



REPORT OF ACTIVITIES
FOR
FISCAL YEAR 2020

HISTORIC MOUNT PLEASANT, INC.

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) 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 sponsor occasional social and educational activities in Mount Pleasant. We welcome the participation of neighbors in all our activities. Please contact us if you are interested in joining our Board of Directors or helping to review projects or working on other things with us.

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 HPRB to the staff of the Historic Preservation Office (HPO), the cases actually going to HPRB for decision are relatively few in number. HPO advises all applicants to share their plans with both HMP and the Advisory Neighborhood Commission for Mount Pleasant (ANC1D), and HPRB invariably asks for our views during the hearing. We invite applicants to discuss their plans with us and also invite the views of neighbors. We exchange views with HPO staff while projects are under review and generally support the staff report to HPRB, although differences of opinion may arise and will be shared with HPRB. If we cannot attend the hearing, we provide comments in writing beforehand.

During Fiscal Year 2020 (December 2019–November 2020), HPRB considered five cases from Mount Pleasant. It approved a three-story rear addition to replace a two-story back porch, new construction on Mount Pleasant Street and Oakwood Terrace, and freestanding vehicle gates at two locations. Whenever rooftop additions are proposed, it is standard HPO/HPRB practice to ask whether they would be visible from the street – as determined by a flag or stick test – and to require that rooftop additions not be visible from the public right-of-way (generally the vantage point of a pedestrian at any place on the sidewalk across the street from the property in question). In all cases going to the HPRB, an HPO staff member prepares a written recommendation for the Board. The HPO reports and summaries of HPRB decisions are available on the Office of Planning website (www.planning.dc.gov) under the month of the hearing, which is given for each case below. Drawings submitted in individual cases are also now posted on the website. Click on the blue field labelled “HPRB and CFA Project Drawings.”

At **1768 Kilbourne** (January 2020), a two-story rear addition was proposed on the footprint of the back porch, along with a third-floor addition. HPRB review was required because the third-floor addition was larger than what could be approved by staff. The project presented two fundamental issues: potential visibility of the addition from directly across the street and the appearance of the addition from the rear. While most rooftop additions are required to be set forward from the rear wall of the house, this would sit wholly atop the main block. HPRB approved the concept subject to the conditions that the addition and any appurtenances (heightened chimneys, mechanical, etc.) not be visible from any point in the

Kilbourne right-of-way, that the siding not exceed six-inch exposure, and that there be no work on the front of the building other than unobtrusive drainage from the addition's front roof.

At **3215 Mount Pleasant** (April and May 2020), the developer proposed razing the one-story commercial building currently used as a laundromat to construct a four-story commercial/residential building. HMP objected to demolition of the storefront as this was the first building on the block (1906), integral to the overall development of the block, and was designed by the first registered African American architect in the city later known for the True Reformer Building on U Street. We asked that the storefront be restored/reconstructed to approximate its original design in exchange for which we would support additional floors, which would not ordinarily be allowed on a one-story historic structure. Although the developer initially agreed to reconstruct the storefront, that changed after discussions with ANC1D, which conditioned its support for the project on expanding it to take advantage of Inclusionary Zoning provisions. This gave the developer an expanded footprint (75% vs. 60% maximum lot coverage) in exchange for providing 2 units of "affordable" housing (as defined by IZ) within the 15 units to be constructed. It also meant going to four stories, one story above the tallest buildings on the block. We opposed going this high with a new building that would visually dominate the block and loom over adjacent historic structures.

HPRB found that the original building was so damaged that it could no longer be considered a contributing structure in the historic district – thus clearing it to be razed – and approved the taller project. The proposed façade bears little relationship to others on Mount Pleasant Street. The new building will extend much further back on its lot than the current building and become a backdrop for the historic buildings to the south. It will replace the 1940 Heller's wall sign as the focal point for the block. The building will have a single commercial unit at the front of the first floor and 15 apartments, two of which will be limited to tenants within an income range that remains to be identified. There will be no off-street parking.

Construction of this design required relief from the parking and penthouse setback requirements of the zoning regulations. The application to the Board of Zoning Adjustment (BZA Case No. 20298) was heard in October 2020. HMP had no objection to the requested relief from the penthouse setback but had to object to the arguments for parking relief. Notwithstanding the HPRB ruling in favor of demolition of the existing building, the applicant argued that parking could not be provided for fear of damaging the historic structure. While two of the four parking spaces required for new construction of this kind could be waived on the grounds that the site was within one-half mile of a Metro station, relief for the remaining two spaces required demonstrating a specific reduction in parking demand related to the project itself. Instead, the applicant argued that it was impossible to provide parking while also arguing that it was too costly. HMP argued that the applicant had not met his burden proof, pointing out that the addition of 15 dwelling units would necessarily increase congestion and the demand for parking on the commercial corridor. Reflecting the current bias against cars, BZA ruled in favor of the developer.

In May 2020, the owner of the large parcel at 17th and Oakwood returned to HPRB with a new design for three townhouses at **3428, 3430 and 3432 Oakwood**. While a concept had been approved for the project in 2010, that approach became untenable in 2014 when neighbors

proved the existence of a 1902 covenant requiring “that no building shall be erected on said lots within 15 feet of the street line.” In 2019, the applicant submitted a new design but withdrew it without responding to issues raised in the staff report. The latest design addressed some but not all of those issues. It reduced the number of units, eliminated previous parking proposals, better avoided the mature oak on 17th Street, and resubdivided the lot to create two buildings roughly equal in area. The HPRB discussed the need to organize the windows more regularly and the possibility of improving the southern corner of the project, among other details raised by staff; it asked for a three-dimensional model of the project when it came back for final review. The Board approved the project in July without that model and with other details left to subsequent resolution by staff.

