



Annual Report

*Of the Board of Directors
Fiscal Year 2008*

*Presented at the Annual Meeting
February 28, 2009*

Historic Mount Pleasant 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 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 activities 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 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 neighbors who have expressed particular concerns about the project. Generally, our comments align with staff recommendations, but we have been disappointed at some recent decisions approving large garages and other rear extensions that, if replicated throughout Mount Pleasant, will considerably reduce the sense of openness that is a defining characteristic of the neighborhood. In these cases, the problem is primarily one of zoning and not design and indicates the need for more serious attention on our part to zoning issues.

During Fiscal Year 2008 (December 2007-November 2008), the HPRB approved the following projects in the Mount Pleasant Historic District:

- 3430-32 Brown, front alterations and rear addition;
- 3310 19th Street, new garage;
- 3142 17th Street, rear addition;
- 1747 Kilbourne, second story rear addition;
- 3108/10/12 18th Street, rear patios and retaining wall;
- 1757 Harvard, rear addition;
- 3201 18th Street, alterations at rear and side to allow wheelchair access;
- 1724 Park, rear addition/conversion to four units;
- 1709 Irving, installation of front basement entrance;
- 1714 Irving, installation of front basement entrance;
- 3150 17th Street, first floor side addition with parking underneath, needs BZA approval to proceed, hearing expected this spring;
- 1665 Harvard, garage proposed for neighboring lot (BZA ruled against it in December); and
- 3126 19th Street, two-story rear addition.

The plans for 3201 18th Street demonstrate how good design can readily make an historic property accessible without removing or damaging distinguishing features. In this case, a sloped ramp

will be installed from the alley along the side of the garage to a new door into the basement of the house, installed in a space formerly occupied by a window beneath the back porch. As noted in last year's annual report, the HPRB had deferred decisions on applications in the two Irving Street cases, pending further documentation of original front basement entrances in Mount Pleasant. HMP worked with the architects and HPO staff in the development of new guidelines for front basement entrances in Mount Pleasant that, recognizing the wide variety of such entrances originally built in the neighborhood, are more lenient than what is allowed elsewhere. We were very pleased with the Board's receptivity and the staff's work on this issue. The guidelines are available on our website.

1724 Park Road has been the cause of continuing concern and intervention with different authorities as the result of repeated delays to secure the property after a fire in October 2007 and the removal of the entire roof in March 2008. The combination of an absentee owner and a contractor who has repeatedly exceeded the scope of authorized demolition permits but who has failed to proceed with authorized construction has placed this long-abused structure at great risk. The house stood completely open to the sky without even framing timbers for a roof from March until late November, when the upper roof was replaced. The plan, approved by HPRB in April, is to convert the property to four condominiums, but work on the property is again at a standstill. We remain concerned at this lack of momentum.

Any questions concerning the work of the Design Review Committee may be directed to our website or to one of the Committee members, whom we thank for their continued willingness to serve in this capacity. They are: Fay Armstrong, Rod Case, Bill Gordon, Jonathan Herz, Hil Langrall, Misha Preheim, Richard Turner and Joe Wohlmuth.

Zoning

Given the importance of zoning in determining what is built in Mount Pleasant, we are continuing to expand our efforts in this area, learning from individual cases and the experiences of other historic districts. We were very disappointed that, on April 18, 2008, the D.C. Court of Appeals affirmed the Board of Zoning Adjustment's (BZA's) dismissal of our appeal on the case of 1636 Irving Street. As noted in last year's annual report, the District Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs (DCRA) admitted error in issuing building permits for this address but refused to withhold the certificate of occupancy (C of O). The result is that a building limited to 40% of lot coverage and a maximum of three units under zoning regulations now covers 60% of the lot and has seven units. BZA had denied an appeal by Irving Street neighbors as untimely, on the grounds that it was filed more than 60 days after the relevant "decision." Our attorney (paid for out of HMP funds set aside and/or specifically raised for this purpose) argued and cited precedents demonstrating that the relevant decision was the issuance of the C of O. However, the Court deferred to BZA in interpreting its own statute and found the appeals period to run from a prior letter stating that a C of O would not be denied. This ended any realistic possibility of getting official action to reverse errors made at 1636 Irving.

