

History

Originally known as “Flatwoods,” the Oakwood neighborhood was created within an oak forest by 1905. Local entrepreneur C.B. Atkin purchased the land in 1902 and developed the area into a streetcar suburb of 531 residential lots, which fronted wooden sidewalks and macadam streets. Atkin implemented early planning tactics such as one dwelling per lot and 25-foot front setbacks, and provided utilities including water, electric, and gas. The neighborhood was conveniently located near C.B. Atkin’s mantle company, located on North Avenue, which provided employment for many Oakwood residents. Residents also included railroad workers from the nearby Coster Shop yards and those who utilized the trolley line to commute downtown. Springdale, Churchwell, and Columbia Avenues were developed first, featuring late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century architectural styles such as Queen Anne cottages and Craftsman houses. The Oakwood School was constructed in 1910, in response to the neighborhood’s substantial growth. The town of Oakwood was chartered in 1913 and annexed by the City of Knoxville in 1917. Additional history of Oakwood can be found at the McClung Collection within the East Tennessee History Center, the University of Tennessee Archives at Hodges Library, and at the Knoxville-Knox County Planning Library.



OAKWOOD A FOREST, JANUARY, 1902.



MORELIA AVENUE, OAKWOOD, MAY, 1902.
Showing the grading of the street and laying of the eight-inch water main.



MORELIA AVENUE, OAKWOOD, MAY, 1902.
View made from same location as ones above.
OAKWOOD, C. B. ATKIN'S ADDITION TO KNOXVILLE.
A forest in 1902. A thriving village, with 535 lots, five miles of macadamized streets, with water mains laid in them, electric lights and street cars, and over 100 homes in 1904.



Early Planning

The Oakwood-Lincoln Park Neighborhood Association has long understood the necessity for short-term and long-range planning within the neighborhood. In 2005, the group enlisted students from the University of Tennessee Department of Urban and Regional Planning, staff from Knoxville-Knox County Planning, and the East Tennessee Community Design Center to produce a collaborative neighborhood plan. The neighborhood plan identified goals including promoting compatible new construction and home rehabilitation, improving existing neighborhood aesthetics by ensuring codes enforcement and utilizing city services, and assessing the area’s zoning.



The **2005 Neighborhood Plan** identified Oakwood, Lincoln Park, and the nearby Scott’s Addition as three potential local historic districts, with demonstrating a consistent collection of early twentieth-century architecture. The Plan identifies both historic and neighborhood conservation zoning overlays as useful tools for protecting historic architectural features and tangible representations of neighborhood history. Overlays are also noted as economically beneficial, offering “investment security” for property owners and resulting in an increase in property values.

Several design principles were identified in the 2005 Neighborhood Plan as major points to be considered in design guidelines for a neighborhood conservation or historic district. Design principles include consistent front setbacks, the incorporation of front porches, and parking off the alley instead of in front yards. Consistent foundation heights; similar height, scale, and massing in new construction; and the use of appropriate building materials to compliment existing houses were identified as priorities for new construction. Other design elements include similar front porch proportions and designs, encouraging repair of original doors and windows, and the use of similar roof shapes and materials. The Plan identifies wood clapboard as the most common siding in Oakwood and Lincoln Park, and encourages residents to avoid faced stone, vertical siding, and other non-historic materials. These design elements were later incorporated into the guidelines for the Infill Housing overlay district.

INFILL HOUSING

The Infill Housing design overlay was created between 2005 and 2007 as a design overlay for older neighborhoods identified as the “Heart of Knoxville,” including Oakwood-Lincoln Park, Lonsdale, and Edgewood Park. Goals include promoting neighborhood stability, strengthening physical features and design characteristics, the retention of affordable housing, and the prevention of blight and incompatible development. Currently, new construction, additions visible from the primary street, modifications to front porches, and driveways and secondary structures are reviewed by the Infill Housing Review Committee. The Infill Housing overlay does not require review of demolition.

Representatives from Oakwood-Lincoln Park have long advocated for cohesive development and consistent design in their neighborhood through the Infill Housing process. After several contentious new construction projects in Oakwood, neighborhood residents identified the need for more rigorous design standards. Also, historic houses were being demolished at a significant rate, including the demolition of sixteen primary structures between 2009 and 2013. Neighborhood residents reached out to their elected officials for guidance on how to better protect the existing character of the Oakwood neighborhood.