Over the years, HMP spent many hours reviewing documents about the history of the site, which at one point had been proposed to be maintained as green space, and working with neighbors to advocate for less intensive development. In the last round, we again stated a preference for new construction that read as a freestanding single house with architectural interest on all four sides – which could of course be a duplex – in a gesture to the houses east of 17th Street. However, notwithstanding the difficult topography, the site had long been classified as a “buildable lot” subject to ordinary zoning and permitting standards. The approved design for 3428-3432 Oakwood comprises two three-story flats that step down the hill, with three entrances on Oakwood and two on 17th Street. The footprint will be a triangle that includes every bit of land between the setback lines of the 1902 covenant and the north property line. There will be no windows on the substantial north wall. Notwithstanding the desirability of saving the heritage oak that towers over the lot, construction will undoubtedly shorten its remaining life. Before the law changed to protect heritage trees, the developer acquired a permit to remove it – eliminating it as an issue in the final review.

In October 2020, the HPRB considered two applications for freestanding vehicle gates on the alley behind houses built without garages. Notwithstanding the presence of such gates in different parts of the neighborhood and in other historic districts, the HPRB had not ruled before on their design compatibility. HPO selected the application at **1745 Park** to propose design principles for such installations throughout the city, suggesting that if the Board were comfortable with the principles set out, HPO could formalize brief design guidelines for the Board’s adoption at a later date. Among the design guidelines proposed: that roll-up gates should not abut or face a street, or be prominently visible from a street; that they should be discouraged where there are no garages nearby; that they should not have garage-like overhead tracks; that the doors should be pre-finished and the steel housing and motor concealed behind an entablature; and that consideration should be given to whether a roll-up gate is functionally necessary in a particular location. Applying these principles to the situations at **1745 Park** and **2051 Park**, the Board approved the installation of single freestanding (or rollup) vehicle gates.

Exterior renovations to properties in Mount Pleasant close to Rock Creek Park are subject to review by the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts (CFA) under the 1910 Shipstead-Luce Act, in addition to HPO/HPRB. While CFA’s mandate does not include historic preservation, CFA refers all cases involving historic properties to HPO and incorporates their comments in its review. In 2020, CFA approved 8 projects in Mount Pleasant: a solar array on the roof at 1925 Park, a new egress window and well below the front porch of 2027 Rosemount, the rollup

vehicle gate at 2051 Park, replacement roofs at 1925 Park including natural slate for the mansard, a rear basement addition at 2020 Pierce Mill, a rear addition at 2038 Pierce Mill, and replacement windows and doors for a basement renovation at 1931 Lamont.

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 – as well as 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, there is now a page on the Office of Planning website – “Reporting Illegal Work” – with instructions on how to verify whether a permit has been issued and how to report it to HPO and DCRA. HMP tries 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. We encourage you to familiarize yourself with this new tool on the OP website.

Annual Meeting and Holiday Party

The HMP by-laws require an annual membership meeting to review prior year activities and vote on the proposed slate of Directors and officers for the coming year. In recent years, we have posted annual reports to our website as they are prepared and conducted elections online, with the results announced at a spring meeting. We were in the process of making arrangements for the spring 2020 meeting when the pandemic hit and suspended all in-person activities. The Board election was held in September 2020, bringing three new members to the Board – Adrian Arroyo, Chris DeRosa and Katherine Wallace. When we had to cancel the holiday party in December, where annual memberships are ordinarily renewed, we decided to extend all existing memberships until such time as an in-person event could be held. We remain in that holding pattern. As of November 30, 2019, HMP members represented 55 households in the neighborhood. We hope to be able to schedule later in 2021 the planned presentation on the work of John T. Earley, “the man who made cement beautiful” and who built the house at 1710 Lamont where our December 2019 party was held.

We appreciate your patience in these most unusual times and look forward to seeing old friends and meeting potential new ones at an in-person event soon. Please feel free to contact us online or in person.

The HMP Board

Fay Armstrong, President
Jonathan Herz, Vice President
Carl Smith, Secretary
Martha Shaw, Treasurer

Adrian Arroyo
Chris DeRosa
Robert Frazier
Olivia Kibler

Robert Frazier
Ian Stirton
Tim Tyler

**Historic Mount Pleasant, Inc.
Profit and Loss Statement**

Fiscal Year 2020 (December 1, 2019 – November 30, 2020)

Income

Memberships and unspecified contributions	2,235.84
Memberships made through PayPal	457.76
Interest earned	8.19

Total **\$ 2,701.79**

Expenses

2019 Holiday Party	1,239.10
Biannual Nonprofit filing with DCRA	80.00
Go Daddy Renewal (5 years)	571.61
Paypal	22.76

Total **\$ 1,913.62**

Net Gain **\$ 788.17**

Assets as of 11/30/2020

DGEFCU Acceso Share Draft	\$ 1,575.79
DGEFCU Acceso Regular Shares	\$ 23,042.41

Total **\$ 23,829.16**

Liabilities & Equity

Total Liabilities	00.00
Equity: Opening Balance as of 12/1/2019	\$ 23,830.03
Net Gain	\$ 788.17

Total **\$ 24,618.20**