

## ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis:           DESIGN REVIEW AND NEW CONSTRUCTION  
  IN THE CHARLESTON HISTORIC DISTRICT

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This thesis examines a number of questions about design review in historic districts. Does the design review process when it is closely associated with a historic district impede creative architectural expression? Or, is the process equal in power to the range of influences that exert formative pressure on architects during the design process? Are the claims valid that the design review process, particularly when it is associated with management of change in a historic district, subordinates new construction to subjective standards for appropriate architectural design? And, does the design review process improperly intercede between the architect and architectural creativity?

Charleston, South Carolina, which pioneered the use of the design review process to manage change in a historic district through its landmark 1931 zoning ordinance, provided an excellent environment for examining these questions. The record of

Charleston's Board of Architectural Review, which spans seven decades, a variety of economic and social conditions, several major expansions of the historic district, and the evolution of the preservation ethic in the city, was examined in detail. Charleston's experience with design review was contrasted with another important historic community – Santa Fe, New Mexico. Charleston's community of architects was surveyed to learn how it is influenced by and reacts to the design review process. Finally, two new construction projects completed in the mid-1990s in Charleston's historic district were evaluated to see how they were influenced by design review.

Contrary to much of the criticism directed toward Charleston's Board of Architectural Review, the research presented in this thesis demonstrates that the design review process in Charleston does not impose specific preferences for architectural styles and forms – either traditional or contemporary – on new construction in the city's historic district. The thesis also shows, however, that design review does have a significant impact on the creative process involved with the design and realization of Charleston's new buildings. Architects in Charleston consciously anticipate the influence the design review process has on their work and they frequently modify creative impulses to conform to preconceptions about the aesthetic preferences of the city's design review board. This thesis concludes that design review is a powerful tool for managing change in historic districts. To ensure that the design review process does not negatively impede the progression of architectural design in the communities that employ it, the goals of the process must be well defined for the architects and their clients who are obligated to comply with them.