

Historic District Design Guidelines Update: Survey Results

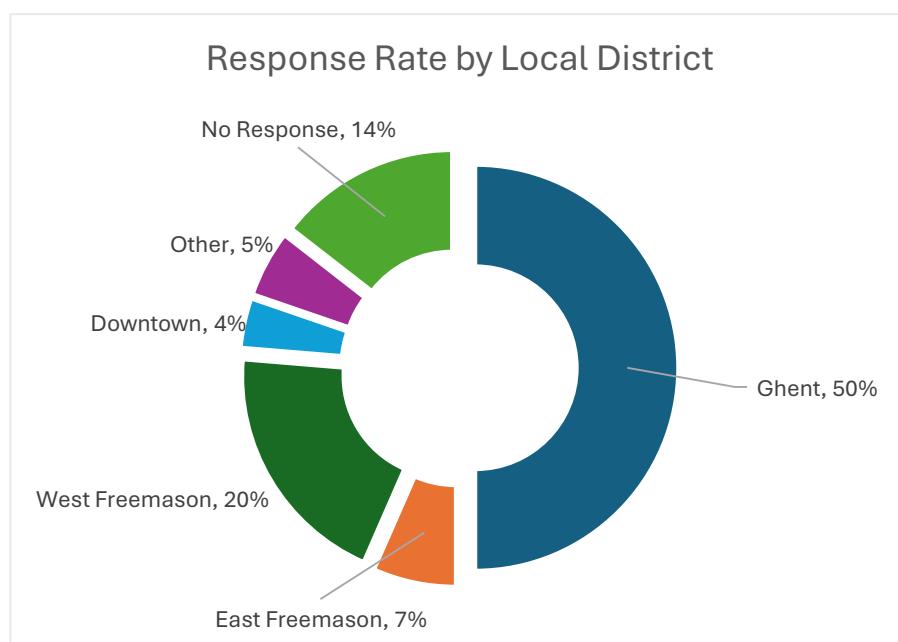
The survey was hosted on the City website through CivicPlus and was advertised as being open from June 1 through June 30, 2025. Two responses were received on July 1, 2025 following a meeting that was held to discuss the update of the historic district design guidelines. It consisted of nine questions, all of which were skippable. The survey itself is included at the end of this report. 76 responses were received.

The survey was advertised on postcards mailed to all property owners in the Downtown, East Freemason, Ghent, West Freemason and to all property owners of local landmarks; on the City website; through City social media accounts; in emails to civic leagues and organizations registered with the City; and at two public meetings hosted by the City Planning Department. The survey response rate is estimated at 5% of property owners in local historic districts, however, not all respondents reported being property owners of property in local historic districts.

Who Responded

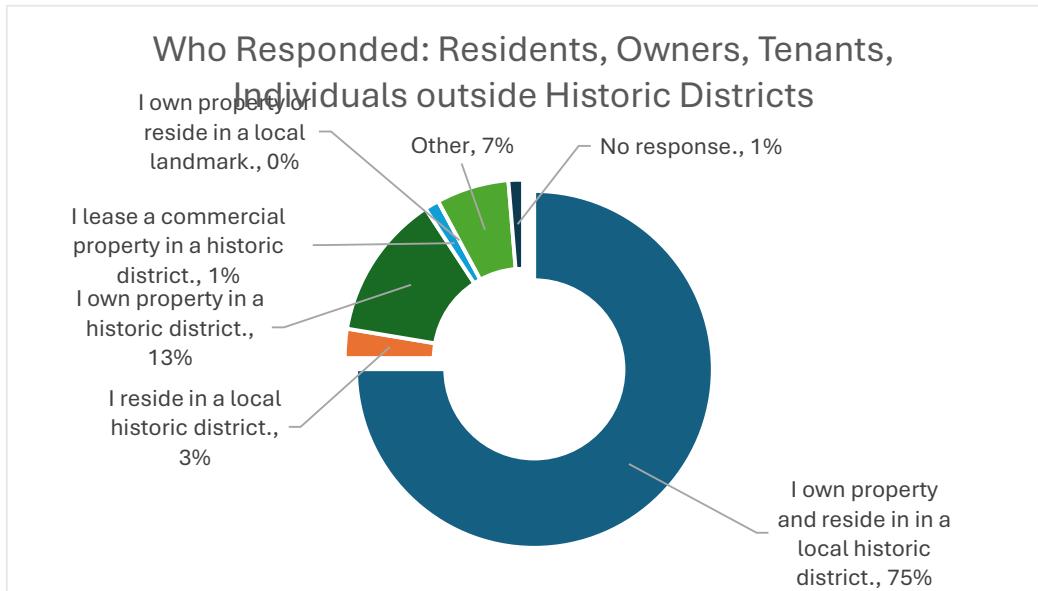
To inform follow up engagement and to deepen understanding of survey responses, several questions about each respondent's association with the local historic districts and their level of familiarity with the current guidelines were asked.