During the late spring and summer, HMP Board members participated in working groups with representatives of other historic districts to develop recommendations for the ongoing rewrite of the fifty-year-old D.C. Zoning Code. We are hopeful that the changes proposed will be incorporated. One of the key issues from our standpoint would be inclusion of specific rules limiting the conversion of single family homes to apartment buildings in "row house neighborhoods" such as ours. The next step

will be public hearings before the Zoning Commission. The overall process is not expected to be completed until next year.

We are also beginning to attend BZA hearings on projects in our neighborhood on a regular basis. The recent hearing on the garage proposed for Harvard Street confirmed our need for a better understanding of zoning issues. In this case, one family owned a portion of the original back yard of the house next door and sought to build a garage there. The owners of the next-door property objected on a variety of grounds. At the hearing, there was considerable confusion among BZA members as to what the governing legal standards were. The objectors then retained legal counsel to frame their case as precisely as possible with supporting legal precedents. BZA ruled against the project, but the discussion was very hard to follow. The Board encourages anyone with zoning expertise within our membership to offer assistance as needed on zoning issues that may arise.

DC Council Actions

We continue to work on citywide preservation issues through the Historic Districts Coalition. Of particular interest this past year were two proposals to amend the Historic Landmark and Historic District Protection Act of 1978. The first, inspired by the Third Church of Christ Scientist's opposition to the landmarking of its 16th Street building, has been tabled pending exhaustion of appeals by the Church, which seeks to demolish the structure. The second, sponsored by Councilmembers Cheh and Bowser, would have given property owners opposed to designation of a new historic district the ability to override community support and a substantive determination by HPRB that a proposed district warranted protection.

In the latter case, the preservation community, including HMP, turned out in force to testify against the proposed amendment. Common objections to the bill were that it was unnecessary, as no historic district had been designated without a showing of strong public support for designation, and that the proposed mandatory waiting period between attempts to achieve designation would only ensure the loss of more irreplaceable historic fabric. No one objected to the polling of residents or property owners as one indication of neighborhood sentiment; but they noted that, like zoning and other land use regulations, such decisions are inherently governmental and not delegable to members of the public. The HMP statement described the process by which designation had been achieved for Mount Pleasant, including outreach and education efforts by both the ANC and HMP, and identified some of the buildings lost during those years. Lawyers from the National Trust for Historic Preservation and the Committee on 100 of the Federal City expertly answered Chairman Gray's questions about how D.C. law compared with those in other jurisdictions and why the proposed amendment was not likely to withstand court challenge. HPRB and HPO acknowledged more clarity was needed about the precise role of public participation and urged that this be provided through changes to the regulations and not the law. Chairman Gray indicated at the end of the hearing that he agreed with the regulatory approach, and further consideration of the proposed bill was set aside. A summary of the regulatory changes proposed by HPO and the HMP testimony are both available on the HMP website. The proposed new regulations may be found at www.planning.dc.gov. Click on Historic Preservation, then Laws and Regulations and Proposed Revisions to Chapter 2, Designation of Historic Landmarks and Districts.

A problem arose with the District's Historic Homeowners Grant Program, which now covers Mount Pleasant, when the D.C. Office of Tax and Revenue (OTR), ostensibly following federal

guidelines, found initial grants to the Anacostia neighborhood to be taxable. According to the D.C. Preservation League (DCPL), this was a mistake, as the grants should not be considered “income” to beneficiaries as they were payable directly to approved contractors. However, there was no D.C. law directly on point. Once informed of the problem, Councilmember Barry quickly obtained emergency corrective legislation for D.C., but the legislation is effective for twelve months only and will need to be extended this year. DCPL is continuing to work with Councilmember Barry and Representative Norton to achieve the desired clarification or other relief at the federal level. It is evident that taxation of what are intended to be substantial grants to homeowners who could otherwise not afford to make necessary repairs runs counter to the purpose of the program.

