

Tampa Heights Overlay Code Amendment

History and FAQ

How did we get here? A history behind efforts to protect the unique character of Tampa Heights.

- In 1995, the Tampa Heights National Historic District was created. In 2000, a local Historic District was created with slightly enlarged boundaries, and overlay design standards were implemented for the Local Historic District only.
- Only a fraction of the neighborhood was included due to the lack of concentration of historic structures in the western half of Tampa Heights. However, a few select historic buildings in this area were included. However, most other remaining historic homes were not included in the district, and the original street grid mostly remains.
- THCA regularly requested additional protections from the City for the entire neighborhood since the foundation of the Historic District in 2000
- In 2012, Soho Capital acquired the roughly 43 acre riverfront redevelopment site, including the old Armature Works building, which had previously been entitled for large scale development by the prior master developer. THCA knew that as we climbed out of the Great Recession and as the Armature Works site was redeveloped, immense development interest would hit Tampa Heights. THCA wanted to beat the next development rush.
- In 2014, THCA put the following goal on its Strategic Plan: "Create an overlay residential design district for the west half of neighborhood to preserve character as new homes are built." Later that year, THCA was promised by the City of Tampa Zoning Administrator that a form-based code overlay process would commence in 2015.
- Seminole Heights has a form-based code overlay, and the process took from 2008 to 2011 to implement. So THCA knew it would take several years, but wanted this process started and continued to request it.
- For several years, Tampa Heights was told we were "next in line" for the overlay because they weren't done with other neighborhoods yet and had limited resources. City of Tampa Urban Designer Mike Callahan told City Council in April 2016 that Tampa Heights "will come under its own regulatory framework in terms of being developed out. But we are in process. This is our next plan, community plan, which will have its own regulatory structure." At that same meeting, City Council even considered spending CRA money to hire consultants to update zoning regulations in Tampa Heights, Ybor, and Downtown. But that didn't happen.
- THCA petitioned the City every year and was consistently told a lack of resources was causing continual delay of our promised overlay. Tampa Heights residents continued to grow impatient and concerned.
- In 2019, representatives of THCA met with City of Tampa staff and Planning Commission staff; we were told resources still didn't exist, that there was no political will for new overlays, and that form-based codes had fallen out of favor at City Hall. We were told we

must write our own code without City assistance and submit it via the Privately Initiated Text Amendment (PITA) process.

- A subcommittee met several times during 2019 on the subject. This subcommittee included the following types of professionals, all from Tampa Heights: community activists, real estate developers, construction managers, architects, real estate agents, land use attorneys, and others. We analyzed codes from each of the City's historic districts, the West Tampa overlay, the Seminole Heights form-based code, and other examples around the country. We started drafting up a code.
- When the COVID-19 pandemic broke out in March 2020, THCA's activities as a volunteer organization were significantly impacted, as were most individual's home and professional lives. Work on the PITA was sidelined.
- In 2021, a rebuilt THCA board took back up the issue of creating a form-based overlay. This priority was discussed at every THCA Board and General Meeting. A conversation restarted with City Planning staff. First, THCA was told a PITA was still the only route; then told expansion of Historic District is possible; then that option was struck down by Historic Preservation Staff.
- THCA board members and other engaged residents completed the draft that was started in 2019. The full text of the draft was posted to the THCA website in May 2021, was read aloud at the May and June general meetings, and has been included with a summary and link to the full text in every THCA email newsletter since July.
- The THCA Board voted to support the draft PITA in July 2021, and submitted it to the City of Tampa for initial review that month.
- The PITA is still in draft form and is available for public review, critiques, and suggestions.
- City Planning staff, again claiming staff and resource shortages, provided THCA with their first review comments on January 5, 2021. THCA worked with City staff to further refine the code language. The amendment is being "workshopped" to City Council on June 23, 2022.
- If you've read this far, then you see how it takes years of commitment and persistence by successive THCA Boards to shepherd regulatory reform through multiple real estate cycles, mayoral administrations, city council configurations, and city staff changes. That statement sadly applies to too many issues in this city. Our local governments are not proactive, but reactive - and slowly, at that.

FAQs:

1. **What is the purpose of the code amendment?** To protect Tampa Heights from losing what's left of its unique historic character, and from missed opportunities to shape the ideal community for affordability, walkability, transit-oriented design, mixed-uses, cultural richness, and architectural compatibility.

