



# HISTORIC MOUNT PLEASANT

## Annual Report Of the Board of Directors Fiscal Year 2013

Presented at the Annual Meeting  
April 5, 2014

Incorporated in 1985, Historic Mount Pleasant (HMP) aims to bring neighbors together to celebrate and protect features of the Mount Pleasant Historic District that give the neighborhood its special character. Our website ([www.historicmountpleasant.org](http://www.historicmountpleasant.org)) provides basic information about historic district requirements and links to a variety of other resources on historic preservation. We regularly field inquiries from residents about individual properties and work with the Historic Preservation Office in the D.C. Office of Planning and other official entities to resolve issues affecting the historic district. We participate in the D.C. Historic Districts Coalition and sponsor social and educational activities in Mount Pleasant.

### Advice and Assistance on Exterior Renovations

Our principal ongoing responsibilities relate to exterior renovations in Mount Pleasant – advising and assisting neighbors on permit requirements, reviewing designs with architects, and providing input on cases going before the Historic Preservation Review Board (HPRB). Given the broad scope of authority delegated by the Board to the staff of the Historic Preservation Office (HPO), the cases actually going to the Board for decision are relatively few in number. HPO advises all applicants whose cases must go to the Board to share their plans with both HMP and the Advisory Neighborhood Commission (ANC), and the HPRB invariably asks for our views during the hearing. If we cannot attend the hearing, we provide comments in writing to the staff beforehand. In all cases going to the Board, we invite the applicant to discuss his or her plans with us and also invite the views of neighbors who have expressed particular concerns about the project.

During Fiscal Year 2013 (December 2012–November 2013), HPRB reviewed nine new projects in Mount Pleasant, approving eight and rejecting just one (expansion of a driveway on 16<sup>th</sup> Street), all with the concurrence of HMP. Most of these projects involved additions to houses, specifically: a one-story rear addition at 1709 Harvard, two-story rear additions at 1893 Ingleside and 1751 Park, a third-floor addition at 1861 Newton, and rooftop additions at 1736 Irving and 1705 Hobart. While the rules for rear additions are more lenient than alterations that may be seen from the street, care is taken to ensure that the design and the materials are appropriate to the house and the site, taking cues from neighboring properties as well. The most important requirement for rooftop additions is that they not be visible from the street – which means from eye-level of a pedestrian on the sidewalk opposite the building. “Flag tests” are often required to test the visibility of such projects under review – in which a flag is erected at the highest point of a proposed addition to see whether it can in fact be seen from across the street.

The project at 1710 Irving was somewhat unusual in that, in addition to a new front basement entrance, the homeowners received approval for a one-story garage that, given the steeply sloped back yard, would be built with a lower level set into that hillside. The new front entrance was achieved by lowering the sill on a window opening in the front porch apron to accommodate a door. No side lights were allowed, in keeping with the requirement that new front basement entrances be as unobtrusive as possible. The illustrated Preservation and Design Guidelines for Basement Entrances and Windows for historic properties are available at

[www.planning.dc.gov/historic\\_preservation](http://www.planning.dc.gov/historic_preservation). Under these guidelines, new entrances should retain original topography, entrance stairs and stoops as well as character-defining features of front porches. They should not include the excavation of front yards to construct at-grade access walkways from the sidewalk or new entrances in front of projecting bays.

In February 2013, the National Housing Trust/Enterprise Preservation Corporation finally presented to HPRB the design for reconstruction and rehabilitation of the Monsignor Romero Apartments at 3145 Mount Pleasant Street. HMP had already been involved for several months in reviewing plans for the project, emphasizing the desirability of restoring features of the façade that had been deliberately removed or otherwise lost over the years. Given the extensive damage to the building, budgetary limitations, and the new internal configuration, we reluctantly agreed that the original appearance could not be recreated. However, based on the historic documentation we provided, the design approved by HPRB included restoration of the original door surrounds, with windows in place of the doors, and a more attractive central entrance. We later participated in selection of the windows for the façade. The project broke ground on July 2, and the Tenants Association presented HMP with a certificate of appreciation for its commitment and support of the project.

