



# HISTORIC MOUNT PLEASANT

## Annual Report Of the Board of Directors Fiscal Year 2014

Presented at the Annual Meeting  
March 7, 2015

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 2014 (December 2013-November 2014), HPRB considered sixteen cases from Mount Pleasant, approving nine rear additions, the use of asphalt shingles on the roof at 1770 Park Road, and substantial restoration work and new construction at 1865-1867 Park Road and 3146 16<sup>th</sup> Street (the former Meridian Hill Baptist Church). It also approved a combination of lots between the school at 3224 16<sup>th</sup> and the house directly behind, which had been joined to the school building some time ago without the required change in zoning. It ordered the owner of 1800 Newton Street to remove the flagstone which had been applied without a permit to the front of the house and across much of the front yard. It did not approve designs proposed for new construction at 1620 Newton or the corner of 17<sup>th</sup> and Oakwood Terrace. Also of interest to Mount Pleasant, HPRB approved the designation of the Meridian Hill Historic District, which includes two buildings in the Mount Pleasant Historic District (The Kenesaw/Renaissance at 3060 16<sup>th</sup> and The Embassy at 1613 Harvard). HPO prepared the nomination and invited HMP to co-sponsor it, which we were happy to do.

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 rear additions approved were of different sizes and shapes. At **1834 Lamont** and **1837 Kilbourne**, they were so small they could have been approved at the staff level. They were referred to the HPRB, and placed on the consent calendar, to allow for greater public notice and input because working drawings had not been circulated in advance. There were no objections. At **3110 19<sup>th</sup>**, the owners proposed to demolish the existing rear wing and construct a modern two-story addition that would be somewhat deeper than neighboring properties. Given the variety of styles in the row, this small deviation did not seem to present a problem. At **1716 Kenyon**, the proposal was to demolish and reconstruct the two-story rear porch and to add a rooftop addition to the house, all the new construction to be clad in black metal and glass. We felt that these materials and their dark color would be out-of-place along this alley, which otherwise has traditional back porches in earth or other light tones. HPRB disagreed. At **1742 Park**, a roof deck was proposed which was subjected to a flag test and approved without the decorative latticework that would have been visible from Park Road.

Rear additions were also approved at **1855 and 1815 Lamont**. The former has been a problem site for years. It served as a group home for juvenile offenders, was gutted in preparation for conversion to a 3-unit condo, and then sat unattended during a lengthy foreclosure process. The new plans for its conversion to three units include a less extensive addition which, significantly in our view, respects the existing rhythm of this row of houses by retaining the rear “ell.” That is, the addition does not go from lot line to lot line. In contrast, the proposal to convert 1815 Lamont to two units began by pushing out and up in all conceivable directions. We objected that the addition was too large, and HPRB directed that the roof deck be removed and the rear addition be reduced in size. However, we were unable to protect the unbroken rhythm of that long row at this location. The addition at 1815 will fill in the existing indentation and go lot line to lot line.

**1682 Irving** illustrates the importance and vagaries of our current zoning rules. The house has been a 7-unit apartment building since 1958. However, based on lot size, there should be no more than three units (one for every 900 square feet of its 3448 sf lot size). The new owner initially proposed to expand the house some 20 feet to the rear and develop 7 luxury condos. However, as the house had previously been converted to apartment use, he did not have the right to expand the house at this time to 60% lot coverage. As a result, the house is now being converted to 4 luxury units (one per floor) with a first-of-its-kind – in that unique row as viewed from the alley -- rooftop addition that is likely to be imitated down the row. (Once a certificate of occupancy issues, the Zoning Office apparently does not question the number of units.) While the front of the house is to be fully restored, along with much of the berm, it will not have a code-compliant front basement entrance. We opposed removing original masonry to widen the opening to the areaway, which would have violated established design guidelines for new basement entrances.

**1821 Newton** was another old case returning with a new developer following foreclosure. The house was converted some years ago to four rental units, but the new owner insisted on increasing that number to six to take full advantage of the large lot size (5649 sf). When HPRB, at our request, directed that the front porch be restored to its original open condition – disallowing its use as a kitchen for one of the units, they proposed a larger addition on the rear.

While the exterior of the front of the house will be restored, there will be a three-story rear addition almost as tall and massive as what will be left of the original house. We were unable to use the five-car garage to reduce the size of the addition because the garage is below grade and thus does not count toward lot coverage. The appearance of the building will be drastically altered.

