THE CITY OF ASHEVILLE

MEMORANDUM

TO: Historic Resources Commission of Asheville & Buncombe County (HRC)

FROM: HRC Executive Committee (FY24 Chair Sioux Oliva, Vice-Chair Will Hornaday, 2nd Vice-Chair Amy Moxley, 3rd Vice-Chair Sara Groce & FY25 Chair Will Hornaday, Vice-Chair Sioux Oliva, 2nd Vice-Chair Celesta Gorman, and 3rd Vice-Chair Shannon Watkins)

CC: Alex Cole, Urban Planner III/HRC Staff Liaison

DATE: April 28, 2026

SUBJECT: HRC Executive Committee Recommendations on the 2023-24 Resident-Proposed Montford Design Standard Amendments

SUMMARY STATEMENT: A resident-led proposal to amend four sections of the Montford Historic District Design Standards was submitted to the Historic Resources Commission (HRC)/City in early 2024. The proposed amendment sections include Fences and Walls (p. 36-37), Sustainability and Energy Retrofit (p. 76-77), Windows and Doors (p. 84-85), and Additions (p. 88-89). Following an initial consideration of the proposed amendments at the April 2024 regular meeting, it was decided by City staff and Commission members that the Executive Committee should conduct additional research and analysis of design standards.

A special work session of the HRC was held on November 14, 2025 where the Executive Committee's analysis findings and recommendations were shared with the larger commission, which included consideration of draft amendments to the standards for Additions, as well as engagement with the community to ascertain the level of support for front yard fences and the proposed addition amendments.

Following the work session, the City published an online survey via Public Input on February 27, 2026 to collect responses on a brief set of questions to gauge the community's sentiments on these two design standard topics. The survey was live through March 27th; the results of the survey can be found here.

On April 14 and 27, 2026, the Executive Committee convened to discuss the survey results, and to further refine their recommendations to the commission. Based on the analysis and consideration of the proposed amendments to date, the committee is recommending that the

commission consider amendments to the following pages of the standards: 11, 36-37, and 88. The draft redline amendment document can be found here. The committee offers the following points of context regarding the rationale for their recommendations:

- p. 11 - Purpose and Applicability of the Design Standards - The design standards are rooted in the narrative description of the historic character of the neighborhood included in the Montford Area Historic District National Register nomination; the committee's recommendation is to include clarifying language on this topic in this section.
- p. 36-37 - Fences - The committee supports continuing review of fences in front yards on a case by case basis via major work application, and is only recommending eliminating some confusing verbiage and addition of some clarifying language in this section.
- p. 88 - Additions - The committee supports more substantive amendments to the standards for additions that would allow for additions to side elevations in some cases.

NEXT STEPS: The next step in the process is for the Commission to hear public comments at the May 13, 2026 regular meeting, which will be followed by a formal decision/vote(s).

BACKGROUND & CONTEXT:
2023

In mid-2023, HRC staff was asked to attend an upcoming Montford Neighborhood Association (MNA) meeting to present on the role of the commission and the design standards and review process. The request for staff to present at the MNA meeting was in response to some concerns regarding recent circulation of misinformation and/or misperceptions around the role and responsibilities of the HRC.

Around the same time, HRC staff met with a community member to discuss a project they were considering, as well as the possibility of amending the design standards for additions to make them allowable on side elevations. HRC staff was also made aware that several residents were planning to poll the neighborhood on a grouping of proposed amendments to the design standards. In response, HRC staff recommended that they allow staff time to give their presentation at the October MNA meeting as planned before publishing the survey so that staff could move forward with the educational effort on the role of the Commission and design standards more generally first. The rationale behind this recommendation was based on the fact that staff had been made aware that confusing and misleading information was circulating in the neighborhood at the time. And, additionally, the draft survey questions shared with HRC staff also included misleading and inaccurate information, which the MNA meeting presentation was intended to aid in curtailing.

Following the educational outreach, staff suggested that they could ask the HRC to consider forming a subcommittee to work with a few representatives from the neighborhood and City staff to work on studying and potentially drafting some amendments together. At which point City staff would have also facilitated engagement (i.e. community meeting(s), survey, etc.) to gauge

neighborhood sentiment around any proposed changes, which would ultimately have to be approved by the full Commission.

Although these recommendations were shared with the community members, the Survey Monkey was published ahead of the October MNA meeting without any revisions based on staff's comments. The survey was published on the Montford listserv, Next Door and Facebook between August 25-October 1, 2023, and generated 135 total responses.