In June, HPRB rejected the after-the-fact application by owners of the school at 3224 16<sup>th</sup> Street to expand the elliptical driveway to include two parking spaces. The staff report explained the history of front yards created within street rights-of-way that are required to be maintained as open green space. Paving over such areas for use as parking is against the law. The school readily agreed to remove the additional paving and return those areas to green space, which was done in the fall.

In addition to the new cases described above, HPRB reopened two cases from prior years -- the construction of new townhouses on the vacant lot at 17<sup>th</sup> and Oakwood and the transformation of Meridian Hill Baptist Church into a 45-unit condominium. In both cases, the HPRB had previously given concept approval for the project, but neither had gone forward for lack of financing. While the church project will now be reviewed again in 2014, Oakwood Terrace became the major focus for the HPRB in Mount Pleasant in 2013.

When the Oakwood Terrace case returned to the HPRB in May 2013 for renewal of its December 2010 concept approval, it was met with widespread opposition from neighbors who had not known about the earlier consideration of the case, in part because the ANC had not put the project on its agenda. The neighbors raised a number of fundamental objections to the design -- including its form, density, and lack of setback. While the Board renewed its earlier conceptual approval, it asked the applicant to return with further development of the design based on study of, among other things, a possible reduction of density, increase of setbacks, revision of the southern "apex," and changes to entrances and other details. The project went back to the Board in September, with some modest adjustments to the design. This time, the Board approved the concept and delegated further review to the staff, subject to a list of conditions in the form of further required improvements to the design. Nevertheless, in December, the case was restored to the HPRB agenda for final approval and then deferred, in view of new information that the site was protected by a 1902 covenant "running with the land" that forbids construction within 15 feet of the Oakwood Terrace street line. The project proposes

to build up to that street line. It is not known what further action, if any, the applicant will take to obtain a building permit for the site at this time.

In October, the neighborhood learned that the owner of 1867 Park had entered into a contract to sell the property and that the purchaser intended to restore the house, build a substantial addition to it, and convert the property to a six-unit condominium, as allowed under R-4 zoning for a lot of its size (see below). HMP arranged two meetings with the architects and concerned neighbors and made available to all the building permits and other information we had collected about the property in anticipation of a sale. The property is unique. In 1904, two houses were built at this location just three and one-half feet apart, one of which burned down in the late 60's. This created the possibility that, instead of building the addition to rear, a side addition might be considered – to replace in some fashion the house that burned. This seemed preferable as a way of keeping the mass in line with other houses on the block and reducing the rear extension. The architects pursued this alternative, with HMP's support, but HPRB rejected the design by a vote of 6-to-2 at its January 2014 hearing, finding the addition overwhelmed the remaining house. The lot in question was also found to be two lots, not the single lot that the new owner thought he had purchased, requiring a different design approach. The project will return to HPRB this spring.

Smaller projects have continued to arise, some without building permits posted. While repairs involving replacement of original materials in kind generally do not require permits, larger projects – including the replacement of windows or exterior doors in historic districts – do, and the permits must be displayed where they are visible from the street. The D.C. Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs (DCRA) issues all building permits. The Historic Preservation Office (HPO) in the Office of Planning must clear on all permits in historic districts. Work in public space, such as excavations in front yards that are part of the right of way for our streets, requires a permit from the District Department of Transportation (DDOT). If you are concerned about work proceeding without the proper permits, you may report it to Toni Cherry, chief inspector for HPO ([toni.cherry@dc.gov](mailto:toni.cherry@dc.gov)), the DCRA illegal construction hotline at 442-STOP (7867), or the Mayor's call center (311). We try to answer all questions from neighbors about possible illegal construction but cannot always do so in a timely manner. The best time to stop such activity is when it is in process.