The greatest number of respondents of the survey associated themselves with the Ghent Historic District, with 50% of responses received were from Ghent. The second highest response was from West Freemason with 20% of responses. The percentage of properties per district is summarized below:

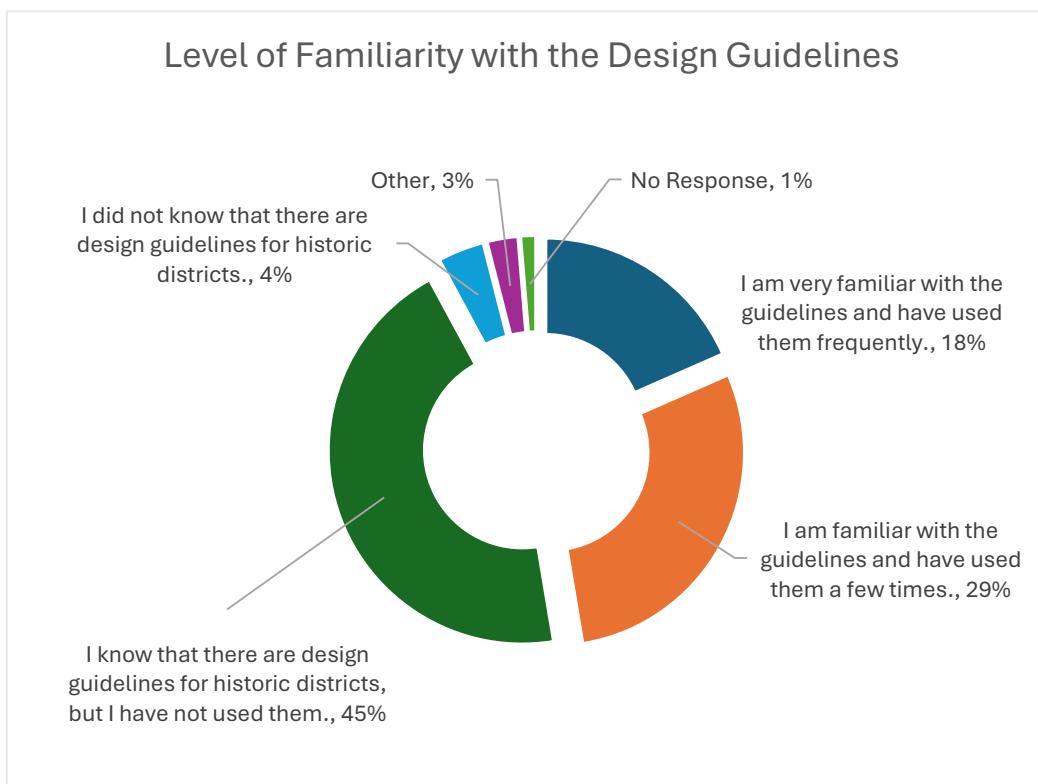


DISTRICT	APPROXIMATE PERCENT OF PARCELS
DOWNTOWN	14%
EAST FREEMASON	<1%
WEST FREEMASON	12%
GHENT	71%
LOCAL LANDMARKS	<1%

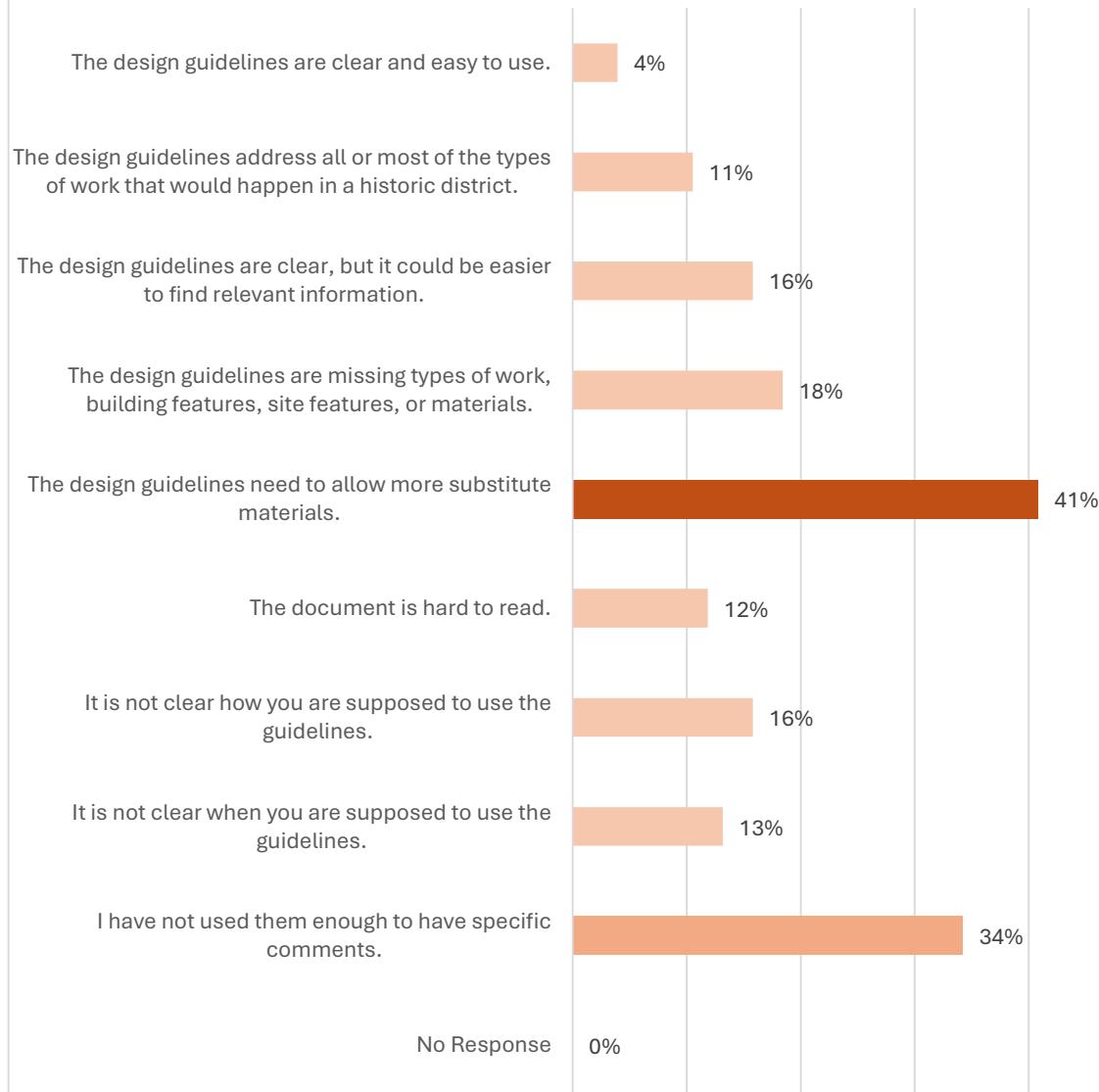
Note: Norfolk and Western Railroad is excluded as that district has a separate set of guidelines.



Overwhelmingly, respondents reported as being those who both own property and reside in a local historic district. The second highest response rate was from owners of properties in a historic district, but who do not also reside in a historic district. No responses were received from owners of local landmarks. Additional efforts should be made to engage these owners. 47% of respondents reported familiarity with the guidelines, with 18% indicating they were very familiar with them and had used them frequently. 45% of respondents reported they were aware of the guidelines but had not used them. Only 4% of respondents reported being unaware that guidelines exist.