RESOLUTION

In **September 2016**, City Council District 5 Representative Mark Campen issued a resolution requesting Planning staff to review and make a recommendation to City Council and the Historic Zoning Commission “regarding the possible addition of an historic Overlay and/or neighborhood conservation Overlay” to the area “bounded on the north by North Avenue; bounded on the south by Woodland Avenue; bounded on the east by the east side of Harvey Street; and bounded on the west by Central Street.” The resolution carried unanimously.

Existing Conditions within the Overlay Boundary

Planning staff spent July through August of 2019 completing an architectural survey of the existing conditions within the overlay boundary. The survey process included identifying draft boundaries, photographing each resource within the overlay, noting the resource’s prevalent architectural styles and exterior materials, and identifying each resource as “Contributing” or “Non-contributing.” Planning staff then created an inventory of each resource within the boundary, with architectural descriptions written to the standards of the National Register of Historic Places. Architectural descriptions highlight primary

exterior materials, roofline descriptions, porch details, and notes on any original features that remain. A brief summary of results follows.

652 buildings were surveyed within the overlay boundaries, including four churches, three apartment complexes, one fire station, and one senior living facility (formerly the Oakwood School).



ARCHITECTURAL STYLES

Oakwood contains a unique stock of architectural styles dating from the early 1900s to the 1960s. The majority of the houses were built between 1910 and 1950 as single-family houses, with many designs repeated throughout the neighborhood. Morelia and Springdale Avenues were the first streets to be developed, and Churchwell and Columbia were considered the most prominent streets, located on the highest topographical point of the neighborhood. As is true for most historic architecture in Knoxville, there are very few “pure” architectural styles. Instead, the houses in Oakwood feature an eclectic mix of styles. Folk Victorian and Craftsman styles are most prominent throughout the neighborhoods, with smaller Shotgun houses and Minimal Traditionals and early Ranch houses dating to the mid-twentieth century.

Folk Victorian houses, also known as “Queen Anne Cottages,” often drew from architectural plan books which circulated widely through the United States at the turn of the twentieth century. In Oakwood, Folk Victorian houses are usually square or L-shaped, with steeply-pitched hipped roofs with lower gables projecting to the front and sides. Additional detail is generally limited to decorative wood trim on porch elements. Porches are commonly hipped or shed-roof corner porches. 225 houses within the overlay boundary exhibit the Folk Victorian style.



Craftsman style houses spread through the United States in the 1920s through 1930s. In Oakwood, Craftsman-style houses feature low-pitched gable or hipped roofs, overhanging eaves, exposed rafters or decorative brackets under eaves, and full-length front porches supported by tapered wood columns resting on brick piers. Craftsman porches were added to many existing Folk Victorian houses in Oakwood in the 1920s and 1930s, creating a combination of styles that is unique in Knoxville. 195 houses within the overlay boundary exhibit the Craftsman style. 77 houses have Folk Victorian plans with Craftsman modifications.

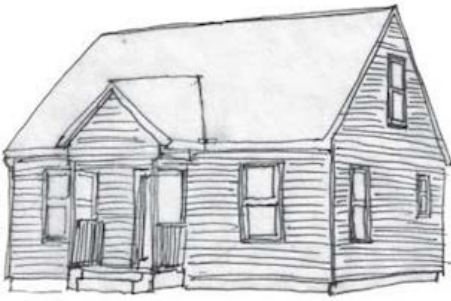


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Shotgun houses are narrow, rectangular forms with rooms arranged one behind the other and doors at each end of the house. In Oakwood, common features of a Shotgun house include a simple front-gable or hipped roofline with eave overhangs at the front and rear, a narrow, hipped porch on the front or side, and an offset front door. Oakwood retains a significant number of Shotgun houses. 24 Shotgun houses were surveyed within the overlay boundaries.