At **1770 Park**, the owners proposed replacing the asphalt shingle roof in-kind in conjunction with a Historic Homeowner Grant for the restoration of the metal cornices and dormers. The original slate roof had been replaced with asphalt shingles many years ago, so the question was whether a like-kind replacement was acceptable or whether a different material should be required. HPRB agreed with staff that, in this particular case, while true slate would be preferable, in-kind replacement would provide the needed protection for the property without any loss of historic fabric.

In 2004 and 2007, HPRB approved concepts for the construction of a two-story house at **1620 Newton**. The applicant, who owns 1626 Newton, sought to renew the approval from 2007. The house would occupy the eastern 20 feet of the lot for 1626 Newton. When the project was reviewed before, most neighbors were unaware of the hearing. HMP thus first sought to inform the neighbors and quickly discovered several issues that should have been raised in 2004. Given the longstanding use of the front yard of 1626 as a parking lot, HPO had been quick to allow a subdivision and close the curb cut. However, there had been a garage there that may have been a contributing structure, and the space around 1626 Newton is integral to its design. The alley configuration had its own history, and the new house would be much larger than the other houses to the east. In particular, it would shut off 1618 from light and air from the west. HMP appeared before HPRB with neighbors to make these points, and HPRB asked for changes to the design to provide relief in particular for 1618. The applicant has not yet returned with revised plans.

In January 2014, HPRB rejected the design proposed for a large addition to **1867 Park** because it would overwhelm the historic structure. There was also a question as to whether the property was one or two lots, and if the latter, no addition could cross the lot line. The applicant then sought a legal review of the status of the lot(s) and returned in March with a revised proposal based on the existence of two lots. The new concept proposed to restore the existing house, with a small addition to the rear, and convert that property to three units. At **1865 Park**, a new house was proposed to replace the one that burned down in the late 60's, building on the original footprint with additions to the rear as before. As new construction, this house, which would be the larger of the two, could have no more than two units. The design of the new house was developed from available documentation of its predecessor without seeking to replicate it. HPRB approved this design. The architects have not yet presented plans for restoration of the hillside in front of the houses, which is public space.

After several years of uncertainty, a plan for converting **Meridian Hill Baptist Church (3146 16<sup>th</sup>)** to residential use returned to the HPRB. The Board had approved a concept for this project in December 2011, but the first developer had not been able to conclude the purchase. The project returned now under the sponsorship of Valor Development, which – after proposing changes to the previously approved design that had been carefully considered by the Board – was able to bring the design within the earlier parameters and gain approval. However, the new

design increases the number of units from 45 to 85 and eliminates all on-site parking – contrary to the express wishes of the community. While zoning regulations would appear to require 28 parking spaces for a new apartment building of this size, as a “nonconforming” property it has been “credited” with the number of spaces required for its prior use as a church with a seating capacity of 750, or 75 spaces. Thus, the developer will be allowed to provide no on-site parking, and ANC1D will be working with DDOT to ensure that the residents of this building are denied access to Residential Parking Permits.

Finally, the proposal for new construction at the corner of **17<sup>th</sup> and Oakwood** returned to HPRB in November 2014. The case had been suspended in January 2014 when lawyers representing neighbors presented evidence of a 1902 covenant that required a 15-foot setback from the street, which the initial design did not provide. The owner/architect has now presented a new design with two houses instead of three, but it is very awkward and ill-suited to the site. The HPO staff report was not favorable. HMP testified before HPRB alongside neighbors and ANC1D highlighting specific points that had been jointly developed. HPRB sent the project back for further design work.

On November 25, the Monseñor Romero Apartments opened at **3145 Mount Pleasant Street**, the site of a five-alarm fire in March 2008. Reconstruction was coordinated by the National Housing Trust/Enterprise Preservation Corporation, which was also responsible for renovation of the St. Dennis Apartments at 1626 Kenyon. The building has 45 “affordable” units. HMP was recognized during the opening ceremony for its research into the history of the building and numerous meetings on the external design which resulted in recreation of the original doorway surrounds on the two wings. Interior layout did not allow for them to be operable. Unfortunately, at the last minute, the landscapers planted screening trees (*Juniperus chinensis* “*Hetzi columnaris*”) directly in front of these important features. We pointed out the error but no corrective action has yet been taken.

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.