General Opinions about the Design Guidelines

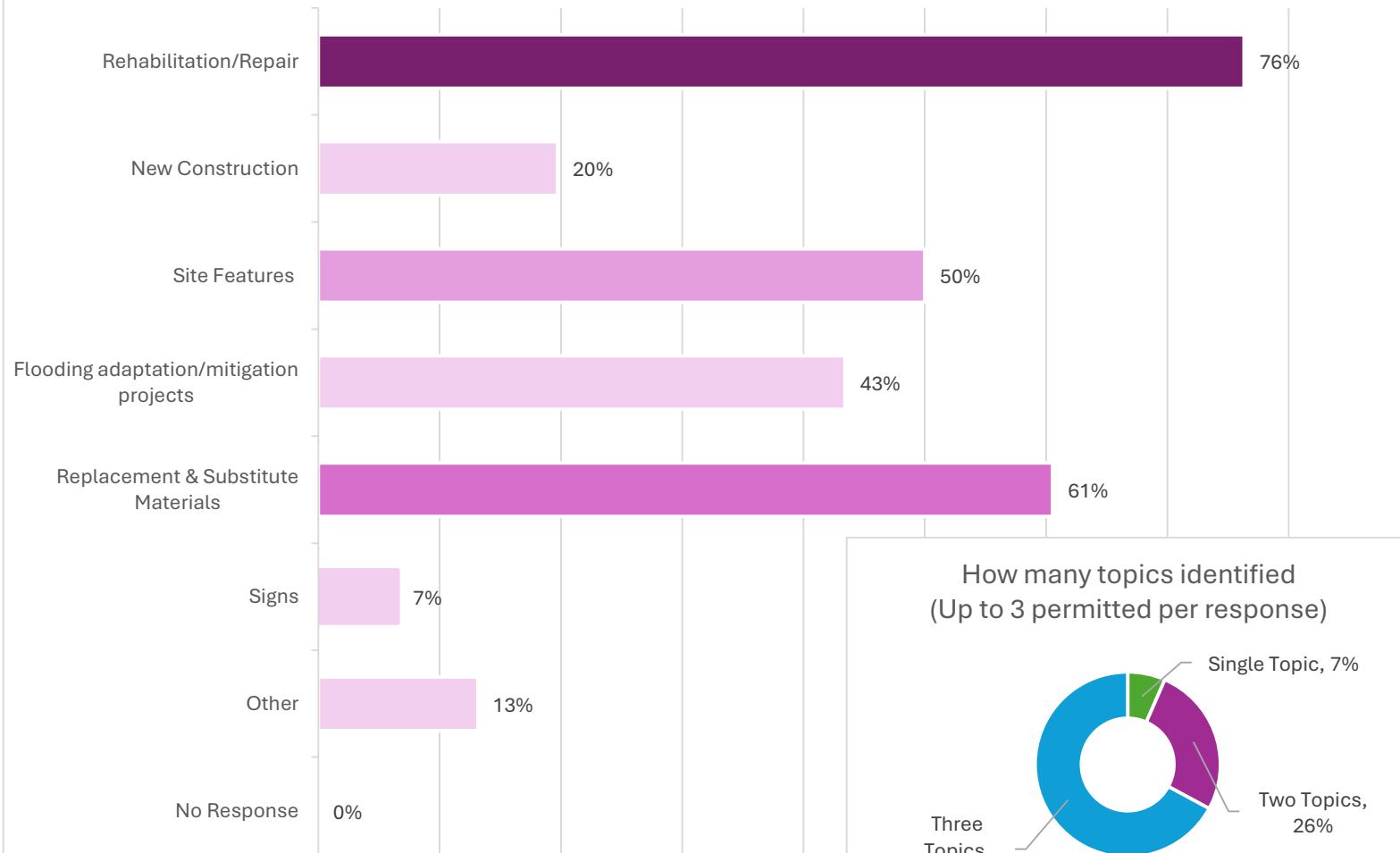


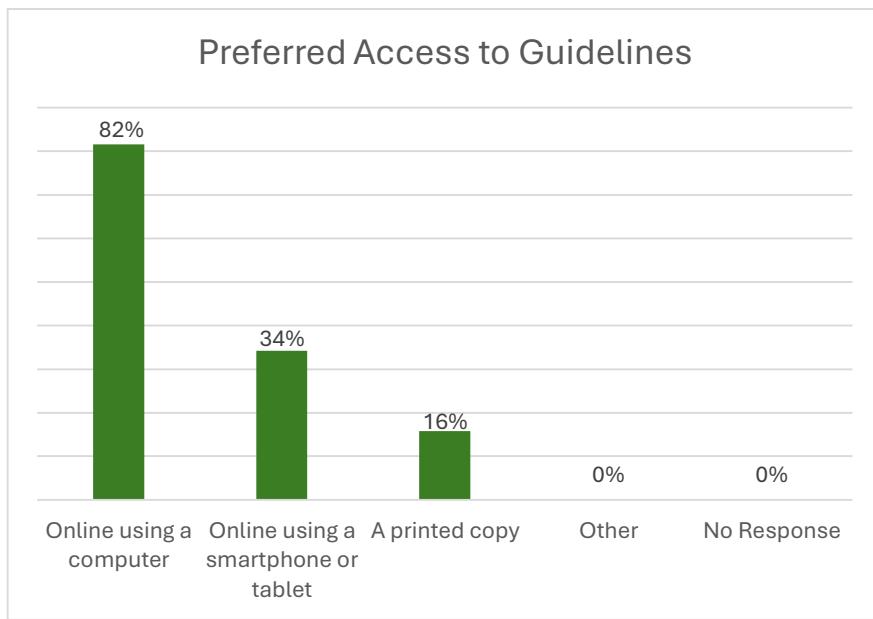
Opinions about the Current Guidelines

We asked general opinions about the current guidelines by inviting respondents to select as many statements as applied to their opinion. 41% of respondents—the highest response rate per statement—reported that the guidelines need to allow more substitute materials. The next highest response rate was from participants indicating they had not used the guidelines enough to have specific comments on them. Only 4% of respondents reported that the guidelines are clear and easy to use. This question received a 100% response rate.

Respondents were also invited to identify the 3 most important topics to address in the update. Overwhelmingly, respondents identified