

# SHOULD HRA PURSUE A HISTORIC OVERLAY DISTRICT (HOD) designation ?



- Please visit our table at Day in the Park this Saturday, 10/26/19 from noon-3PM. We will be joined by a Fairfax County Planner who will have information, and be able to answer questions.
- Please come to the Community Meeting on Thursday, November 7 at 7:30PM in the Woodburn Cafeteria, for a presentation on Historic Overlay Districts by Fairfax County Historic Resources staff, and a Q&A session.
- Please go to this link for a primer on what a Historic Overlay Designation looks like for a community: <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/planning-development/plan-amendments/hollin-hills-hod>
- Please go to our website and read up! [www.holmesrunacres.com](http://www.holmesrunacres.com)

## WHAT IS A HISTORIC OVERLAY DISTRICT (HOD)?

Simply stated, a HOD is an extra layer of permitting that would preclude out-of-character additions and replacements. Hollin Hills - our closest, analogous Mid Century Modern neighborhood in northern Virginia - has determined that a HOD is the only way to preserve the character of their neighborhood while modernizing their individual homes. They have begun the process toward HOD designation with the County. We have learned a lot from their process and seek to share it with HRA. We are uniquely positioned to take advantage of a HOD - something most neighborhoods aren't - because of our [currently] largely intact MCM neighborhood. This means that, unlike communities all over Northern Virginia that have fallen to the domino effect of over-scaled houses, we actually have the ability to do something about it.

## WHY PURSUE HISTORIC OVERLAY DESIGNATION NOW ?

Our Holmes Run Acres (HRA) is a unique neighborhood in northern Virginia. For the past 70 years, most renovations, while personalized, nevertheless have been respectful of their neighbors. Moreover, many folks who bought into the neighborhood years ago never left, and this has meant less turnover of the homes through the decades. Our homes have remained modest, mostly true to their Mid-Century Modern (MCM) architecture, and the ratio of trees and green to building has been retained as well. This has kept the treed and quiet character of our neighborhood intact, and has been a benefit for everyone to enjoy. We've mostly taken this for granted and hoped it would stay this way.

Sadly, this is changing. HRA is not immune to the epidemic of tear downs and over-scaled buildings that replace them. In the past two years, several homes have been torn down and replaced with large houses that are out of character with our neighborhood and tower over their neighbors. It has been hugely upsetting to the direct neighbors, and many, many of you have shared your dismay and asked, "what can be done to stop the domino effect on the rest of the neighborhood?"

Fearful of this very thing, three years ago we invited a Fairfax County historian to speak to us about Historic Overlay District designation. At that time, many of you immediately embraced the idea, while others had questions and concerns about the added layer of permitting. We decided to see how far we could get by pursuing other measures to save the character of our neighborhood. For example, we worked behind the scenes to connect sellers with buyers who would respect our unique character. This helped to save a few more homes from becoming tear-downs, but this volunteer effort is not sustainable, and clearly holds no guarantee.

After considerable investigation and thought, we have turned once again to the possibility of a Historic Overlay District (HOD) designation for HRA. We have determined it is not as restrictive as many of us initially thought. Please note that a HOD is decidedly not a Home Owner's Association (HOA). A HOD embraces individualizing your home, while an HOA seeks sameness. The goal of the HOD is to ensure the *character of the entire neighborhood remains intact*, not that it be arrested in history or look uniform. Moreover, a HOD requires new development to be compatible with - not necessarily identical to - what's here already. This is an important distinction.

#### WHAT'S NEXT?

The HRA Civic Association Board seeks informed dialogue among the community regarding whether or not to pursue a Historic Overlay District designation. We will circulate a petition in order to gauge community interest in pursuing a HOD.

If the majority of the neighborhood decides against it, we will hear you and stop the process. At that point, however, we will have exhausted our ability to prevent what has, now, already come to our neighborhood. After 70 years of modest existence, the recent builds have shown us our future: HRA will fall to the domino effect of over-scaled structures. We are already a targeted neighborhood, given our location.

Please join us in learning more about how a HOD can help us, and what exactly it entails - from time frame, to restrictions, to protections, etc. We hope that the majority of us will, as we have, come around to recognizing the unique opportunity we have with this tool, to preserve the character of HRA for generations beyond us. **Come to our table at DitP and to the Community Meeting to have myths busted and to learn more. Visit the HOD link on our HRA website for articles, documents, and eventually, a link to the petition. [www.holmesrunacres.com](http://www.holmesrunacres.com)**

*- Brought to you by the Friends of Holmes Run Acres (FoHRA). Friends of Holmes Run Acres. (FoHRA) is a committee of the Holmes Run Acres Civic Association that was born out of the Libeau fight. We realized we needed to do something to retain the character of HRA, and prevent the scourge of McMansions besetting virtually every neighborhood in northern Virginia, from taking over HRA.*