### Zoning

In 2007, the Office of Planning (OP) began a massive effort to overhaul the Zoning Regulations (Title 11 of the DC Municipal Regulations) for the first time since 1958. In July

2013, OP released the first complete draft of the new zoning regulations – 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 our testimony before the Zoning Commission (ZC) on November 7, 2013, we focused on the proposal to retain the provision allowing the matter-of-right conversion of single family houses to multi-unit dwellings based on lot size. We argued that the overly-large additions generally entailed in these conversions were doing irreversible damage to our historic housing stock and asked that the conversion provision be removed from the new regulations. The Zoning Commission seemed sympathetic and asked OP to work with HMP to propose a solution.

Last spring, after some discussion of alternatives, OP proposed a simple exemption for the Mount Pleasant Historic District limiting conversions of single family houses to no more than two units. It sent this proposal to the Zoning Commission with our support. At the same time, it was developing a new initiative to address the problem of “pop-ups” – additions to houses of whole floors that are visible from the street – which has become a hot issue in nearby neighborhoods that are not historic districts. OP surveyed more than 30,000 properties in R-4 zones such as ours, housing construction trends and demand and presented a proposal for four amendments to the existing zoning regulations in June. Three addressed the height of properties; the fourth was a proposal to end matter-of-right conversions of residential structures within R-4 zones to more than two units. We were thus presented with an alternative route to the relief we sought.

As proof of neighborhood support for the zoning change would be critical to gaining approval, we set about developing a petition with background materials for circulation throughout the neighborhood. After multiple drafts negotiated around vacation schedules, the Dear Neighbor letter with a two-page attachment explaining the need for zoning relief was released August 25. We sought out and identified volunteers to deliver the package door-to-door and collect signatures on the petition. The petition endorsed placing a limit of two on matter-of-right conversions of houses, with applications for more than that subject to treatment as variances, and thus would cover either of the proposals that had been presented to the Zoning Commission. There was strong support for the petition, which had 555 signatures when it was presented to the Zoning Commission on January 15, 2015, during the hearing on OP’s June proposal. As a result of the petition effort, many more people were aware of the zoning initiative than would otherwise have been. In December, ANC1D Chairman Adam Hoey sponsored a resolution to express support for OP’s June proposal, which was adopted unanimously and sent to the Zoning Commission.

Since last summer, we have been following the progress of both the new regulations (the so-called Zoning Regulation Review, or ZRR, Zoning Commission Case 08-06A) and the proposed amendments to the existing ones (Case 14-11), which if adopted would have to be incorporated into the new regulations, when and if they take effect. There had been a strong push by other parties to derail the entire ZRR, but in October, the Zoning Commission worked through the outstanding text issues and approved an overall package. In the process, it rejected the Mount Pleasant-specific amendment by a vote of 3-to-2. Opponents questioned why Mount Pleasant should get special consideration and why any such relief should not be in the form of a “customized zone” instead of a simple text amendment. We were surprised that a majority

would reject an amendment they had asked be prepared. There will be one final round of public notice and comment after the final consolidated text of the new regulations is approved by the Office of the Attorney General. If we have not prevailed in Case 14-11 before then, we will ask for reconsideration of the Mount Pleasant-specific amendment to the ZRR.

The public hearing on Case 14-11 took place January 15, 2015. Although few witnesses signed up in advance, the hearing room was overflowing with outraged homeowners and small “developers,” mostly contractors, many sporting large “No on 14-11” buttons. (The hearing was videotaped and may be accessed on the Office of Zoning website, [www.dcoz.dc.gov](http://www.dcoz.dc.gov), along with the full case record.) The Zoning Commission discussed the issues raised in a public meeting February 9. Three members expressed support for the OP proposal, while two are strongly opposed. The Commission asked OP for additional information on some specific issues, including the impact of heights on solar energy, and will vote at a later date, likely in March. Supporters noted the need to act quickly to protect neighborhoods, while opponents sought to delay any action by asking for more information and a working group. The schedule going forward will depend largely on how much time OP needs to develop the additional information requested. The Commission will meet again March 9 and 30.

