

Development Activities Meeting Report (Version: 01/24/2024)

This report created by the Neighborhood Planner and included with staff reports to City Boards and/or Commissions.

Logistics	Stakeholders
Project Name/Address: East Carson Street Local Historic District Guidelines Update	Groups Represented (e.g., specific organizations, residents, employees, etc. where this is evident): Consultant Team / Applicants South Side Community Council Area residents DCP staff
Parcel Number(s): Entire East Carson Street Local Historic District [see map at https://www.pittsburghpa.gov/Business-Development/City-Planning/Historic-Preservation-Program/Historic-Designations-and-Districts and making visible the “Historic Preservation” layers of the City of Pittsburgh Zoning Map at https://pittsburghpa.maps.arcgis.com/apps/instant/sidebar/index.html?appid=4bb79ea64bf848b3a0560e3856efeccb]	
ZDR Application Number: N/A	
Meeting Location: Zoom	
Date: September 18, 2025	
Meeting Start Time: 6pm	
Applicant: LGA Partners (member of project consultant team)	Approx. Number of Attendees: 24
Boards and/or Commissions Request(s): Update to the East Carson Street Local Historic Guidelines requires approval by Historic Review Commission (HRC)	

How did the meeting inform the community about the development project?

Ex: Community engagement to-date, location and history of the site, demolition needs, building footprint and overall square footage, uses and activities (particularly on the ground floor), transportation needs and parking proposed, building materials, design, and other aesthetic elements of the project, community uses, amenities and programs.

The project is for an update to the East Carson Street Local Historic District Guidelines. The applicant (from LGA Partners) provided introduction on the project impetus, funding from a Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) grant, and the organization leading it, the South Side Community Council, who contracted with the consultant team. The update is to include easy-to-follow guides with graphics and photos informed by public input, and is intended to help owners go through the permitting process.

Applicant provided historical information about the South Side Flats neighborhood area and East Carson Street, when the area was a borough and when it was annexed into the City of Pittsburgh. Shared about the presence of steel-making and glass making production historically, and commercial storefronts. Many structures are in the predominant styles of the late 19th century – Romanesque, Italianate, and Second Empire, with ornate detailing, interesting window profiles, decorative cornices and brick detailing. Highlighted East Carson Street as one of the largest Victorian main streets still in existence in the country and a special place.

Applicant provided a visual mapped outline of the 1983 national historic district area, and an outline of the City-designated/local historic district first established in 1993 and expanded in 1999. Noted that the local historic district has more impact due to its regulatory power as an ordinance, whereas the national status is more honorific. If a site is

in the national district and not in the local district, or simply any historic building in the area of similar nature, the guidelines are still a great resource for any existing building.

Applicant described what the design guidelines are. They are best practices for the treatment of buildings in the historic district. They are a toolkit used by many, including property owners, contractors, City staff, the Local Review Committee, and the Historic Review Commission (HRC) uses guidelines to review applications and make appropriate decisions on projects impacting historic properties. Guidelines are based on the Secretary of the Interior standards for treatment of historic properties, but are distilled, specific, and tailored to the district.

Applicant explained how the guidelines cover work that is up for review in the locally-designated historic district, which includes any property within the local historic district's geographic boundary making exterior modifications visible from the public Right of Way, which includes streets, alleys, sidewalks, and any public way. Items covered in the guidelines include elements like roofs, windows, doors, painting, new construction, demolition, site improvements, and building signage, and more. Noted that the guidelines focus on items that are visible from the public ROW, but it is always a great practice to consider if something is visible or not before proceeding and getting too far down the road on a project. On multiple slides within this presentation, the applicant included some existing conditions photos of buildings and facades in the East Carson Street Historic District.