### Adams Mill Road

At our annual meeting last year, we discussed the new design for the intersection at Adams Mill, Kenyon and Irving, which many were surprised to learn entailed two levels at the top of the hill separated by a median wall. During the construction process, a row of Jersey barriers had been placed all the way up the hill, which most found unsightly and inappropriate for the historic district. Upon further examination of the situation, we learned that Advisory Neighborhood Commission 1D (ANC) had approved the project without having been made aware that there would be a two-level road with a median wall, and that DDOT had relied on this approval without reaching out to others, including immediate neighbors. Given the involvement of federal funds, a historic preservation review was also required under Section 106 of the federal historic preservation law, but there was no evidence that that had occurred or that HPO had actually approved the final road design.

As a result of the public outcry, the issue returned to active consideration by the ANC, and there was a large public meeting with DDOT on April 13, at which a variety of objections were raised. HMP, which had no prior knowledge of the proposal, raised concerns about lack of compliance with Section 106, as well as the appearance of the bare concrete wall that was out of character with the historic district. Following this meeting, a neighborhood committee was formed to work with DDOT on possible changes to the design. Homeowners near the intersection took the lead, but two members of the HMP Board were regular participants.

Our inquiry into the nature of the Section 106 review was inconclusive. DDOT insisted they had complied with the requirement, but it seemed that HPO may not have reviewed the final design of the project and that standing waivers for federal highway projects may have excused any meaningful review. In any event, we were unable to muster support from the federal Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, the ultimate Section 106 authority, to reopen the design. After much discussion of alternatives, the neighborhood group reluctantly agreed to the two-level design but insisted that the median wall be covered in stone as closely matched as possible to that used in the retaining walls along Adams Mill Road. There was also considerable discussion of the design of handrails to be installed along Irving Street and the nature of the crash barriers to be installed at either end of the median wall. In both cases, the neighborhood group rejected DDOT's initial designs, rod-type railings and crash barriers similar to those at the other end of Adams Mill Road with yellow bumpers, and insisted on installations that were more in keeping with the residential character of the street and the historic district.

As the meetings progressed to replanting the forested areas that had been disturbed, HMP became concerned that the trees and groundcovers being proposed were not appropriate and brought in a native plant specialist to discuss alternatives that could be selected from species native to the Rock Creek watershed. With her help, an alternative planting plan was developed and accepted by DDOT. In the late fall, DDOT planted a large number of trees on both sides of Adams Mill Road. In the spring, we expect DDOT to plant some ornamental Prairie grass (specifically "Little Bluestem") to replace the sod on the steep slope. However, this new area will require ongoing attention from the neighborhood to become established and fill in. Please let us know if you are interested in helping with this. A neighborhood committee – not just HMP members – is needed to take on this responsibility.

### Zoning Rewrite

As discussed last year, the Office of Planning (OP) has been engaged for five years in a massive effort to update the Zoning Code for the first time since 1958. Historic districts have generally expressed concern about potential changes that might become "matters of right" (i.e., permitted under existing zoning, with no need for a variance that would trigger requirements such as notifying neighbors) under the new code, in particular changes affecting density, property use, accessory dwellings and parking. In Mount Pleasant, there is concern about the continuing matter-of-right conversions of single family homes to multi-family dwellings. Such conversions are actually encouraged by current rules that not only permit them in R-4 zones as long as there is at least 900 square/foot of lot coverage per unit but also permit the lot coverage to increase from 40 percent to 60 percent if a detached or semi-detached dwelling is being

converted. This is what occurred at 1738 Park Road and what was averted at 3307 18<sup>th</sup> Street, when the would-be developer backed out of the deal. The more recent proposal for 1867 Park Road was rejected by HPRB as too large for the remaining historic resource and the design is being revised.

