



## **THE HILLCREST NEIGHBORHOOD RISKS LOSING ITS STATUS ON THE NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES !**

Although many residents believe that National Register status protects Hillcrest against development that does not fit with the historic character of the neighborhood, this belief is not true. Historic Hillcrest's only protection is its Design Overlay District (DOD) with the City of Little Rock Planning Department.

**The Hillcrest DOD sets limits on the height, size and setbacks of additions and new construction in the neighborhood. Nevertheless, in recent years residents of Hillcrest have expressed increased concern over building projects that are out of character and out of scale with the neighborhood. A detailed study by the Hillcrest Residents Association yielded a series of recommendations to modify the DOD in order to further protect the look, scale, feel and charm of Historic Hillcrest. We hope that you will support this vital effort to preserve and sustain our beloved neighborhood.**

### **Why Our Historic Community Matters**

In 1990, the federal government placed Hillcrest on the National Register of Historic Places. The National Register is an official list that recognizes districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects worthy of preservation. Hillcrest is the largest historic district in the state of Arkansas. Hillcrest's period of significant historical and architectural importance dates from 1890-1940. Most of Hillcrest was developed during this time and most of the buildings still stand today.

Hillcrest boasts a variety of styles and sizes of homes based on European designs including English Revival, Craftsman, Georgian, Tudor and Colonial Revival style homes. The buildings of Hillcrest are mainly historic, of human-scale and set on tree-lined streets. Most amenities are within walking distance; even our children are able to walk to neighborhood schools. These qualities of historic integrity, human-scale and accessibility are the features that make up the "charm" of Hillcrest and why so many people are eager to reside in our neighborhood.

Hillcrest is comprised of "in-fill" buildings as well. In-fill buildings are structures that were built after the original neighborhood was constructed and are usually built on individual empty lots. Because Hillcrest is such an exceptional community, it is important that we maintain our historic buildings. Any new in-fill structures should complement our historic streetscape rather than conflict with the historic design; this destroys the feel of the neighborhood with over-scaled or over-built homes or additions.

In recent years, a significant number of our original Hillcrest homes have been either torn down, expanded with extremely large additions or new homes of enormous scale or proportions are built which are unsympathetic to their historic neighbors. With each teardown or over-built nonconforming structure our historic designation is chipped away. Therefore a committee was formed to give serious consideration as to how to retain our historic standing.

### **What is the DOD?**

The risk of losing Hillcrest's historic designation is not a new problem. Little Rock enacted the Hillcrest Design Overlay District (HDOD) Ordinance in 2007 to remedy the destruction of our architectural heritage. The HDOD was designed to discourage tear-downs by limiting the size of new construction. Although the HDOD was a good bipartisan solution at the time, the Ordinance has proven to be less effective than hoped. Now that 13 years have passed, the neighbors

decided it was time to take a new look at this ordinance and assess what aspects have and have not been successful.

The Hillcrest Residents Association formed a Design Overlay District (DOD) committee in July 2018. Since that time, the DOD Committee has met regularly, most times with Brian Minyard from the City of Little Rock's Office of Planning and Development, to find solutions to the destruction of our Historic Neighborhood.

The committee is chaired by Bruce McMath with Scott Smith, Antoinette Johnson, Carolyn Newbern, Chris Parker, John Burnett and Bill Rector serving. The committee represents very diverse views on preserving our Historic District. Members include the following professions: land rights attorney, civil rights attorney, real estate professional and developer, architect, neighborhood enthusiast and volunteer extraordinaire and historic preservation and design consultant. The diversity of this group, and its unanimous recommendations speak to the importance of the issues, and the remarkable team effort.

### **The Task**

The DOD Committee assignment is to preserve the unique character of the Hillcrest area in terms of diversity of its residents, economic vitality and accessibility, livability, and architectural character. This assignment involves finding methods to preserve the Hillcrest's architectural legacy and its historic neighborhood designation, as ultimately the architecture and built environment defines the neighborhood and influences the above enumerated considerations.

Although the DOD Committee agrees on the problem, we have not reached a consensus on the necessity or desirability of a Local Historic Ordinance District to protect the historic district designation. There is an agreed awareness that such an approach would meet a level of neighborhood resistance. As such, we decided to put off any decision on which legal mechanism we would or would not employ and focus instead on identifying areas of concern. In our view, defining solutions to identified problems should lead us to the necessary tools to correct them.

### **Concerns**

After many months of research, our identified concerns fell into two camps: One being the loss of historic architectural fidelity of the neighborhood's structures and hence ultimately the historic designation. The second being issues primarily related to the scale of new and remodeled structures, whether historically conforming or not.