2. **How has THCA engaged the public?** Prior to submitting the draft amendment to the City in July 2021, THCA read it aloud at two separate General Meetings, and distributed it via our email mailing list. The issue has been on the agenda at each monthly General Meeting. The exact language of the amendment has been posted on the THCA website since June 2021 and linked to in each THCA email, which are sent approximately twice a month. Public engagement and community buy-in is important. If you have skipped over this information, we encourage you to get involved and provide your feedback. There are still opportunities to revise the amendment.
3. **How will this amendment affect affordability?** Very few, if any, clauses in this amendment will increase the cost of development or construction. It does not limit the development potential of properties. This does not require alleys to be improved beyond normal city standards, nor change the construction type for driveways. If your home does not comply with these standards, it does not have to be brought up to code until it is redeveloped or undergoes a Major Renovation. A Major Renovation is defined as “Any construction, reconstruction, structural alteration, expansion, enlargement or remodeling conducted within any two-year period, the total cost of which exceeds fifty-one (51) percent of the assessed value of the property.”

Among the ways this amendment HELPS affordability: it permits Accessory Dwelling Units in all residential districts, which increases the housing stock with small rentable units and gives homeowners an existing income stream that helps offset their mortgage, thereby helping keep them in their homes; it induces walking and biking through urban design, which are healthier and more affordable modes of transportation; it reduces the requirements for off-street parking for new townhomes, mixed-use, and commercial buildings, which reduces the development cost of those projects.

4. **Is Tampa Heights’ development pattern truly unique?** Yes, and the Tampa Comprehensive Plan recognizes that. The Comp Plan, in speaking to Historic Development Patterns Pre-World War II Pattern (page 30), states: “This period represents a time when many people walked, bicycled, or took the streetcar to work and other destinations. It features an interconnected, grid-style street network designed to maximize the efficiency of these transportation modes. Land uses were mixed, minimizing travel time between home, work and shopping. Homes and other buildings were oriented near the sidewalks, with parking relegated to the back of the property. This pattern can be seen in historic neighborhoods around downtown Tampa: Hyde Park, Beach Park, Ybor City, **Tampa Heights**, Seminole Heights, Palmetto Beach, West Tampa and Virginia Park.” Current City of Tampa Land Development regulations do not effectively regulate outcomes as stated in the Comp Plan. This Code Amendment is necessary to achieve that vision.

Furthermore, the Comp Plan on page 40, section “Urban Villages”, acknowledges the Tampa Heights Neighborhood plan, which was adopted by City Council in 2003. This plan, which details many goals in the “Urban Design” section starting on page 17, includes provisions such as to “Encourage design and orientation that reflects the historic Tampa Heights.”

5. **Is this a NIMBY (Not in My Back Yard) or anti-development effort?** No! This is not anti-development, anti-townhome, or anti-density. Nowhere does the amendment espouse opposition to multifamily housing. From an urban planning perspective, moderate density belongs in Tampa Heights. It takes advantage of its walkable/bikeable amenities inside the

neighborhood (and destinations like Armature Works, Downtown, Ybor City, etc. all being within a mile of our limits). It creates the density necessary for supporting a robust public transportation system.

- 6. Does the amendment regulate architectural style?** No. The code amendment does not prohibit modern architecture, or regulate any specific architecture styles or materials. This was a very heavily debated point during the drafting of the amendment. Many longtime Tampa Heights residents have desired architectural standards similar to our Historic District for the area that lies outside of those boundaries. Others have not. There are valid points on both sides. This amendment solely seeks to improve urban planning failures in the code.

- 7. What are the boundaries of the overlay district? Does this amendment affect the Tampa Heights Historic District?** No. The recognized local and national historic districts are omitted from the boundaries, as are The Heights master development and Blake High School. All other areas of Tampa Heights are included. Tampa Heights official boundaries are I-275 to the south and east, MLK Blvd to the north, and N Blvd to the west. A map can be seen on the Tampa Heights website homepage.

- 8. What if I disagree with this amendment?** The purpose is not to make anyone feel bad for the style or layout of their home. The purpose is to educate City Council, developers, and the public by illustrating real-world examples of an entirely physical issue - the urban design of real estate. We know that many of the residents for what we consider "incompatible design" had no hand in designing or building these homes - that is why we are targeting the development community. To those who have been offended and feel unwelcome: you are welcome in Tampa Heights. We value diversity in every measure, including diversity of thought. We want you to join the conversation. We know it must sting to believe some of your neighbors do not like the design of your house, but it's far more complex than "not liking" it. At hand is a long-running issue of how redevelopment occurs, which decades of neighborhood leaders and engaged residents have worked on. Whenever anyone moves into a neighborhood, whether it is historic, a deed-restricted subdivision, or an urban high rise, they move into the underlying issues that already exist there. Neighborhood issues are not cleanly delineated into periods, they are a woven continuum, and Tampa Heights' continuum is 140 years and counting. THCA is always willing to sit down with anyone to discuss our understanding of where TH came from, where it is now, and where it is going.