Applicant shared the process timeline for this project of updating the guidelines. The Update process kicked off on October 1st of 2024. There was a public engagement opportunity at the Neighbor Night on October 15, 2024. The project team solicited feedback on people's favorite things about the existing historic district guidelines and what they want to improve. On April 30, 2025, the project consultant team submitted draft guidelines to the South Side Community Council (SSCC). The project team, meanwhile, was also in a parallel effort with the City of Pittsburgh to do a similar exercise for three other historic districts, and so they wanted to work with the City to get a template shaping the look and feel of the guidelines before continuing to work on the East Carson Street guidelines, to ensure they would all be consistent and the City can take them and they will fit into the bigger picture of multiple guidelines' updates. On July 2, 2025, the project team presented all the draft guidelines updates at that point in time to HRC in a briefing. Then, on August 19, 2025, the team submitted updated draft guidelines to SSCC that incorporated feedback from previous comments and from different conversations with the City related to solar panels and more. Then the guidelines went through a review process with SSCC and with the Local Review Committee of architects, which gets us to this month and today having this Development Activities Meeting. Guidelines will be available for review over a 30-day period, during which people can provide questions and comments, and then after that, the proposed guidelines will be presented to HRC at a Hearing and Action, anticipated for November 5, 2025. In tonight's DAM, the team will not review every detail of the guidelines but intend to provide an overview and example of components of it.

Applicant explained there is a General Design Guidelines Document – a two-chapter document applying to all historic districts in the city, which includes high-level philosophy and background info about historic preservation common to all districts. Chapter 2 of this covers the procedures about planning a project before talking to the City, and then current HRC procedures and a flow chart and FAQ section. This General Design Guidelines Document is in the hands of the City and is a living document.

Applicant described the East Carson Street Historic District guidelines chapter 1. Noted how it provides background about the district, as well as diagrams describing major architectural styles. If someone is interested in what style a building falls under, there is a graphical guide to figure that out. Chapter 2 has the guidelines for existing buildings. Chapter 3 includes the guidelines for supporting elements like signage, murals, accessibility, fences, solar panels, and utilities that could be placed on existing buildings or new construction. Chapter 4 are guidelines for additions and

Chapter 5 is for new construction. There is guidance around mass, scale, and materials used for those construction elements. There also is a chapter 6 with Guidelines for Demolitions.

Applicant provided a couple slides showing snapshots of a couple of pages as they appear in the draft East Carson street guidelines. Applicant presented an example of a building on East Carson Street with a slate roof and a leak – what do as a property owner? Recommended that the owner review the general design guidelines, especially if unfamiliar with historic preservation. Then the owner should review the procedures to get a sense of how long it would take and what they would need to do. The background info of Chapter 1 might inform general knowledge on the building itself. Then the owner could go to the section on roofs. Showed a 2 page spread layout about the guidelines for roofs.

Using the roof section as an example, the applicant explained how the draft guidelines are very consistent in their layout. There is a yellow box with text in it that serves as a section introduction about why a given element is important and how it contributes to the identity of the building and district. After that, there is a 2-column layout with a series of text items bolded with numbers – these are the actual guidelines. An example is “Repair and restore original roofs when possible.” On the right side of the guidelines’ section’s 2-page spread are supporting photos and diagrams from the district to give extra visual/contextual info about the text itself. Each guideline is only a sentence or two long to keep concise, and key terms are bolded so as to make it easy to navigate what may apply to one’s project. There are gray text boxes that also provide additional info (even if not formal guideline) and expand on the guidelines. As an example, alternate materials for slate are shown.

The applicant explained that the guidelines as a whole are structured to be in keeping with the level of priorities of historic preservation. For example, the first priority is to restore and repair. But if repair is not feasible and have to replace, the parameters about replacement are explained in the guidelines. There is a lot of focus on materials, appearance, dimension, pattern, etc. The guidelines are not meant to be overly prescriptive. There are ways of doing exterior work to promote longevity of structure while keeping with the character and identity of the district.