Neighborhood Events

The fiscal year began as it traditionally does – with a well-attended holiday party in December 2007—and included the ever-popular yard sale in June. We thank Linda and Rob Low and Joel Rosenbloom, respectively, for allowing us to use their wonderful home and garden for these neighborhood gatherings. Each year the Board struggles with whether and how to restructure these events, given their logistical challenges. While receipts from the yard sale have held up well even after difficult categories of items (particularly clothing) have been eliminated, it still requires a yeoman’s effort to remove all the unsold items at the end of the sale. Other changes are under consideration to make this a less arduous task for our volunteers. The size of the holiday party limits our options for location. While we were fortunate enough to begin our new fiscal year (2009) with a holiday party at the home of Camille Barnett, we would welcome any new ideas for future venues.

The Board began the year with plans to continue a series of periodic pot-luck dinners to provide a means of greater social interaction and information exchange among members and non-members alike, and potentially to increase membership in HMP. In July, members Dana Keeney and Paul Young opened their lovely home and garden for a delicious repast and enjoyable evening. However, we have found it difficult to attract a level of participation that justifies the effort involved and have temporarily suspended this activity.

Application for Neighborhood Investment Fund Grant

In 2006, to help focus future efforts, the Board surveyed then-current and former HMP members about their views of the neighborhood and of HMP. The survey clearly identified “the condition of structures” along Mount Pleasant Street as the primary concern that members wanted HMP to address. However, the reasons for the poor condition of many of these structures are complex and largely beyond our control. Since that time, we have supported the façade renovation program funded through the Latino Economic Development Corporation (LEDC), recognized particularly successful commercial renovations with award plaques and promoted awareness of our Guidelines for Storefront Renovations. During 2008, we explored funding assistance for signage in cooperation with LEDC and provided input to city initiatives regarding transportation planning and streetscape improvements for the corridor.

However, these efforts admittedly have not produced much visible change on Mount Pleasant Street. The primary problem in our view has been that most business owners do not own their buildings, and many property owners do not see the potential advantages provided by the historic district and the diverse income levels in surrounding areas. The District’s long-standing failure to enforce basic

ordinances, moreover, has invited the abuse of structures and public space. The only way HMP can have an impact on these inter-related problems is through a partnership with other neighborhood groups with direct ties to the business community.

We are thus very pleased to report that a concrete opportunity of this kind is now at hand. In December 2008, Mount Pleasant Main Street and the Mount Pleasant Business Association approached us to propose that our three organizations join together and apply for a Neighborhood Investment Fund Grant.¹ The deadline for submission was January 12, 2009, and – with the help of Gabriela Mossi, who works with the Mount Pleasant Business Association, and Tom Litke, an independent consultant – a 112-page grant proposal focusing exclusively on Mount Pleasant Street was submitted. The proposal seeks funding primarily for technical assistance to help complete property improvements on 6-8 properties, increase sales of potential multi-cultural businesses, and reduce commercial vacancies. The amount requested is \$128,000, with activities programmed over a one-year period. If the grant is awarded, Gabriela will serve as overall project manager, with regular support from both Laurie Ballenger and Fay Armstrong of the HMP Board. HMP will manage the funds, with the assistance of Main Street’s bookkeeper Ken Rubotzky. We are very hopeful the grant will be approved, as it will focus attention on the most difficult problem now facing the neighborhood: how to define a sustainable commercial identity, distinct from Columbia Heights, that maintains the cultural diversity we all value in Mount Pleasant.

Promoting Broader Membership and Involvement

Fiscal year 2007 ended with xxx members, including x lifetime members. During 2008, xxx members renewed their annual memberships and xx new members joined our ranks, so that the year ended with a total of xxx members.

As the activities outlined above illustrate, HMP engages in a broad range of activities both within the neighborhood and within the local preservation community. We are covering our core areas now with an eight-member Board of Directors, five other volunteers on the Design Review Committee, and some regular volunteers for the yard sale. Some have served in these positions for a number of years and may want to move on but do not because others have not stepped forward to take their places. We would like to involve more members in the day-to-day activities of the organization – both to increase capacity and to facilitate gradual transitions in leadership. More volunteers are needed to: keep our website up-to-date; contact members on a regular basis; organize educational and other programs; and develop the kind of expertise we would like to have on issues such as zoning. We urge all members past, present, and future to contact any member of the Board of Directors if you are willing to help on a regular or occasional basis with any of these endeavors. We urge you also to help us reach out to neighbors, particularly new neighbors, to tell them about HMP and elicit their support and participation. It is through direct outreach that we are most likely to attract new members who share our commitment to preserving the characteristic architecture and other defining features of this wonderful neighborhood.

