



REPORT OF ACTIVITIES
FOR
FISCAL YEAR 2021

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, but all such activities have been suspended during the pandemic. 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 to 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 in person, we provide comments in writing beforehand.

During Fiscal Year 2021 (December 2020-November 2021), HPRB considered nine cases from Mount Pleasant. Five involved rear additions of differing sizes both with and without expansions of the building footprint, all of which were approved. The Board also approved a project to restore the freestanding house at 1635 Harvard, as well as a new carport with deck at 1656 Hobart. It denied approval for a two-story accessory structure on the alley behind 1710 Irving, as well as applications from the Renaissance Condominium at 3060 16th Street to remove balconies on three sides of the building. 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 staff reports and 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 **1818 Kilbourne** (consent calendar, February), a third-story addition with roof terrace was proposed, along with replacement of the front windows. The staff report noted potential

problems with the chimney extensions, drainage, extent of demolition, configuration of replacement windows, and stucco material. It noted that a second electrical meter would be needed for the new basement unit and that it was proposed to be placed under the front porch to minimize public views. Staff recommended approval of the project in concept with delegation of final approval to staff, with the conditions that: (1) the addition and appurtenances (skylights, chimneys, solar panels, mechanical, etc.) are not visible from the Kilbourne Place right-of-way; (2) the floor framing be retained, (3) front window replacements be nine-over-nine to duplicate the original configuration and otherwise meet the window regulations; (4) any electric meters be placed under the porch; and (5) the rear wall be clad with a buff-colored true stucco.

At **3320 19th** (consent calendar, March), a two-story rear addition with decks was proposed, along with a two-story accessory structure at the alley. The staff report noted a number of issues to be addressed with the applicant, including retention of floor framing, window and door products, material for deck railings, exposed house foundation, siding not to exceed six-inch exposure, and location of utility meters. Unfortunately, final plans are not available to show what was actually approved. During construction, HMP received numerous complaints about the work, including the manner of installation and kind of windows and the unusual shape of the front porch roof. HMP confirmed that the windows installed on the front façade were not as indicated on the permit posted in one of those windows. The new front porch roof should have been flat like its twin next door, as such design changes to the primary façade are not allowed. These complaints were forwarded to HPO and a Stop Work Order should have been issued. In addition, the house was painted white, destroying the original unity of design with its twin, a unique pair of row houses in our historic district. According to the D.C. Preservation Guidelines: “If the brick was never painted, it should remain unpainted.” This is good practical advice for historic properties and should have been followed here.

Another aspect of the project at 3320 19th that has been questioned is the two-story accessory structure at the alley. The upper level has a bathroom but no kitchen; it is not a separate legal dwelling unit. To quote the staff report:

With the exception of a few carriage houses, there are few two-story accessory buildings in Mount Pleasant. Because of the steep grade behind this row, however, the Board has supported such structures here in the past (at 3304, 3308 and 3310 19th), because they can be built into the grade and overshadow the downhill properties across the alley less than the hill itself and the houses upon it do. The slope of the structure’s roof reduces its profile.

The topography here is the reverse of that at 1710 Irving (see below) where the Board denied approval of a two-story structure on the alley because it would have stood alone and towered over the houses downhill.

At **3060 16th** (April and September), HPRB denied the application by the Renaissance Condominium and Kenesaw-Phoenix Cooperative, which owns 29 units within the Condominium, to remove all the balconies except the one over the main 16th Street entrance and to patch the areas behind. The proposed demolition would include two balconies only recently reconstructed. As the balconies are integrated into the exterior walls, removal would result in

large gaps in the beltcourse at the base of the third floor and the exterior walls themselves, requiring extensive reconstruction. Applicant presented estimates for replacement vs. removal (approximately \$1.7 million vs. \$1 million) and asked for permission to pursue the lower cost approach because of the economic hardship to be caused to low-income owners.

On April 22, HPRB ruled unanimously that the balconies were “character-defining features” of the building, originally known as the Kenesaw Apartment House, which could not be removed consistent with the preservation act. The Applicant indicated an intention to take an expedited appeal to the Mayor’s Agent for Historic Preservation for a ruling on the economic hardship claim. However, Applicant returned to the Board in September with a modified request involving the reinstallation of handrails directly on the beltcourse, which HPRB denied. It was not until November 29 that the appeal to the Mayor’s Agent was filed, and a hearing was scheduled for December 17. On December 2, HMP and the DC Preservation League (DCPL) filed a motion for party status to oppose the application. After two postponements, the hearing was held on February 25, 2022; a decision is expected later in the year.