Rehabilitation/Repair as the most important topic for the guidelines (75% of respondents). This was followed by Replacement & Substitute Materials (61%) and Site Features (50%). A few respondents provided Other opinions, with several identifying EV charging and exterior/building lighting as being important topics for the guidelines to address. This question also received a 100% response rate.

Most Important Topics for the Design Guidelines





Accessing the Guidelines

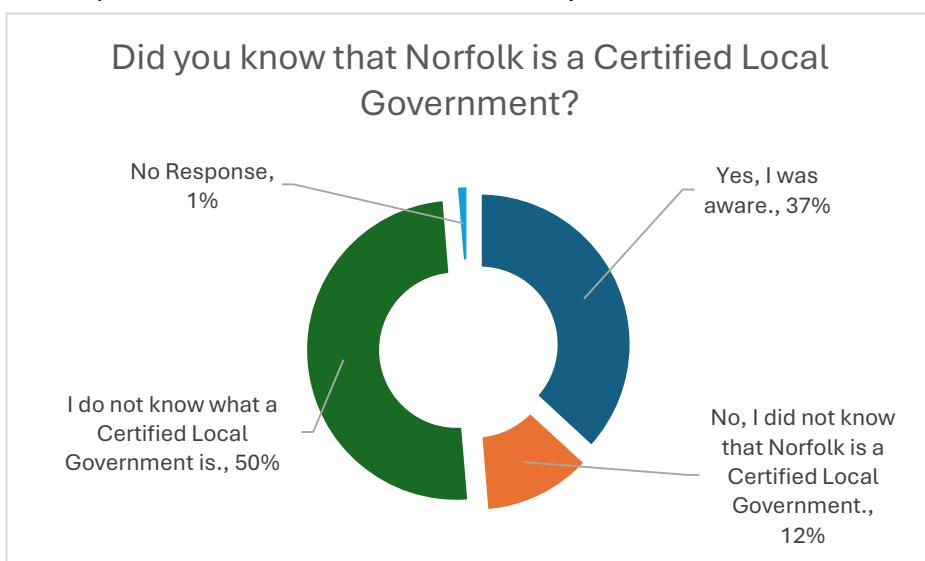
To inform how we would best structure the new guidelines, we asked how respondents would prefer to access the guidelines, listing the three most common means and inviting participants to identify any other way that they would prefer to use to access the guidelines. More than one preferred method could be reported.