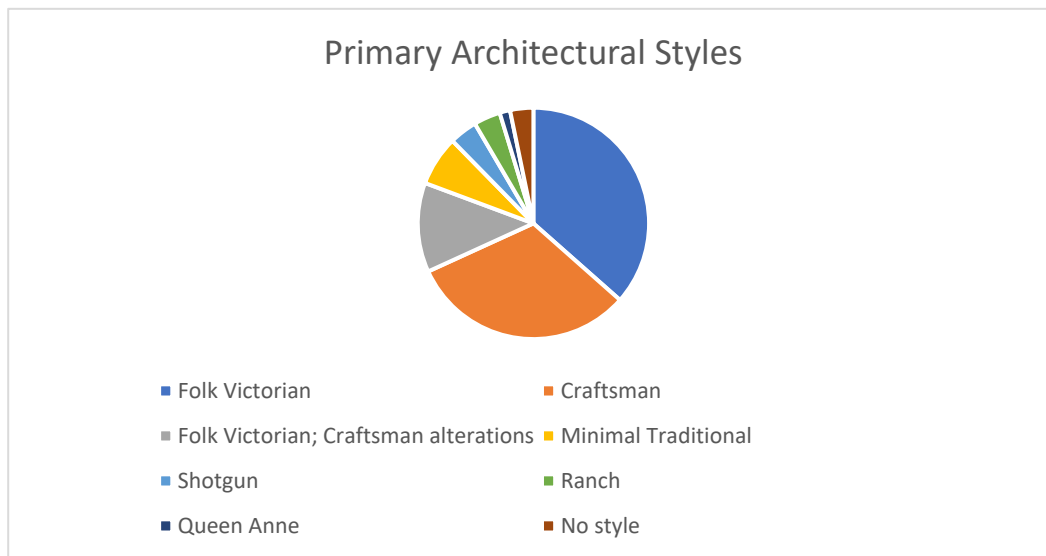
Minimal Traditional houses were built during and following World War II, drawing on advancements in



construction technology and building materials. Most are modest single-story, square-shaped houses with plain facades and stoops. Minimal Traditionals in Oakwood feature varied window styles and sizes, frequently with non-operable shutters, square plans, and side-gable roofs. 43 houses within the overlay boundary exhibit the Minimal Traditional style.

Other styles in Oakwood include several modest Queen Anne residences (two-story, more elaborately detailed houses built in the early 1900s), and Ranch houses, which date to the mid-twentieth century and feature low-pitched roofs, rectangular plans, and simple facades, often clad in brick veneer. 9 Queen Anne houses were surveyed in Oakwood, along with 23 Ranch houses.

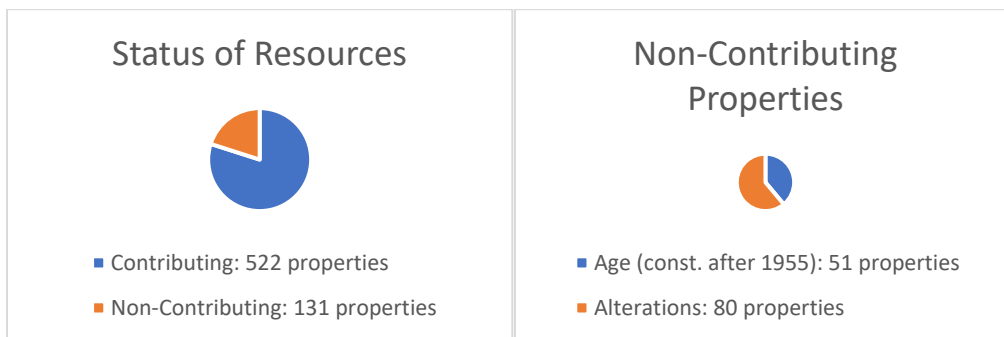
Several houses are identified as exhibiting no style. This designation indicates that the house has been altered so substantially as to no longer retain any defining characteristics of an architectural style. Approximately 20 houses are noted as featuring no style in the overlay boundary.



For purposes of the architectural survey and potential historic or neighborhood conservation overlays, properties have been designated as **contributing or non-contributing** as of the July/August 2019 survey. A contributing resource is a structure which fits within the period of significance for the overlay and retains

sufficient architectural integrity to lend character to the district. Even if a historic structure has been altered, it can be considered contributing as long as it retains important character-defining features that support its association with the district. A non-contributing resource is a structure that does not contribute to the historic significance of the district, whether due to its construction after 1955, or due to a lack of integrity. In this case, a lack of integrity is defined by less than 50% of its original building envelope or materials and features remaining.

Out of the 652 buildings surveyed, **521** of the properties were designated as contributing, and **131** were designated as non-contributing. Out of the non-contributing properties, 51 were non-contributing due to age (built after 1955) and 80 were non-contributing due to significant alterations and loss of integrity.



DEMOLITIONS WITHIN THE OVERLAY BOUNDARY

As the Oakwood neighborhood is currently within the Infill Housing overlay, one common question that arose at public meetings pertained to the benefits of a different design overlay. Proponents of the overlay within the neighborhood identified review of demolition as a major benefit of a neighborhood conservation or historic overlay. Historic Zoning Commission review of proposed demolitions would provide an additional layer of protection for historic houses in the overlay boundary.