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

On May 15, 2013, we wrote DDOT Director Bellamy asking for his prompt personal attention to longstanding violations of public space rules in the 3100 block of 16<sup>th</sup> Street, where several front yards had been completely paved over and were being used for parking. DDOT’s replies revealed confusion and ineptitude. After a number of fruitless exchanges and a change in leadership at DDOT, we renewed the request with a letter to the new Director on May 24, 2014, attaching all prior correspondence. Shortly thereafter, DCRA acting in concert with HPO on a separate track, sent in a crew to remove the concrete at 3130 16<sup>th</sup>. HPO had initiated this case with a stop work order shortly after the concrete had been installed without a permit, and DCRA provides enforcement back-up to HPO. Although DDOT had by now confirmed our easy-to-confirm statement of the facts, it took them a few more months to take action – and then against only 2 of the 3 remaining properties, 3118 and 3120 16<sup>th</sup>. They left Jersey barriers in place at 3116½ to prevent access for parking but have not gone in to remove the excess concrete. Nor have they offered an explanation for their failure to do so. The Jersey barriers have since returned at 3118 16<sup>th</sup> in an effort to keep cars off the newly planted grass -- without much success. Our experience here demonstrates how difficult it is to get DDOT to take enforcement action on public space rules even against egregious violations. Success is more likely if the violation is reported immediately and a stop work is issued, as occurred at 3130 16<sup>th</sup>. HPO is more likely to respond than DDOT.

#### Energy Efficiency Workshop

On November, 15, 2014, in response to requests for a repeat of the program we sponsored in 2011, Board Member Andrea Foss, managing partner of Everyday Green, teamed with John Sandor, a technical preservation specialist with the National Park Service, to present a program on energy efficiency and window restoration in historic homes. Andrea discussed strategies for energy savings appropriate for Mount Pleasant rowhouses. John discussed the role that windows

actually play in the total energy picture of a house (less than you may think), how to improve historic windows, and when replacement windows should be considered. If you missed this program, watch for it to be repeated elsewhere in the city – with John and Andrea or another energy expert.

### Annual Meeting

In accordance with our by-laws (and longstanding practice), HMP held the Annual Membership Meeting on April 5, 2014, at Stoddard Baptist Nursing Home. The President briefly recapped the highlights of the preceding year, distributed copies of the Board's Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2013, and outlined potential activities for 2014. The members present unanimously approved the proposed slate of Board members and Officers for the coming year. The featured speaker was Eric Madison of the National Capital Trolley Museum, who described how the development of the streetcar system propelled the development of Mount Pleasant in the early twentieth century.

### 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 Katie and Tim Tyler for hosting this past December. If you are willing to host the party or have a new site to suggest, please let us know.

At the end of November 2014, HMP had 71 members (13 life, 42 family, and 16 individual). In its early years, HMP had active standing committees for membership, communications, education and design review, among other things. As participation in the organization has declined, all activities came to be vested in the Board of Directors. However, with the increased demands of design review and the new – and we believe very important – focus on zoning, it is evident that the Board needs more active support from and involvement by its members to move forward.

Toward that end, we are reestablishing a separate design review committee for 2015 with three practicing architects and two long-serving committee members, including the HMP President who will at least in the near term continue to coordinate the work. Design review results will be forwarded to the Board for its information. With design review removed from the Board's agenda, the Board will have time to focus on redoing our website, outreach for membership development, and other issues that require our attention. Zoning will remain on the agenda for the Board, but we hope with a lower level of effort.

We will be seeking to establish other committees for specific projects or ongoing activities to spread the responsibility for action and increase our visibility in the neighborhood. Please give us your ideas and be willing to share your time. We 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 2014 (December 1, 2013 – November 30, 2014)**

**Income**

Memberships and undesignated contributions	\$2,723.17
Memberships made through PayPal	685.00
Holiday party bar donations	180.00
Interest earned	26.43

**Total** **\$3,614.60**

**Expenses**

2013 Holiday Party	807.00
Contribution to Stoddard (annual meeting 4/14)	200.00
Contribution to Stoddard (window/energy 11/14)	200.00
Copying, office supplies, zoning challenge	646.88
Website operation	169.80
PayPal charges	20.57

**Total** **2,044.25**

**Net Gain** **1,570.35**

**Assets as of 11/30/2014**

DGEFCU Acceso Share Draft	\$ 5,279.75
DGEFCU Acceso Regular Shares	16,570.43
Prepaid expense	263.76

**Total** **22,113.94**

**Liabilities & Equity**

Total Liabilities	0.00
Equity: Opening Balance	20,543.59
Net Gain	1,570.35

**Total** **\$22,113.94**