In the meantime, HPO – with support from DCPL and HMP, among others – had been trying to determine how much financial assistance was needed to enable restoration of the balconies and to provide that assistance. HPO manages a grant program to help owners of historic properties with exterior repairs, but that program is limited to single-family properties. A legislative proposal was floated over the summer to open the program to multifamily buildings generally. Instead, on August 5, the DC Council approved emergency legislation limited to this particular building, described simply as a Common Interest Community located in Square 2594, authorizing its owners to participate in the grant program. On August 25, DCPL and HMP sent letters to as many individual owners within the building as we could identify, informing them of the “temporary” change in the law (then expected to expire in November) and urging them to apply for grants. The letter noted that it would take some time for HPO to determine the total amount of grant assistance that could be made available.

At the hearing before the Mayor’s Agent, HPO Director David Maloney announced that 16 grant awards for a total of \$224,000 had been issued to individual owners within the Renaissance/Kenesaw for assistance with balcony restoration and that HPO was continuing to receive and process applications. In other words, of the 87 residential units in the Condominium, a clear minority (perhaps no more than 20) appear to meet the definition of low- or moderate-income utilized by the US Department of Housing and Urban and Development. Applicants have been reluctant to come forward, which has made it impossible for HPO to help those it can within its current budget or to seek additional funding from the DC Council, if that were necessary. Grant eligibility is determined by household (number of persons and total income) and by comparison to median family income in the Washington area, which is relatively high. For example, a two-person household can earn up to \$120,961 and still be eligible for tax-free assistance of up to \$25,000, although in this case it would be subject to a 50% match. However, no match is required for a two-person household earning less than \$52,920. The Historic Homeowners Grant Program is the existing standard for financial assistance to homeowners in historic districts in the District of Columbia. It would seem to offer significant relief to owners in this building if they would only come forward.

It should also be noted that it was the Cooperative that acquired ownership of the entire building from the DC Government in 1985 with financial assistance from the DC Development Corporation, predecessor to the DC Department of Housing and Community Development. The income limitations that have applied within the building were conditions of the financing package and are being eliminated as the loan is paid off. Income limitations currently apply to only 15 of the original 29 units and will all be removed as of January 31, 2024. It was the Cooperative, with the support of its long-time management company CIH Properties, that established the Condominium Association, promulgated its Bylaws, and sold other units to finance Condominium management expenses. Those Bylaws require that the Board of Directors establish a reasonable fund for capital improvements and major repairs and also that all repairs “be of first class quality and as nearly as practicable similar to the character and appearance of the construction . . . immediately prior.” This was a self-imposed requirement before Mount Pleasant was even designated a historic district in 1986. Yet the Condominium and Cooperative now seek to shift the blame for their failure to maintain the exterior of their building to the preservation law.

As the case has developed before the Mayor’s Agent, the full scope of the failure to maintain the exterior has been revealed. When the Condominium and Cooperative first approached HPO in December 2020 about the “problem” with the balconies, it is now clear that they knew the cornice and the façade were also seriously deteriorated but chose not to mention these other problems. On January 19, 2022, their attorney produced for the first time a Building Façade and Condition Survey dated December 29, 2020, based on a proposal dated July 17, 2020, showing serious deterioration of both with a cost estimate of just under \$1.3 million for urgent repairs. So, when the April 2021 staff report on the request to remove the balconies mused that “the present proposal raises a question of what happens to [the] cornice or other major exterior elements, when they too require repair,” it was not a distant hypothetical but in fact a major factor behind the request to remove the balconies. The building was trying to cut costs wherever it could and saw the balconies as arguably expendable unlike the cornice and overall façade.

As a result of having deferred regular maintenance on the exterior of the building since 1985, all Renaissance Condominium owners are now liable for extraordinary repairs not only to the balconies but also to the cornice and façade. It remains an open question how much of these costs can or should be covered by the DC Government. Had repairs to the exterior been made on a regular basis over the years, the total cost would have been much lower and could have been spread out over a longer period of time. In contrast, The Northbrook Court, at 3420 and 3426 16th, undertook major rehabilitation of its more numerous balconies and repointed its entire façade in the early 1990’s. It took out a line of credit (not the least costly option considered) so as to be able to accomplish the work in a reasonable period of time and not continue to risk liability from the poorly maintained balconies. The repairs were expensive and could not be covered fully by the reserve fund. The Renaissance Condominium should have been looking into these same maintenance issues and available financing options, including any available to low-income owners, at the same time.

Against this background, it should be evident that the financial difficulties now being faced by the Renaissance Condominium Association and the Kenesaw-Phoenix Cooperative are

a direct result of the structure and management of the Condominium itself and not the preservation law. A decision by the Mayor's Agent to permit removal of the balconies would set a terrible precedent for the preservation law. HMP will continue to defend the law and seek appropriate financial assistance to enable the balcony restoration to proceed without displacing any long-time owners of the building.