Planning staff and neighborhood residents used City records (via the City Office of Plans Review & Inspections) to determine the number of houses demolished within the overlay boundaries in the last two decades. KGIS Historical Aerials were also used to support the demolition research. From 2000 to 2008, twelve houses were demolished. Between 2009 and 2019, sixteen houses were demolished in Oakwood. Of those sixteen houses, eight were initiated by the City due to Codes Enforcement concerns, five were permitted requests by the property owner, and three did not have demolition permits.

Public Outreach

The Oakwood overlay process formally began in 2017 when Planning staff began coordinating efforts with neighborhood representatives. An initial meeting was held between Planning staff and representatives of the neighborhood in **April 2018**.

Planning staff hosted an informational meeting regarding a neighborhood overlay on **September 18, 2018** at the Oakwood-Lincoln Park Neighborhood Clubhouse. Information regarding the neighborhood was advertised on the local news via a press release, in the OLPNA Neighborhood Newsletter, and on social media. Approximately 25-30 people attended the meeting, which explored the basics of neighborhood conservation and historic overlays and the design review process. Attendees asked questions about review of demolition, the existing Infill Housing overlay, and how the new City zoning ordinance would affect the neighborhood. At this meeting, an “overlay committee” joined together to identify character-defining features of the neighborhood and work with staff on draft design guidelines. The Committee identified the historic overlay as a preferable option, to provide review of exterior rehabilitation work.

Through 2019, neighborhood proponents of an overlay worked with Planning staff to develop **design guidelines** related to existing materials, additions, secondary structures, and new construction. Staff identified the guidelines as a unique opportunity to create a flexible, affordable historic overlay, in recognition of the wide variety of materials and styles found in Oakwood. While the historic overlay would include review of exterior rehabilitation on existing structures, the drafted design guidelines were designed to accommodate the variety of non-original materials in the neighborhood.

Prior to a public meeting scheduled for September 2019, neighborhood overlay proponents created and disseminated an informational flyer containing their recommendation that the neighborhood be considered for a historic overlay. The flyer included details on the design review process, a map of the proposed boundary, and contact information for committee members and Planning staff.



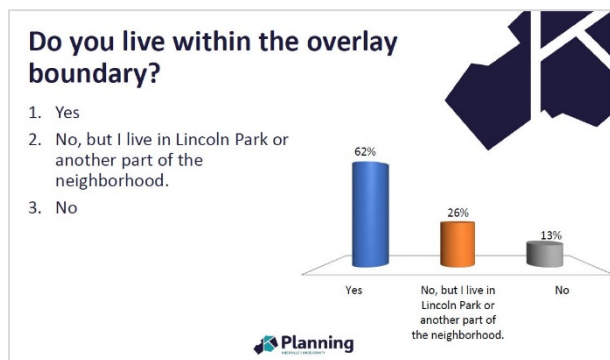
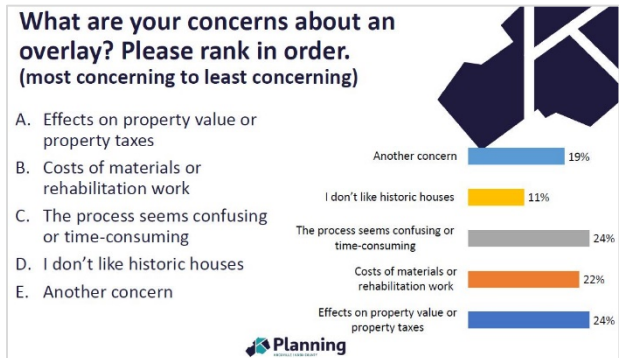
OAKWOOD HISTORIC DISTRICT | DESIGN GUIDELINES | DRAFT: SEPT 2019

On **September 17, 2019**, Planning hosted a meeting at the Emerald Youth Foundation at 1718 N. Central St. The meeting was intended to present the draft design guidelines for the historic overlay and receive input from neighborhood residents. Residents were notified of the meeting via a press release, in the OLPNA Neighborhood Newsletter and on social media. Planning also mailed postcards with meeting details to each property owner within the boundary. Approximately thirty-five people attended the meeting. Questions and comments were focused more on overlay basics, instead of specific items on the design guidelines. Residents expressed concerns about higher property taxes, fees for Certificates of Appropriateness, and questions regarding the general requirements of design review. After this meeting, Planning staff encouraged the overlay committee to complete further neighborhood outreach before beginning the formal review process.

The overlay committee elected to host four **holiday open houses** at multiple historic houses throughout the neighborhood, at different times and days of the week, in order to facilitate broader attendance. The open houses were informal events where neighborhood residents were invited to drop in, ask questions, voice concerns, and review copies of the draft design guidelines. For this meeting, committee members also created an informational summary of historic overlays. The summary document included an overview of the COA process, answers to some frequently asked questions, and a detailed summary of the draft design guidelines. Over forty people attended the holiday open houses, with attendance increasing at each meeting.