Our committee collaborated and as a result, unanimously presents the following recommendations to the Hillcrest community for consideration to make changes to the current HDOD:

#### Proposal 1

Incorporate Side Yard Setbacks:

- Modify HDOD to include minimum combined side yard setback equal to 35% of the average lot width, with a minimum side yard setback of 10% of lot width per side.

##### Interpretation:

*One of the issues we have identified with new-builds is that they are not placed on the property lines like the historic homes around them. Typically, an original home will have a driveway to one side and a few feet between it and the neighbor's driveway creating a rhythm of space-to-structure. When new homes do not follow this rhythm, it disturbs the historic streetscape. Wider side yard setbacks will ensure new structures or additions will not be built side setback to side setback, much like the original houses in the neighborhood.*

#### Proposal 2

Modify the Floor Area Ratio (FAR) for Reuse of Existing Structures, and Include Height and Width Restrictions for Additions:

- Add definition for "reuse existing structure" as the reuse of the existing front three (3) sides and associated roof framing.
- Modify HDOD to establish FAR for Additions to Existing Structures, as follows:
  - Single story - 37% (currently 37%)
  - Double story – 40% (currently 50%)
  - Two and Half story – 44% (currently 55%)
- Modify HDOD to require new roof additions to be at least 12" lower than the highest ridge of the existing roof structure.
- Modify HDOD to require a minimum 12-inch inset or outset where an addition connects to the existing structure.

##### Interpretation:

*Floor to Area Ratio (FAR) is designed as a way for a property to be measured for size compliance by the planning department. It compares the amount of structure to the amount of land on its lot. After reviewing many new-builds and additions, it became obvious that the current HDOD allowed homes and additions to be built too large and out of scale with their historic neighbors. For study, we considered a typical 1400 sq foot Hillcrest bungalow on a standard 7,000 sq foot lot. On this style house, a one-story addition built slightly below the roof-line and off-set from the original structure (to the back of the building) can still accommodate a master bedroom/ bathroom suite with walk-in closet or kitchen expansion—the most common reasons for additions in our neighborhood—and still stay in historic compliance.*

*The home could easily accommodate a 425 sq foot addition and still be in compliance with historic standards set forth by the National Park Service. It is important to NPS that a home retain its historic architectural integrity from street views. It is why we are considering the "reuse of an existing structure" as reusing the existing front, two sides and roof line.*

#### Proposal 3

Create Floor to Area Ratio (FAR) for Sites Without Existing Structures, or for Sites where an Existing Structure is Not Reused:

- Modify HDOD to establish FAR for New Construction, as 30%, or the size of the immediately preexisting structure, whichever is greater.

##### Interpretation:

*This is designed to discourage tear-downs. An owner or developer could get more square footage by adding on to an existing structure under Proposal 1 than demolishing one for a new build. At the very least, this will encourage retention of the historic scale of the community.*

#### Proposal 4

Establish Typical sidewalk Width and Location:

- Repair or replace any existing sidewalk as per municipal code sec. 30-48.
- Install a sidewalk if half or more of the block, determined in linear feet, has a sidewalk, the width to be 4' or to match existing walk, whichever is greater.

##### Interpretation:

*We are a pedestrian-oriented community. We need walk-able sidewalks.*

#### Proposal 5

With regard to any non-residential zoned property:

- The HDOD should limit new construction to 2-stories maximum.
- The HDOD should require an entrance facing the street. When a building is located with frontage on two streets, the entrance shall face the street having the higher classification according to the city master street plan. In the instance that development occurs at the intersection of two collectors and one being Kavanaugh Boulevard, the entrance shall face Kavanaugh Boulevard.

##### Interpretation:

*This proposal is designed to keep over-scaled commercial buildings off of our commercial corridors. Our HDOD already requires commercial buildings to be built at the street which results in parking in the back most of the time. By requiring an entrance on the street, we ensure that the building will not be built with its back to the commercial corridor, which would discourage walking and street strolling—important aspects to our pedestrian-oriented community.*

#### Other Points of Consideration

Because of the uniqueness of Hillcrest, no two lots or buildings are the same. Therefore, it is very difficult to come up with measurable solutions that will fit ALL buildings in Hillcrest. Our HDOD regulations must be measurable instead of subjective because the viability of a building project will be decided at the planning desk at the city. The clerk there will be checking each building proposal to make sure it meets our criteria. Therefore, the DOD Committee came up with recommendations that will work well for MOST Hillcrest properties. There will be exceptions: odd shaped lots, lots with no other homes in view, lots in the middle of other extremely large historic homes, etc. It does not mean that these applications will be denied. It does mean that these owners will have to submit an application to the city planning department to deviate from the regulations. When an applicant files the application, the immediate neighbors and the HRA are notified. Our intention is to create a process for the neighborhood to have the opportunity to comment on projects that fall outside the new HDOD regulations before they are built.