To provide context on the number of residents compared to the number of survey responses, Montford is part of census tracts 2 and 3. About one third of census tract 2 land area is located within the historic district overlay, which is arguably the most dense housing-wise within that tract; there are 1,206 estimated residents in census tract 2 who are 20 years of age or older. The majority of tract 3 is within the historic district overlay; there are 1,929 estimated residents in census tract 3 who are 20 years of age or older. Per the Montford Area Historic District National Register nomination, there are more than 600 properties within the district boundary. Given the size of the district and number of residents, it is anticipated that additional engagement opportunities facilitated by the City will be needed.

2024

In early 2024, a small group of Montford residents formally submitted their proposed amendments to the HRC, and they were presented at the April 2024 regular meeting. During that meeting, it was decided that with the support of City staff, the Executive Committee should conduct an in-depth analysis of similar standards and best practices in the field of historic preservation in order to prepare recommendations to the larger Commission. The committee met multiple times over the course of spring and summer of 2024, and was prepared to bring their findings to the commission at a special work session on September 26, 2024; however, due to circumstances around Hurricane Helene, that work session rescheduled to November 2025.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE ANALYSIS & RECOMMENDATIONS: In order to analyze the existing Montford standards and the proposed amendments in a broader design standard context, staff and the Executive Committee studied and compared them to other local historic standards in multiple peer cities, including:

Raleigh, NC
Greensboro, NC
Wilmington, NC
Winston-Salem, NC
Charlotte, NC
Durham, NC
Rocky Mount, NC
New Bern, NC

Greenville, SC

In addition to studying the design standards of peer cities, City staff and the Committee also referenced the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation, which provides the federal framework for local district standards.

Based on their analysis, the Executive Committee and staff offered the following feedback for the Commission's consideration:

- **Historic windows and doors -** That historic windows are viewed one of the most character-defining features of historic buildings is a foundational principle in the field of historic preservation. The existing Montford standards for maintaining and preserving historic windows are aligned with historic district standards of other NC communities, as well as the Secretary of the Interior's Standards (see pgs. 102-109). In addition to their role in conveying historic character, much documentation exists to support preserving and repairing historic windows for sustainability purposes as well.
    - The Committee **did not** support further consideration of the proposed amendments to the standards for windows and doors at this time.
- **Solar panels -** Solar energy collectors are allowed in the district pursuant to the standards for Sustainability and Emerging Technology on pages 80-81. As noted to the Commission in the April 2024 staff memo, the example images included in the resident-proposed amendment documents are illustrative of multiple solar arrays that have already been approved in the district by City staff via minor work application. Based on our analysis, only seven solar applications have required major work review by the HRC due to collectors facing a right of way in the past decade, with the vast majority of solar applications having been reviewed and approved by staff via minor work. And out of the seven major work solar applications, five have been approved and two were withdrawn. Additionally, the Montford solar standards are comparable to standards in other NC cities, which also encourage solar features to be located as inconspicuously as possible, and placed on non-character-defining facades whenever possible. Whether or not solar collectors facing a right of way impacts the historic character of the property and/or district is inherently subjective, hence major work being required in those limited cases. It's the committee's position therefore that the existing standards are effective and sufficient.
    - The Committee **did not** support further consideration of the proposed amendments to the standards for solar at this time.
- **Additions -** Design standards for additions in other NC cities were not entirely dissimilar to the existing Montford standards; however, while most standards indicate that additions

that only affect a rear facade are the best case scenario, many communities allow additions on non-character defining facades more generally. It was therefore recognized by the committee that adding some additional standards and clarification on hierarchy of features/facades when considering additions was warranted.

    - The Committee **did** support amendments to the standards for additions; the draft amendments can be found here.

- **Fences -** Perhaps where the Montford standards differed the most from other NC standards was on the topic of fences. The vast majority of the standards reviewed do not preclude or discourage fencing in front yards where it did not exist historically. Charlotte was an exception; however, in speaking with their staff, it appears that they differ from Asheville in that they do not receive many applications for front yard fencing. It is recognized that the openness of the landscape is characteristic of Montford; however,

    - The Committee **did** support further dialogue with the neighborhood on the topic of fencing and ways to improve the standards to be more clear.

Final recommendations from the Committee can be found above in the Executive Summary section.

NEXT STEPS: The next step in the process is for the Commission to hear public comments at the May 13, 2026 regular meeting, which will be followed by a formal decision/vote(s).