The applicant shared what they heard from feedback in the October 2024 Neighbor Night and with the public survey. They received 122 responses from the public survey. The public shared what they liked and what they’d like to see improved. Applicant noted some things that the guidelines cannot prescribe. Applicant also noted there was feedback about streamlining the HRC process that they passed along. Comments also addressed cost-effective materials and affordability, and the updated guidelines are written with options so appropriate treatments can be done but not one-size fits all. Other comments included being clear about what is being reviewed, equitable and consistent enforcement as an issue, more knowledge about the current standards, tailored and local guidelines being helpful to preserve the identity/character of the district, vacant storefronts and property maintenance/upkeep as issues, and other comments about types of businesses along East Carson.

Applicant directed further project questions and comments to info@southsidecommunitycouncil.org

Input and Responses

Questions and Comments from Attendees	Responses from Applicants
[SSCC rep:] The draft could not be reviewed in its entirety here since it so many pages. Is there a public link where	We want to ask you about that as well, if that should be hosted by the South Side Community Council or if it should come from my team.

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people can review the draft document of the Updated Guidelines? <i>[SSCC rep:]</i> We can talk about that offline then and get that information out to the community at large following the meeting.	Great.
Great presentation, thank you. I missed who approves the guidelines – City Council or some other body? So the HRC administers the guidelines in the district, and if I’m a property owner looking to fix up my building in the district, then I’m ultimately going to the HRC to review my fix-ups?	We will present this to the HRC, the Historic Review Commission (HRC). They administer the guidelines. Yes.
<i>[SSCC rep:]</i> My understanding is these guidelines do not need to go to City Council for review since they’re a revision to existing guidelines, but we can follow up if you provide your email in the chat.	
<i>[DCP staff:]</i> The Design Guidelines do not need to go through the same process as a historic nomination would, they only need to be approved by HRC. Once drafted, they do not go to City Council or to Planning Commission. The job of HRC is to use the guidelines to review projects that come before them.	
<i>[SSCC rep:]</i> Great, thanks for that clarity.	
Reading through this, I think there are a lot of things that are not covered, but a lot of times it refers to the City of Pittsburgh Zoning code, like with building signage, for example. I tried digging into the Zoning code once and it’s a quagmire in trying to get the information that you really want. Is there an easier way to get to a list of what the zoning codes are? For example – I want to paint the front of my building yellow and I have to go to the Zoning code – how do I find out what colors I am allowed to paint? What is a simple way to get to zoning code?	
<i>[DCP staff:]</i> The Zoning code is a large and boring document with the rules and ramifications for development and building throughout the City. There is no rule on what color one can paint things – that is not controlled by HRC or the Zoning code – there are recommended colors in some districts but not in the East Carson Street historic district. Since the code is onerous, and it’s like this with zoning everywhere and not just in Pittsburgh, you can send an email to zoning@pittsburghpa.gov and someone from our zoning	

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staff will provide an answer. You can also come to the public Zoning counter at 412 Blvd of the Allies and talk to somebody from Zoning, somebody from Permits, Licenses and Inspections, somebody from Department of Mobility and Infrastructure and that's a great resource since everyone is available there to assist you. The Zoning Code should be something that can go in on one's own and find info but it can be difficult and it's something we're working on that, but it's a long process.	
The paint color was only an example. The fact is anything associated with the Historic district – somebody will hand them this 29 page document as a guideline. But then if there are further points of information, should this document send the reader to email addresses or in-person addresses in particular departments, should we list contact info like that in the document, to make it easier, instead of just telling people to go to the zoning code, since it's a lot to get through?	
[DCP staff:] In the document, there is a reference to contacting the Historic Preservation staff. You shouldn't have to know what staff falls under each category. But if you are doing work in a historic district, for example, you could be guided to an email address historicreview@pittsburghpa.gov. That is referenced. I'm not sure if the public counter is referenced, but once this document is finalized, we can include that info if it's not in there. The Zoning code is onerous and tough to understand– this Update is designed to make the historic part easier to understand, though it would be another project to make the Zoning code easier to understand.	[Consultant:] We tried in the document to provide a link to the specific zoning code signage section. But going directly to the City is a surefire way to get the answers that one is looking for. That contact info would be helpful for inclusion in the general guidelines. There is that contact info for historic review staff and HRC, but we could also have a contact box where if trying to contact different departments, it's all in that one place at the front end, so contact info is in one central location in case of changes in staff / email addresses.
[DCP staff:] We shifted to general email addresses so they are always consistent regardless of who is on staff.	
In the past, the guidelines were reviewed with building owner but enforcement is spotty. Has there been teeth added to the HRC [in terms of enforcement]?	
[DCP staff:] Enforcement is a struggle citywide with everything. PLI does inspections for all planning related items. PLI staff, if traveling around and seeing a violation, they record it, but they rely a lot on 311, which is the phone number to call that residents see. Inspector comes out to confirm if there is a problem, and if so, they issue a citation. It's how all cities do it but it's not an ideal system and hard to enforce. Before someone would get an additional permit to do additional work they would have	