#### Next Steps

The Preservation and Planning Committee of the HRA has graciously offered to host at least 2 virtual panel discussions featuring members of the DOD committee to answer questions. Please log in to these meetings to learn more information and share your opinions. Visit [hillcrestresidents.com](http://hillcrestresidents.com) to get the sign on link.

##### Tentative Dates:

July 22, Wednesday	6:00pm
August 2, Sunday	2:00pm

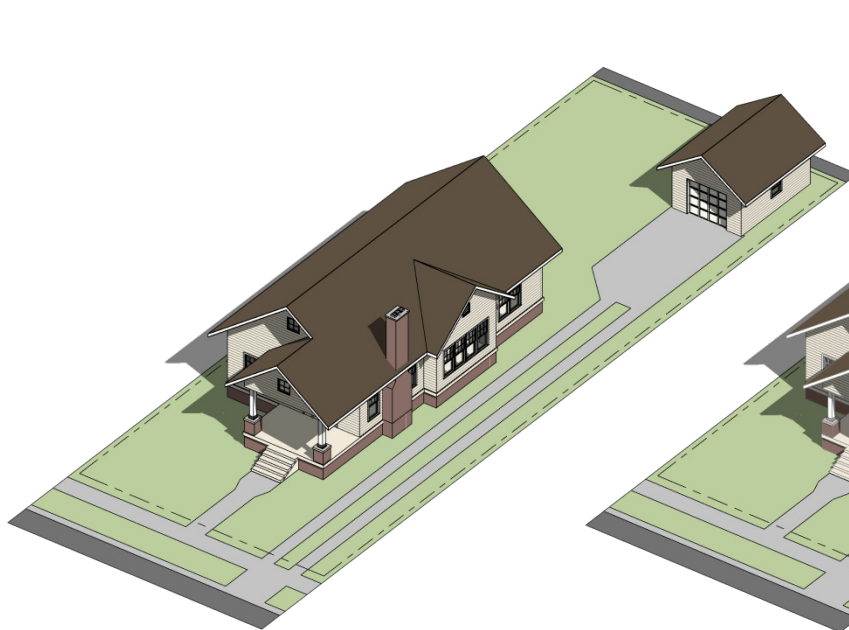
The DOD Committee will meet after the public engagement period to consider comments. Then the next steps will be publicly shared.

#### HOW CAN YOU HELP?

Sign our On-line Petition at <http://chnng.it/DDHYG8Dx5B> to show your support for the Hillcrest Historic District!