This question received a 100% response rate. Almost all respondents (82%) would prefer to access the guidelines online by using a computer. Some respondents (34%) also indicated that they would prefer to use a smartphone or tablet to access the guidelines. While a smaller percentage overall, it indicates that while the guidelines should be optimized for a computer, they should still be friendly to smaller screens.

Certified Local Government (CLG)

As one of the guiding goals of this update initiative is to maintain the City's certification as a CLG, updated guidelines will still need to be consistent with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. We asked whether respondents were aware that Norfolk is a CLG. Half of respondents reported not knowing what a CLG is, identifying a critical area of missing knowledge.

This certification, what it is and what it does, needs to be explained as part of this initiative.



Conclusions

While there was only a 5% response rate, there are several key, relevant takeaways from the survey responses. Among these respondents:

1. There is a moderate awareness of the current design guidelines, but only a fair level of familiarity with them.
2. There is very strong interest in addressing general rehabilitation/repair projects and a similar level of interest in addressing replacement and substitute materials.
3. There is strong interest in addressing guidelines for site features, which are not as thoroughly addressed in the current guidelines as other topics.
4. When accessing the guidelines, a computer is most likely to be used.
5. Education/awareness of the preservation program should be addressed as part of this update. (This need is seen most directly in the response to the question about whether respondents know that Norfolk is a CLG, but also in that 34% of respondents reported not knowing the guidelines well enough to share an opinion of them.)

Survey Questions

1. Which **district** do you live/work/own property in?
 - a. East Freemason
 - b. West Freemason
 - c. Ghent
 - d. Downtown
 - e. Norfolk & Western Railroad
 - f. Local Landmark
 - g. I do not currently live/work/own property in a local historic district or local landmark.
2. Choose which statement best **describes you**:
 - a. I own property and reside in in a local historic district.
 - b. I reside in a local historic district.
 - c. I own property in a historic district.
 - d. I lease a commercial property in a historic district.
 - e. I own property or reside in a local landmark.
 - f. Other (Describe)
3. Choose which statement best describes your **familiarity** with the current design guidelines:
 - a. I am very familiar with the guidelines and have used them frequently.
 - b. I am familiar with the guidelines and have used them a few times.
 - c. I know that there are design guidelines for historic districts, but I have not used them.

- d. I did not know that there are design guidelines for historic districts.
- e. Other (Describe)

4. Which of the following statements best describes your **general opinion** about the **current design guidelines**? Select as many as apply.

- a. The design guidelines are **clear** and **easy to use**.
- b. The design guidelines **address all or most of the types of work** that would happen in a historic district.
- c. The design guidelines **are clear, but it could be easier** to find relevant information.
- d. The design guidelines are **missing** types of work, building features, site features, or materials.
- e. The design guidelines need to **allow more substitute materials**.
- f. The document is **hard to read**.
- g. It is **not clear how** you are supposed to use the guidelines.
- h. It is **not clear when** you are supposed to use the guidelines.
- i. I **have not used** them enough to have specific comments.

5. Which of the following topics do you think are most important to address with this update to the design guidelines? Pick up to 3.

- a. Rehabilitation/Repair projects generally
- b. New Construction
- c. Site Features (landscaping, walkways, driveways, fencing, lighting etc.)
- d. Flooding adaptation/mitigation projects (wet/dry proofing, building elevation, venting, etc.)
- e. Replacement and Substitute Materials
- f. Signs
- g. Other
 - i. If other, please describe:

6. How do you/would you want to access and read the design guidelines?

- a. Online using a computer
- b. Online using a smartphone or tablet
- c. A printed copy
- d. Other. Please describe:

7. Is there anything else you would like to share as we begin updating the design guidelines? (Leave blank if no comments at this time.)

- a. Free response

8. Did you know that Norfolk is a Certified Local Government (CLG)?

- a. Yes, I was aware.
- b. No, I did not know that Norfolk is a Certified Local Government.

- c. I do not know what a Certified Local Government is.

9. If you would like to receive email updates about the design guidelines update, please list your email below.

- a. Input Email
- b. I currently do not wish to receive emails about this initiative.

