

TOWN OF HILLSBOROUGH



What is the Architecture and Design Review Board?

If this is your first meeting of the ADRB, this information may answer some of the questions you may have about the process of considering applications.

What is the Architecture and Design Review Board (ADRB)?

The Board was created by the City Council to provide Hillsborough with a thorough design review process. The 5-member board of volunteers, consisting of citizens who typically have some background and/or experience in design or construction, is appointed by the City Council. The ADRB serves as a link between the applicant and the Town's goals for functional and aesthetic standards. Although the ADRB's process is one of critique, the intent is one of guidance in order to establish excellence in design as the prevailing standard for the Town.

What is the purpose of the ADRB?

To encourage design that is responsive to the site, compatible with the surrounding neighborhood, in harmony with the natural environment, and in keeping with the character of the Town. It is the charge of the ADRB to promote good design in order to maintain and enhance the environmental qualities, historic character, and the high quality of aesthetic values that make the Town unique and desirable. The ADRB evaluates applications to address issues including:

- 1. Is the project compatible with the neighborhood?*
- 2. Does the proposed project appropriately relate to the site, especially in terms of the site grade and the appearance of height, mass and bulk of the structure?*
- 3. Are all of the design elements consistent and of a quality that is commensurate with other new or historic homes in Town?*

These issues are also addressed in the Town's Residential Design Guidelines, which were adopted by the City Council to assist the community and the ADRB in evaluating site-specific design issues. The Design Guidelines provide guidance toward potential design solutions to: reinforce Hillsborough's image; facilitate contemporary life; encourage Town-wide diversity; and foster creativity.

Does this project comply with Hillsborough's zoning codes and regulations?

Before projects are scheduled for consideration by the ADRB, every project is checked by Planning Department staff for compliance with Municipal Code regulations and standards. If a project requires a variance to the standards in the Code, the variance must have been approved by the City Council prior to the ADRB's consideration of the design.

Do my concerns really matter? The ADRB conducts these public hearings to hear your concerns. It is best if you have reviewed the plans if you have specific concerns (related to the design of the project) which might be addressed through the design process. Thoughtful comments (written or spoken) from individual homeowners about their specific design issues are the most effective means to express your concerns to the ADRB.

Did the Board read my letter? All correspondence which is received prior to the meeting is delivered to the Board-members with their plan packets. The ADRB thoughtfully considers all correspondence. Anything handed in during the meeting will be placed in the file; however, the ADRB has a policy against stopping the meeting to read correspondence.

Should I talk with the project designer?

The ADRB encourages the designer to contact neighbors early in the design process so that any issues might be addressed in the design development. Even if you oppose the project, the ADRB suggests that you review the project with the designer to better understand the proposal and formulate your opinions.

How do I address the Board?

The ADRB conducts legal public hearings, but they are not held in an overly formal manner. Usually, the Chair of the Board first asks if there is anyone in the audience who wishes to provide comment on an agenda item. At this time, anyone wishing to express concern, support, or opposition may do so.

When you speak, go to the podium, state your name and address for the record and present your concerns to the ADRB, stating them as simply and clearly as possible. Generally each speaker is permitted to speak only one time and for a maximum of three minutes. You are welcome to ask a question about the project, but understand that it may not be answered until the Board requests the applicant to respond. Next, the applicant may be asked by the Board to respond to the comments, answer any questions which the neighbors have asked, or respond to comments and questions the Board may have.

This process does not provide for conversations or arguments between neighbors, applicants, designers, or the Boardmembers; all testimony should be directed to the Chair of the Board. Once the public hearing has been closed, no additional testimony may be given.

What can the Board do about protecting privacy and views?

The ADRB considers privacy as well as major views/vistas from key picture windows in evaluating projects, but these issues are not protected by ordinance in Hillsborough. Most cities do not have privacy or view protection regulations because both are difficult to legally define and protect. Also, the law is not clear as to rights to views over another's property.

The only way to truly protect a view is to purchase a view easement over your neighbor's property. Views are described

differently by different people; however, seeing a roofline or a portion of a house that you haven't seen before is not considered a blocked view.

The ADRB may require landscaping to screen specific views or vistas from a project into your house or portion of your yard; or, it may ask if a window or deck can be relocated or oriented differently. Property maintenance including clearing old vegetation and trimming and/or removing dead or diseased trees may result in neighbors seeing things that have not seen before. The Board recognizes, however, that the Town is suburban, rather than rural; the minimum required setback distances provide a certain level of privacy. One cannot reasonably expect to not see another house from an adjoining lot or the street.

What can the Board do about who is going to live in the house?

The ADRB must use the same standards for all houses, whether they are going to be owned by current residents; sold to new owners; or, if they are being built on speculation by a developer.

What can the Board do about my concerns regarding drainage?

The ADRB does not review drainage plans; those are submitted with the construction plans for review by the Building Department when an application is made for a Building Permit. In most cases, new development means that existing drainage facilities will be improved to today's standards and existing problems are often solved. If you have concerns about drainage, talk to your neighbor or, if the project is approved, write a note to the Building Department to assure that your concerns are on file when the construction plans are reviewed.

What if I disagree with the Board's decision?

The ADRB's decision is, in most instances, final unless it is appealed within fifteen days to the City Council. To file a formal appeal, follow the procedures contained in the handout available in the Planning Dept. An appeal involves a new public hearing at a meeting of the City Council. The appellant is responsible for the cost of processing the appeal; preparing the public notices; and, showing cause why the Board's decision should not be upheld.