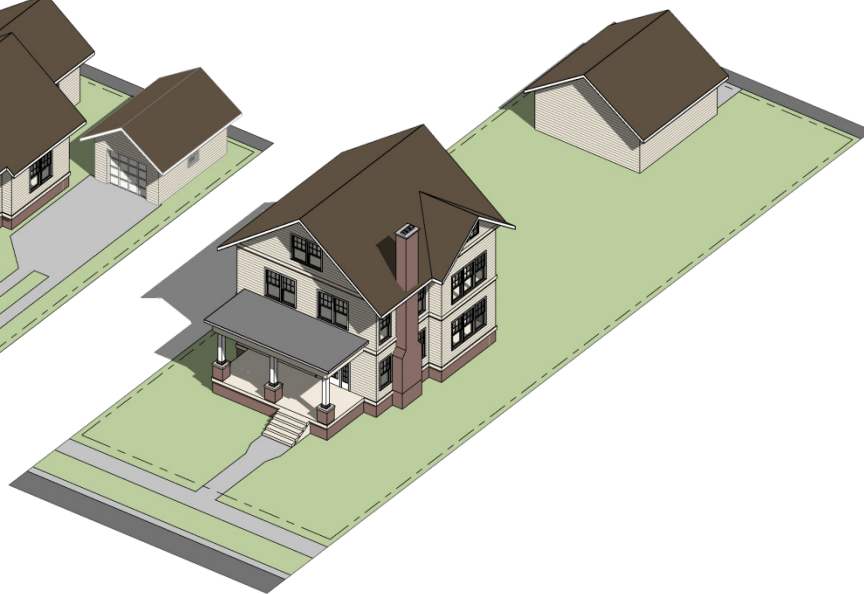
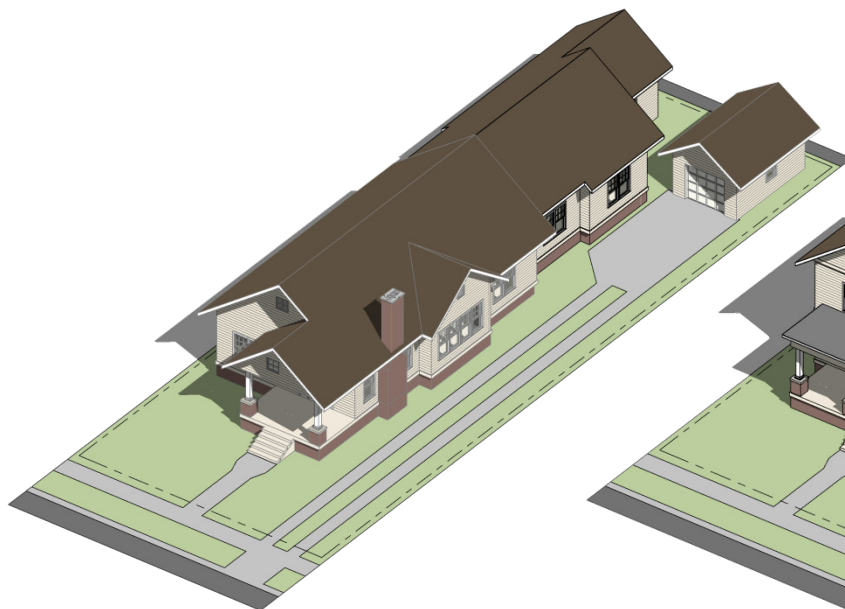
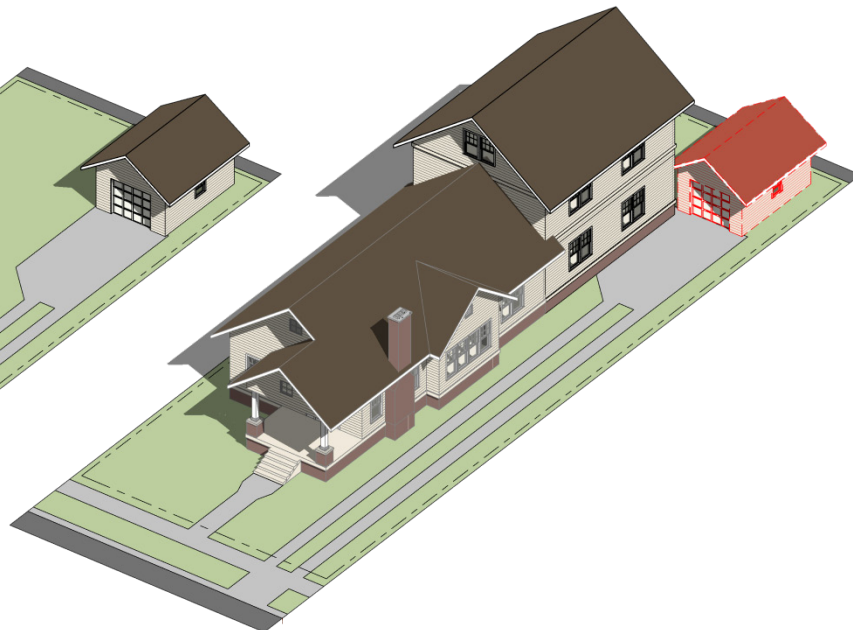
**TYPICAL BUNGALOW** (Original Construction)  
(Pre-D.O.D. Zoning)

Area: 1,400 s.f.  
No. Stories: 1  
Lot Size: 7,000 s.f.  
FAR: 20%  
Lot Coverage: 34%  
Building Height: 24'  
Side Setbacks: 5' Min.



**TYPICAL BUNGALOW** (With Addition)  
(Existing D.O.D. Zoning)

Area: 3,835 s.f.  
No. Stories: 2.5  
Lot Size: 7,000 s.f.  
FAR: 55%  
Lot Coverage: 45%  
Building Height: 35'  
Side Setbacks: 5' Min.



**TYPICAL BUNGALOW** (With Addition)  
(Proposed D.O.D. Zoning)

Area: 2,590 s.f.  
No. Stories: 1  
Lot Size: 7,000 s.f.  
FAR: 37%  
Lot Coverage: 60%  
Building Height: 24'  
Side Setbacks: 5' Min.

**NEW CONSTRUCTION**  
(Proposed D.O.D. Zoning)

Area: 2,100 s.f.  
No. Stories: 2.5  
Lot Size: 7,000 s.f.  
FAR: 30%  
Lot Coverage: 34%  
Building Height: 35'  
Side Setbacks: 5' Min (17' combined)





**Hillcrest Residents Association**  
P.O. Box 251121 Little Rock, AR 72225  
(501) 940-5818 hillcrestresidents.com



### WHAT IS WRONG WITH THIS PICTURE?

In a Historic District like Hillcrest, it concerns all of us when we see structures being built that are out of scale or out of character with the neighborhood. It is unsettling when historic homes are modified in inappropriate ways, or even worse, torn down! Please take time to read this important information about how you can help preserve the historic character of Hillcrest!

Sign our Petition at  
<http://chnng.it/DDHYG8Dx5B> to show your support for the Hillcrest Historic District.

## KNOOPY & KAVANAUGH