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to correct what was wrong. But there are not enough staff to just solely look at historic district enforcement. But if you find something in violation you can report it to 311, and report it anonymously if you would like. Cities rely a lot on residents to be eyes on street due to limited resources. That's my best advice on that. <i>[DCP staff:]</i> If you also want to ask questions specifically of historic review staff, you can email historicreview@pittsburghpa.gov.	
I'm in favor of updating the guidelines and I appreciate everyone's efforts on this. Good work.	
<i>[SSCC board member:]</i> When we were reviewing this content before the meeting, to explain a point you all were making about zoning, something we've talked about is the amount of signage that are pretty much those in the vape shops on the south side. A community member had put in numerous 311s related to signage, but as talking about that, that again is a zoning issue as opposed to a historic district guideline. Can you provide clarification about that so that the rest of the people on the call have an understanding of it? For a long time we thought those stores were in violation on signage. The community member was not getting a response when put in 311 complaints.	The guidelines focus on how signage is installed, or intersecting or mounted to historical materials, and we talk about utilizing original sign bands and if illuminated, using light fixtures compatible with the district. One challenge is the historic district guidelines cannot regulate things that the Zoning code does – zoning dictates how much signage is appropriate. But I think a big comment is about an interior-mounted sign – if inside face of storefront and inside of building, it's not regulated as an exterior modification since it's inside the building. So that is a limiting factor with signage. That in a sense is an interior installation and not under HRC purview. We want to ensure there is not damage when mounting and putting up a sign, but we do not dictate the content of the signs.
Is there anything we can do about LED internal signage through zoning?	
<i>[SSCC rep:]</i> I think to my knowledge, Zoning does not affect internal signage behind the glass in businesses to my knowledge.	I am not as familiar with that.
<i>[DCP staff:]</i> In general, the interior space of a building usually is more handled by PLI with the building code. The Zoning code looks less at the interior and to the extent it looks at the interior it's more about the use of the space and related to that, and otherwise tends to look more at external elements. In any case, we can follow up with a more definitive answer about the question.	
As a follow-up, we talked about this a lot when reviewing it, and I was with the community member when traveling East Carson Street, and it has to do with those LED lights. And we heard there was no jurisdiction over this issue. And I'm asking this to see if there is some way to find a resolution. The issue is this makes the historic district look like a red light district, excuse the phrase.	I hear you on that. My team would be happy to have a follow-up conversation with City and get back to you on that.

Questions and Comments from Attendees	Responses from Applicants
[SSCC rep:] Knowing that this is dictated by code and the code does not address those items, as we understand. Thanks for offering a follow-up on that.	
[SSCC rep:] This project is going to HRC and there is a 30-day comment period after tonight's meeting where you can provide additional comment. Additional comments can be shared at info@southsidecommunitycouncil.org . There is also additional info about HRC on city website. Testimony can be provided to historic review staff by email, letter or joining virtually or calling into meetings (details on City's website for historic review). Thank you and we look forward to getting these published.	

Other Notes

The project consultant team includes Landmarks SGA, LLC, as well as LGA Partners and Stromberg/Garrigan Associates.
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Planner completing report: T.S.