Planning hosted another informational meeting on **January 30, 2020** at the Emerald Youth Foundation. The meeting was advertised via press release, social media, and the OLPNA neighborhood newsletter. Approximately forty people attended the meeting. Responding to questions presented at the September 2019 meeting, Planning staff stepped back from specific elements of the draft design guidelines and presented basic information regarding overlays. Staff utilized TurningPoint software and handheld clickers to survey and gather input from participants. Attendees were asked questions about whether or not they live within the proposed overlay boundary, if they own or rent their homes, if they'd attended any previous meetings, or if they'd reviewed the draft design guidelines or project website. 62% of meeting participants lived within the proposed overlay boundary, with 26% from Lincoln Park or another part of the neighborhood and 13% residing elsewhere. Notably, 100% of attendees owned their homes. 31% of attendees had lived in the neighborhood for 2-5 years, with 23% at 0-2 years and 20% at 5-10 years. Staff then addressed common concerns, including property values and taxes, housing affordability, and costs of materials and labor. Staff also addressed topics such as housing affordability in historic districts, costs of materials and labor, neighborhood diversity, and effects on property values. At the end of the meeting, the TurningPoint software was used to survey the crowd on where they would most like more information: 40% of attendees requested info on design guidelines.



Conclusion: An Incremental Approach

At the January 30, 2020 meeting, Planning provided comment cards for neighborhood residents to provide informal written comments on the proposed overlay. Some comments included requests for overlays that “limit demolition only,” and an interest in protecting “autonomy to make decisions about our property,” though the same writer noted they did “not want historic houses torn down” and did “not want predatory development,” and could “get behind an NC-1.” After the January 2020 meeting, neighborhood proponents of an overlay were encouraged to gather signatures or another tangible show of support for an overlay, to present to City Council. These residents surveyed their neighbors and found broader support for a neighborhood conservation overlay.

A follow-up meeting was scheduled for late March 2020, which was cancelled due to restrictions on large groups related to the COVID-19 pandemic. This gave staff and neighborhood proponents an opportunity to step back and identify goals for moving forward. In lieu of a follow-up meeting on design guidelines, neighborhood proponents of an overlay requested a meeting with Councilmember Charlie Thomas and Planning staff. At this meeting, staff reviewed the extensive public outreach completed over the last four years, along with comments and concerns brought up at public meetings.

During this meeting, acknowledging the hard work of neighborhood overlay proponents and staff alongside the variety of comments and concerns voiced by residents, the group identified a neighborhood conservation overlay as an “incremental approach” to historic preservation in Oakwood. While neighbors have voiced concerns about potential restrictions inherent in review of exterior rehabilitation projects, residents have been more amenable to review of new construction and demolitions only. Planning management echoed the benefits of an incremental approach, recommending the neighborhood conservation overlay as a tool to ensure future development is respectful of Oakwood’s unique character.

One common question from residents’ centers on what benefit a neighborhood conservation overlay has over the existing infill housing overlay. One benefit of the neighborhood conservation overlay is the provision of Historic Zoning Commission review of demolition. In existing overlays such as Fort Sanders, this has proved to be a useful tool to discourage the removal of historic housing stock. Considering that 28 houses have been demolished over the past two decades within the Oakwood overlay boundary and that those demolitions are a recurring concern of residents, the review process would provide desired oversight for this particular issue. Moreover, the creation of a neighborhood conservation overlay and

associated design guidelines will provide the neighborhood the opportunity to draft design guidelines specific to Oakwood's building systems, materials, and community priorities. The Infill Housing design guidelines were written in 2007 to serve as a general guide for multiple neighborhoods; a neighborhood conservation overlay would involve contemporary guidelines written specifically for Oakwood.

As requested in the City Council resolution from 2016, Planning has completed the evaluation of Oakwood's historic resources. Staff has spent several years reviewing existing conditions within the neighborhood and drafting design guidelines for a historic overlay. Through these efforts, staff and members of the overlay committee have encouraged public input throughout the process, increasing outreach and opportunities to provide feedback when questions and concerns arose. That dialogue led them to reconsider the type of overlay most appropriate for the neighborhood.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the extensive research and neighborhood input over the last several years, Planning recommends a neighborhood conservation overlay for Oakwood due to broader support for less restrictive guidelines, and the ability to tailor the overlay in a manner that is respectful to the needs and goals of existing property owners.