guidelines in order to protect the special qualities of each area.

How do you start an NCO in your neighborhood?

Typically a neighborhood files an application with the Planning Department and an assessment is made as to its eligibility. If the neighborhood is found eligible using criteria outlined in the Development Ordinance, a public meeting is scheduled by the Planning Department to provide pertinent information for residents and stakeholders. Following the public meeting, if the residents are still interested in pursuing an NCO district, the residents, with the assistance of City staff will draft a Neighborhood Conservation Plan. The plan is reviewed by the neighborhood and is presented at public hearings by the Planning Board, Zoning Commission and City Council. Once the Neighborhood Conservation Plan is approved, the Guidelines will be used to review proposed developments within the district.



Neighborhood Conservation Overlays



Neighborhood Conservation Overlay Process

1. Pre-Application Meeting

Neighborhood representatives from interested districts will meet with city staff prior to initiating the application process. This meeting will be an opportunity for the applicants and staff to discuss opportunities available to the neighborhood. Staff will also explain the NCO planning process and the responsibilities of the neighborhood in establishing an NCO.

2. Application Initiation (there are 3 ways an application may be initiated)

- (a) petition signed by property owner(s) representing at least 25% of the land area and at least 25% of the parcels within the proposed district
-or-
- (b) request by a property owner within the proposed district, pursuant to an adopted neighborhood or other area plan that recommends a Neighborhood Conservation Overlay District
-or-
- (c) By City Council

3. Eligibility Determination

A potential district is determined eligible if it meets three basic criteria:

- (a) Contains a minimum of one block face (all the lots on one side of a block); and
- (b) At least 75% of the land area in the proposed district was developed at least 25 years prior to the application, and is presently developed; and
- (c) there are natural or man-made features shared by a majority of the properties, creating a cohesive and distinctive setting, character or association

4. Community Meetings & Planning Process

After a district is determined eligible, the neighborhood will work with city staff to determine boundaries for the district and the Neighborhood Conservation Plan.

- (a) **Public Information Meeting-** A public meeting is held to describe the NCO planning process as well as the nature and purpose of an NCO and its potential effects on property owners.
- (b) **Community Meetings-** Following the Public Information Meeting, a series of meetings (typically 4-6) will be held with neighborhood property owners. These meetings will address the characteristics to be included in the NCO development guidelines. Staff will work with the district to draft the conservation plan and guidelines and ensure that they are consistent with the purpose of an NCO and the established character of the district. At these meetings the neighborhood will need to establish support of the plan and guidelines prior to the final community meeting. A draft of the new NCO plan and guidelines will be made available via the City of Greensboro website and notice will be sent out to all affected property owners and to the properties adjacent to the proposed district.

Neighborhood Conservation Overlays



Neighborhood Conservation Overlay Process

5. NCO Plan

Based on the input from the Community Meetings a neighborhood conservation overlay plan will be prepared for public review. The contents of this document are:

- (a) Statement of Purpose and Intent;
- (b) A map that indicates the boundaries of the proposed district;
- (c) A description of the relevant history of the area;
- (d) A description of the existing and common characteristics of the area;
- (e) Design Guidelines for new construction and improvements.

6. District Approval

Upon completion of the proposed Neighborhood Conservation Plan, a public meeting will be held to inform property owners in the proposed District of the guideline requirements. A petition indicating support for the NCO plan must be filed with the Planning Director within six (6) months of this meeting for the City to proceed to public hearings. The petition to proceed must be signed by property owner's representing at least 51% of the land area and at least 51% of the parcels within the proposed district.

7. Public Hearings

The Neighborhood Conservation Plan will be forwarded, with the recommendations of the Planning Board and Zoning Commission following public hearings, to the City Council for approval. The City Council will hold a public hearing to consider adoption of both the Overlay District and the Plan.



Neighborhood Conservation Overlays



Planning Process Responsibilities

Neighborhood Actions

- appoint representatives to meet with city staff for pre-application meeting
- initiate application process
- survey the district to determine the area's specific needs for an NCO
- photograph properties in the proposed district
- meet with city staff through community meetings to determine elements of development guidelines
- acquire signatures representing 51% of property owners in the district in support of the development guidelines to proceed to public hearing



City Staff Actions

- provide petitions/ application to district representatives for signatures
- survey the proposed district to determine eligibility for becoming an NCO
- conduct community meetings to address district needs
- report findings of eligibility to the community
- draft a Neighborhood Conservation Plan
- provide notice to public of Neighborhood Conservation Plan
- present Neighborhood Conservation Plan to Planning Board and Zoning Commission for recommendation; present Plan to City Council for final action



Neighborhood Conservation Overlays



Sample Community “Check Point” Schedule

1 Listening

- Staff listens to neighborhood concerns and why they want an NCO
 - review the purpose and intent of an NCO
 - explain the potential effects of an NCO on the district

2 Neighborhood Report

- neighborhood establishes goals and objectives for NCO
- neighborhood explains to staff their ideas for possible elements to be included in the guidelines
 - neighborhood defines NCO boundaries

3 Refining

- refine elements to be included in development guidelines
 - neighborhood votes on inclusion of elements

Neighborhood Conservation Overlays



Sample Community “Check Point” Schedule

4 Checking In

- neighborhood comments on Neighborhood Conservation Plan

5 Finalizing & Approving

- neighborhood reviews Neighborhood Conservation Plan
- neighborhood votes on Plan to determine support
- neighborhood circulates petition to support Neighborhood Conservation Plan. Based on neighborhood support, the Plan proceeds to public hearings



Neighborhood Conservation Overlay



Feasibility Application

Date: _____

1. District Name: _____

2. Proposed Boundaries:

North: _____ East: _____

South: _____ West: _____

3. Attach map of district boundaries (provided by Planning Department). Indicate if boundaries include both sides of the street, to the centerline, or along rear edge of property lines.

4. Contact Information (For principal neighborhood contacts)

Name	Address	Telephone	e-mail
Main Contact	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

5. Statement of justification

This should explain why the neighborhood should be considered for Neighborhood Conservation status. Please limit this statement to 500 words.

6. Approximate age of the neighborhood. _____

7. Description of common natural or man-made features that help to define the potential district.

8. Attach petition (provided by Planning Department) representing support of 25% of the land area *and* parcels, unless initiation is pursuant to an adopted plan or by City Council.

9. Any additional information necessary for determination of eligibility.