In July 2013, OP released its new draft zoning code – approximately 900 pages in length. Hearings were announced for the fall, and HMP joined others scrambling to understand what its effect might be on individual neighborhoods. In August, we sent initial questions to OP – including asking how Mount Pleasant would be rezoned, as all the zone names had changed. We were informed that the new code would not remap the city, that current R-4 zones would become RF-1, for Residential Flats. Under the old code, a “flat” is a two-family residence. In the new RF-1 zones, a maximum of two flats would be permitted. However, the new code also retained the conversion provision from the current code, making the stated limitation to two-family units illusory. We consulted with experts in other neighborhoods, learned more of the history of the current code, and prepared testimony for the Zoning Commission against continuation of the conversion authority.

The HMP President appeared before the Zoning Commission on November 7. Our statement noted that Mount Pleasant had suffered greatly under the R-4 designation and asked for: removal of the conversion authority found in Chapter 6 of Subtitle E; maintenance of current lot occupancy maximums for different types of housing; and setting those maximums by building type and not the number of units. In other words, she continued, “flats” or multi-unit dwellings should not be entitled to more lot coverage than the building itself based on its exterior style, whether detached, semi-detached or row. HMP also opposed the proposal to raise the maximum lot occupancy to 60% for detached and semi-detached single family residences, with or without existing accessory dwellings, a significant last minute change in the draft text. The response to her testimony from the Zoning Commission was positive, in that they asked OP to propose a solution for Mount Pleasant. While OP subsequently proposed exempting the Mount Pleasant Historic District from Chapter 6, there are questions about the impact of that exemption given other changes in definition being proposed in the new code.

As a result of discussions with zoning experts from other neighborhoods, we have concluded that the best solution would be development of a “customized” residential zone for Mount Pleasant, or portions of the neighborhood, coupled with a moratorium on conversions until the new zone is in place. We have asked to meet with OP to discuss these and other options. A new zone would require a survey of existing housing stock and documentation of neighborhood support for the changes requested. Please let us know if you will be available to help survey or distribute information about the zoning initiative. This is the single most important activity we can undertake in 2014 to protect the historic district. The zoning rewrite itself and supporting documentation are available at: [www.dczoningupdate.com](http://www.dczoningupdate.com).

### Parking along 16<sup>th</sup> Street

The addition of parking spaces to the circular driveway at 3224 16<sup>th</sup> Street last spring caused us to reevaluate more egregious longstanding violations of public space rules in the 3100 block, where four houses had paved over their entire front yards to park cars. Throughout Mount

Pleasant, and much of the District, front yards are public space owned by the city and subject to strict rules as to what can be built and/or planted on them. Enforcement of these rules by DDOT is poor, and it seemed clear that DDOT's failure to enforce in the 3100 block had encouraged the action at 3224 16<sup>th</sup>. However, the properties in Mount Pleasant were the only ones along the entire length of 16<sup>th</sup> Street where front yards were being used to park cars. When the Embassy of the Congo at 1720 16<sup>th</sup> paved its front yard for parking a few years ago, the public outcry was immediate; and DDOT worked with the US Department of State to force the Embassy to remove the pavement and the cars. We decided to press DDOT to enforce these same public space rules in the 3100 block.

On May 15, we wrote DDOT Director Bellamy asking for his prompt personal attention, noting the negative impact of these parking areas on the gateway to our historic district as well as the precedent of the Congo Embassy. A month later, after several e-mail exchanges, we received a form letter noting the issue was under investigation and promising that "any instances where DDOT finds that green space has been illegally paved and improperly used for parking without a permit will be fined, and restoration to its original condition will be enforced." In early January, again after many e-mails, we received a written update, stating that DDOT had visited the locations several times to inform property owners of the rules, issued warning citations, and was monitoring the parking situation. If the property owners wish to seek after-the-fact permits for the paving and parking, they would be required to go before HPRB and the DDOT Public Space Committee, both of which should deny that request. If they wish to contest any fines issued, they may file appeals with the Office of Administrative Hearings. A course of action should be determined in the near future that will bring the enforcement process into the light of day. HMP will continue to look for ways of moving these cases toward removal of the illegal pavement and restoration of the green space.