¹These grants, administered by the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Economic Development, “are intended to spur small community efforts and improve the quality of life of each neighborhood through civic action and resident involvement” (from the Office’s website). The grants are targeted at 12 specific neighborhoods, one of which is named “Columbia Heights” but is defined to include Mount Pleasant Street.

Historic Mount Pleasant, Inc.
Profit and Loss Statement
 Fiscal Year 2008 (December 1, 2007 – November 30, 2008)

Income		
Memberships & undesignated contributions	3,536.50	
Merchandise sales	16.00	
Holiday party bar proceeds	265.00	
Yard sale proceeds	3,488.00	
Interest on savings account	132.72	
Contribution from film company	500.00	
Contribution to cover bad check fee	10.00	
Total Income		7,948.22
Expenses		
Event-related:		
Holiday party	828.05	
Annual meeting	200.00	
Yard sale	151.00	
Corporate:		
Financial services	200.00	
Registration/license fees	115.00	
Insurance	642.00	
Website operation	230.61	
Other:		
Gifts and donations	350.00	
Awards for preservation (plaques)	93.15	
Total Expenses		<u>2,809.81</u>
Net Income		<u>5,138.41</u>

Historic Mount Pleasant, Inc.
Balance Sheet
End of Fiscal Year 2008 (November 30, 2008)

ASSETS	
Current Assets	
BOA Checking Account	3,579.67
BOA Savings Account	<u>18,196.80</u>
Total Current Assets	21,776.47
Prepaid FY 2009 expense (website)	18.55
 TOTAL ASSETS	 <u>\$21,795.02</u>
 LIABILITIES & EQUITY	
Liabilities	0
Equity	
Opening Balance Equity	16,656.61
Net Income (Loss)	<u>5,138.41</u>
Total Equity	21,795.02
 TOTAL LIABILITIES AND EQUITY	 <u>\$21,795.02</u>

Note: As stated at the 2008 Annual Meeting, the Board was unable at that time to prepare financial statements for fiscal year 2007 due to the untimely death of former Treasurer Jim Barnett and the understandable delays in retrieving the necessary records. Using those records, the current Treasurer has since prepared financial statements for fiscal year 2007, which appear on the following pages.

Historic Mount Pleasant, Inc.
Profit and Loss Statement
 Fiscal Year 2007 (December 1, 2006 – November 30, 2007)

Income			
	Memberships & undesignated contributions	3,615.00	
	Merchandise sales	140.00	
	Holiday party bar proceeds	228.00	
	Yard sale proceeds	2,519.36	
	Interest on savings account	139.48	
	Designated contributions (for special legal expenses)	3,120.00	
	Total Income		9,761.84
Expenses			
	Event-related:		
	Holiday party	2,203.48	
	Annual meeting	269.65	
	Yard sale	60.00	
	Corporate:		
	Financial services	117.00	
	Registration/license fees	0	
	Insurance	642.00	
	Website operation	119.88	
	Office supplies	149.95	
	Other:		
	Gifts and donations	500.00	
	Awards for preservation (plaques)	93.06	
	Special legal expenses	11,290.14	
	Membership drive/outreach	1,040.33	
	Total Expenses		<u>16,485.49</u>
	Net Income		<u>(6,723.65)</u>

Historic Mount Pleasant, Inc.
Balance Sheet
End of Fiscal Year 2007 (November 30, 2007)

ASSETS

Current Assets

BOA Checking Account 2,630.13

BOA Savings Account 14,026.48

Total Current Assets 16,656.61

TOTAL ASSETS \$16,656.61

LIABILITIES & EQUITY

Liabilities 0

Equity

Opening Balance Equity 23,380.26

Net Income (Loss) (6,723.65)

Total Equity \$16,656.61

TOTAL LIABILITIES AND EQUITY \$16,656.61