At **1833 Irving** (consent calendar, March), reconstruction of the enclosed two-story rear porches with a deck above was proposed, along with a third-story addition behind the attic, as well as a rear deck. Staff report discussed treatment of an abandoned chimney, drainage, and the rear elevation, stating a preference for siding not to exceed six-inch exposure in place of brick as proposed. HPRB approval repeated that condition as well as that the third-floor addition and any appurtenances not be visible from Irving Street.

At **3351 18th** (consent calendar, April), rear additions were proposed including a three-story elevator shaft and one-story structure wrapping the ell, with rear and roof decks on the one-story addition. The elevator would be tucked between the house ell and that of the immediate neighbor. The staff report recommended that the cladding be painted wood or smooth-faced fiber cement of an exposure not to exceed six inches, consistent with the narrower siding widths typical of the era of construction. HPRB approval was conditioned on no work being done at the front exterior, including but not limited to utility meters.

At **1635 Harvard** (consent calendar, July), the project to restore the detached house as a single family home with basement rental unit includes: demolition of ad-hoc additions and sheds at the side and rear; reconstruction of a two-story side addition to the north; construction of a belvedere-type third-floor addition in the middle of the roof to the rear; replacement of most windows; new basement stairwells and window wells; and modifications to the garage. HPRB approval in concept was conditioned on the belvedere addition being invisible from both Harvard Street and Argonne Place and reevaluated as necessary during construction to meet this standard, its framing and roofing match the house's principal roofing, and exterior materials and products be specified as consistent with the Board's standards.

At **1710 Irving** (July), permission to construct a two-story accessory structure at the alley was denied. The staff report gave an overview of garage construction in Mount Pleasant, evaluating the situations in which there are garages or carriage houses exceeding one story erected before the designation of the Mount Pleasant Historic District and the few cases in which new ones have been approved.

Although the southern half of Mount Pleasant has had only a couple of similar height historically, the Board supported such structures at 3304 19th (2017), 3308 19th (2006), and 3310 19th (2007), because of the steep grade falling behind the houses. The accessory buildings were built into the grade, and the houses tower over them. The houses across the alley are reasonably distant. The present proposal is something of the reverse of this condition; the subject row sits well below the alley grade and would stand below the garage.

The Board agreed with the staff analysis and found the concept of a two-story structure at this location would not protect the general context of the historic district and would be inconsistent with the purposes of the preservation law.

At **1656 Hobart** (September), the Board approved the design of a carport/deck over an existing alley parking pad, with the deck to be surrounded by a six-foot-tall plank privacy fence. Staff described the project as a cross between a rear deck and roof deck and recommended substitution of a handrail for the fence. The Board disagreed, based on the existing context which included other structures of similar or greater height along the alley. Issuance of a permit, however, will require relief from zoning regulations governing rear yard requirements and lot occupancy. A hearing before the Board of Zoning Adjustment is scheduled for March 16 (BZA Case No. 20663).

At **3118 Mount Pleasant** (September), formerly Logan's Antiques, a ramshackle one-story-over basement rear addition would be removed, along with much of the rear ell and rear wall, to be replaced by a contemporary three-story addition. The storefront would be reconstructed and a new areaway provided to access a deeper basement retail space. If the front porch is not restored, the new display window is to be set back behind or at the rear edge of the porch piers, so that columns matching those at 3116 Mount Pleasant can return. Window replacements on the façade are to be one-over-one double- or single-hungs of compatible materials to fit the original masonry openings, including arched upper sash at the third floor and brick mold to match the existing. Porch masonry should not be painted black, as proposed, and not painted at all if that can be avoided.

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 2021, CFA approved 10 projects in Mount Pleasant: a screen porch addition with deck and swimming pool at 2071 Park; solar arrays at 3209 Adams Mill, 2032 and 2042 Pierce Mill, 1857 Ingleside and 2039 Rosemount; replacement windows at 3171 Walbridge and 3129 Adams Mill; replacement windows and other changes at the rear of 1933 Lamont; and the site plan, landscape improvements and public amenities for the new park at 19th and Lamont. In March 2021, CFA denied approval for a project at 2021 Park, noting that vinyl insert windows had been installed there without CFA approval or a permit and referred the matter to HPO.

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

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 when available and conducted elections online, with the results announced at a spring meeting. However, in-person activities have been suspended since the onset of the pandemic in March 2020. When we cancelled the holiday party in December 2020, where annual memberships would ordinarily have been renewed, we decided to extend existing memberships and terms of Directors until such time as an in-person event could again be held. As of November 30, 2021, HMP members represented 57 households in the neighborhood. With the suspension of activities, our financial situation remains essentially unchanged from the year before, with assets totaling \$24,651.77, an increase of \$33.57 from the prior year.