#### Historic Districts Coalition

HMP continues to participate in the Historic Districts Coalition (HDC), an informal network of neighborhood preservation groups in the city. The Coalition serves as a source of information on legislative and other local initiatives affecting historic preservation and provides and coordinates testimony before the D.C. Council as necessary. Coalition representatives appear on a regular basis at budget and oversight hearings for the Office of Planning, which includes HPO. This past year HDC also testified before the DC Council on the zoning rewrite, stressing the importance of having zoning work with and not against the purposes of the historic preservation law, and before both the DC Council and National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC) on the importance of maintaining the 1907 federal Height of Buildings Act. HMP signed onto all of those statements.

At the request of the Congressional oversight committee, OP and NCPC had conducted a joint study of the possibility of raising heights in the District beyond those set in the 1907 law but reached diametrically opposed conclusions. NCPC recommended leaving the act essentially unchanged, while OP urged lifting the height restrictions completely outside the original L'Enfant City and allowing significantly taller buildings along some avenues within those original boundaries. OP arguments in favor of raising height limits – e.g., that this would help bring affordable housing to the city – were widely challenged. The hearings invited outspoken

opposition from all corners of the city to the OP recommendations. The DC Council adopted a Sense of the Council Resolution in favor of maintaining the Height Act, and the Committee of Fine Arts also endorsed the NCPC recommendation. HMP attended the presentations for preservation groups at NCPC as well as the lengthy public hearing in October and joined HDC in testifying before the DC Council in favor of maintaining the federal height restrictions.

Over the summer, we had the opportunity to work with HDC and the Committee of 100 on the Federal City to prepare comments on the long-awaited draft demolition by neglect (DBN) regulations, which will enable implementation of amendments to the historic preservation law adopted in 2007. The absence of implementing regulations for DBN has made those provisions a dead letter and cast doubt on HPO's commitment to "act before it's too late" to save historic properties, as stated in its own action plan. In reviewing the law and specific cases from around the city, we focused on the need for greatly improving coordination between HPO and DCRA in enforcing building code violations, which is how such cases are now addressed without being called "demolition by neglect." Examples in our neighborhood in recent years include 3324 18<sup>th</sup> and 1724 Park. Based on our experience with the latter case, where DCRA's own building inspector threatened to demolish the property as a threat to public safety, we stressed the need for HPO to have its own authority to protect historic properties when DCRA was unwilling or unable to do so. We called for fines being assessed as soon as there is evidence of serious neglect of basic maintenance and for the fines to be set forth in the historic preservation regulations where owners of historic property could easily find them. The new DBN regulations, whenever they are adopted, will apply to only the most serious violations where court action is initiated. For day-to-day enforcement against what we may consider demolition by neglect, we must continue to rely on HPO to coordinate enforcement action with DCRA under DCRA's authority over building code violations – not where we would like to be on this issue.

HDC has been in transition over the last couple of years, beginning with the departure of long-term coordinator Nancy Metzger and her appointment to HPRB. Rick Busch, long-active with the Dupont Circle Conservancy, had volunteered to serve as coordinator for a limited time (twice extended) and has now relinquished that role. In view of a lack of other willing volunteers, his objective over the past year was to redefine HDC as a virtual organization focused on advocacy and to reconnect it to the DC Preservation League (DCPL), which had helped create HDC in the first place. DCPL of course also engages in advocacy and wanted to improve its outreach to neighborhood groups, so there seemed to be mutual benefit to joining forces. HDC now has its own section on the new DCPL website ([www.dcpreservation.org](http://www.dcpreservation.org)), and DCPL has a new staff member assigned to do public outreach. DCPL intends to provide draft testimony on issues of interest to neighborhood groups through the HDC distribution list to facilitate preparation of separate statements and/or invite others to join their statements. HDC and DCPL hope that this collaboration will make it possible to bring widespread public attention to preservation issues when necessary, as it was this past fall with the Height of Buildings Act.

### Annual Meeting

In accordance with our by-laws (and longstanding practice), HMP held the Annual Membership Meeting on March 9, 2013, at The Rosemount Center. The President briefly recapped the highlights of the preceding year, distributed copies of the Board's Annual Report

for Fiscal Year 2012, and outlined potential activities for 2013. The members present unanimously approved the proposed slate of Board members and Officers for the coming year. Design awards were given to Grant Epstein of Community Three Development and Kevin Milstead for their sensitive exterior restorations of 3324 18<sup>th</sup> and 1840 Kenyon, respectively. The featured speakers were Professor Miriam Gusevich from Catholic University and Tony Norman of the McMillan Park Committee, who spoke about the history of the McMillan Sand Filtration and presented an alternative vision for its redevelopment designed by architecture students under Professor Gusevich's guidance. The city's proposal for the site has generated much controversy and has yet to be approved by HPRB.

### Promoting Broader Membership and Involvement

The annual Holiday Party, held on the first Friday in December, has long been our main membership drive. We thank Leslie Blakey and Joe Wohlmuth for hosting the 2012 party, and Bonnie Cain and Frank Method for hosting this past December. As many of you know, Frank had been in poor health, and he died on December 21. The HMP Board joins their many friends in expressing our sincere condolences to Bonnie. Frank was a welcoming presence and gracious host, and we will all miss him.

In the past, we have mailed invitations to the entire neighborhood – at great expense and with few visible results in terms of new members. In 2010, we decided instead to post invitations on websites and in the neighborhood and to send e-mail invitations to everyone on our active membership list. If we missed anyone who should have received a direct invitation, please contact us to make sure we have your correct e-mail address. If you are willing to host the party or have a new site to suggest, please let us know.

At the end of November 2013, HMP had 71 members (13 life, 42 family, and 16 individual), down from the approximately 140 that we had in the early 2000s. Some of this drop is due to the departure of members for other neighborhoods. This past fall, we reinitiated the “welcome bag” program with personal delivery to 30 new homeowners of the blue HMP logo shopping bags filled with information about the organization, the neighborhood and life in DC more generally. These welcome bags were well-received and we plan to continue the activity in 2014.

For many years, HMP had active standing committees for membership, communications, education and design review, among other things. Only the Design Review Committee remains today. We need volunteers to chair and/or participate in new committees to conduct specific activities throughout the year. Website management and communications are the critical needs at the present time, but we also need assistance to organize more workshops and continue historical research activities. Please give us your ideas and be willing to share your time. We also urge you to help us reach out to neighbors, particularly new ones, to tell them about Historic Mount Pleasant and elicit their support and participation. HMP can only be as effective as it is representative of its membership at large. You may contact any member of the Board of Directors or send your suggestions to our website at any time -- [www.historicmountpleasant.org](http://www.historicmountpleasant.org).

**Historic Mount Pleasant, Inc.**  
**Profit and Loss Statement**  
**Fiscal Year 2013 (December 1, 2012 – November 30, 2013)**

**Income**

Memberships and undesignated contributions	\$2,488.00
Memberships made through PayPal	1,013.52
Holiday party bar donations	270.00
Sale of merchandise	129.88

**Total** **\$3,935.82**

**Expenses**

2012 Holiday Party	1,086.64
Contribution to Rosemount (annual meeting 3/2013)	200.00
Plaques for Design Awards	161.99
Copying, office supplies	115.16
Website operation	203.76
PayPal charges	15.18
MPBA “Make-It-Mount-Pleasant” Sponsorship	500.00

**Total** **2,282.72**

**Net Gain** **1,653.09**

**Assets as of 11/30/2013**

DGEFCU Acceso Share Draft	\$ 4,047.96
DGEFCU Acceso Regular Shares	16,325.83
Prepaid expense	169.80

**Total** **20,543.59**

**Liabilities & Equity**

Total Liabilities	0.00
Equity: Opening Balance	18,890.50
Net Gain	1,653.09

**Total** **20,543.59**