



HISTORIC MOUNT PLEASANT

Annual Report Of the Board of Directors Fiscal Year 2012

Presented at the Annual Meeting
March 9, 2013

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 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 2012 (December 2011–November 2012), HPRB reviewed and approved three projects in Mount Pleasant – at 3146 16th, 1662 Irving Street, and 1738 Park Road. The first project would have transformed Meridian Hill Baptist Church into a 45-unit condominium, restoring this prominent property to use after years of abandonment and its destruction by fire in 2008. In December 2011, HPRB approved revised plans for the project, delegating final approval to the staff following resolution of several design details. However, the developer (Bozzuto Co.) did not purchase the property, as it was intending to do in January 2013, and the property is back on the market. The second project, at 1662 Irving Street, entailed a small rear addition, including extension of the third floor behind the mansard, and restoration of the front mansard windows. The third project, 1738 Park Road, entails the conversion of a semi-detached single family home to a four-unit condominium, with a significant addition on the rear, and demolition of the garage. Work has begun on this last project.

In addition, two properties were the subject of ongoing HPRB cases—1620 Lamont Street and 3142 17th Street. Last year’s report noted that in November 2011 HPRB had rejected a proposal to build a brick wall to separate the front yard at 1620 Lamont from the driveway alongside owned by the Mount Pleasant Condo. In December 2011, HPO staff approved the revised plan for an open 36-inch iron railing now in place. However, the developer also installed solid wooden screens on either side of the front porch, which were not approved. This resulted in enforcement action which the homeowner appealed to court. We look forward to the removal of these visual barriers on the porch, which are incompatible with the design of our row houses.

In February 2012, HPRB again considered illegal construction at 3142 17th. This property has a long history of exterior alterations without permits dating to August 1997 when masonry walls were built on the front porch in place of the original wooden handrails. The homeowner has appeared before HPRB on numerous occasions, been repeatedly advised on permit requirements, and been cited and fined for violations. In 2008, HMP attempted unsuccessfully to establish a working relationship with the homeowner in conjunction with a proposed rear sunroom. The specific issue before the HPRB last February was the removal of a portion of the brick apron below the front porch and the installation of a vinyl window. In preparation for the hearing, HMP prepared a memo for HPO providing a chronology of events since 1997 as documented in our archives, with photographs. At the hearing, the homeowner was instructed to work with HPO staff to resolve existing issues and not to engage in further construction without the proper permit. Instead, he appealed the outstanding fine to the Office of Administrative Hearing, where we understand it was affirmed. None of the unpermitted alterations have been brought into compliance. Indeed, the only visible change to the property since the hearing has been the bright blue paint applied to the front steps and walkway. We understand the property owner will be cited once again.

In 2008, at HMP's urging, HPRB adopted guidelines for new front basement entrances in Mount Pleasant. In March 2011, HPRB approved illustrated Preservation and Design Guidelines for Basement Entrances and Windows for historic properties throughout the city, available at 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 early December 2011, we received numerous complaints about excavations at 1830 Lamont to open up an existing basement entrance so that it could be accessed directly from the landing in the main walk going up to the front porch. We complained immediately to HPO pointing out that this clearly violated the guidelines as original topography had been removed and the basement wall exposed to the street. We learned, to our dismay, that the permit had been approved by HPO staff and would not be reconsidered, even if misrepresentations had been made in the process, which seems to have been the case. HPO has acknowledged the mistake and said it will not allow this permit to be used as a precedent for other projects in the neighborhood.

This past fall, HMP became involved in reviewing plans for the reconstruction of the apartment building at 3145 Mount Pleasant Street as low income housing. After the fire which destroyed the north wing of The Deauville in 2008, the building was purchased by the tenants association with a loan from the D.C. Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD). Ownership will pass to NHT/Enterprise Preservation Corporation with approval of the financing package, which will utilize federal historic preservation and low income housing tax credits. At the March 2012 Annual Meeting, we presented Scott Kline of NHT with information we had developed on the history of 3145 Mount Pleasant Street, including copies of the original façade drawing from the National Archives, and expressed our hope that missing façade elements would be restored. In May, we sent a letter to the Director of DHCD supporting NHT's application for low income housing tax credits, which was approved in the fall. Since then, we have met on several occasions with the project team for the Monseñor Romero

Apartments, as the building is now known, to consider design alternatives for the façade. Given the extensive damage to the building, budgetary limitations, and the new internal configuration, the original appearance cannot be recreated. However, the design concept just approved by HPRB calls for the restoration of the original door surrounds, with windows in place of the doors, and a more attractive central entrance. We will continue to work with HPO and the project team as they develop final design details and select the materials to be used on the outside of the building.

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 to the street. The D.C. Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs (DCRA) issues all building permits. The Office of Historic Preservation 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. 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), 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.

Spring Garden Events

On Saturday, March 31, HMP hosted a discussion of landscape design as applied to Mount Pleasant front yards with Caren Yglesias, AIA, lecturer in landscape architecture at the University of Maryland, and graduate student Kimberly Moyer. Caren Yglesias gave a broad overview of landscape design reaching back into the English countryside and up to the present in Washington, D.C., through principles of the L’Enfant Plan and the Parking Act of 1870, which gave homeowners responsibility for maintaining as green space (or parkland) the land that is public property in front of their houses. The conversation then turned to a discussion of appropriate designs and plants for Mount Pleasant front yards, illustrated with photos taken in the neighborhood. The presentation was well-received and well-attended, bringing participants from as far away as Capitol Hill.

A garden party on May 20 at the home of Linda and Rob Low provided an opportunity for neighbors to socialize around a wisteria-covered arbor, perhaps encouraging others to envision new ways to use their own back yards. This members-only event attracted some new members, an outcome that we would like to repeat with future social events. HMP hopes to expand activities to encourage better use of the green space at our disposal in Mount Pleasant.

Make It Mount Pleasant

HMP was the first “platinum” sponsor (representing a contribution of \$1000) to commit for the June 10 Pop-Up Artisans Craft Market organized by the Mount Pleasant Business Association under the name Make It Mount Pleasant. The objective was to attract residents of

Mount Pleasant and neighboring communities who might not otherwise shop on Mount Pleasant Street to come there on a Sunday and look around. The costs associated with the event were largely related to advertising. The event produced significant foot traffic and sales revenue, not only for the craft merchants but for regular businesses as well. The Business Association plans to hold more special events, and we stand ready to assist. As a major sponsor on June 10, we had a booth with the HMP banner in a prominent location (in front of the paint store) and spent the day talking with passers-by about the history of the neighborhood and our role in it. We also sold some HMP merchandise (hats, postcards, etc.). The new HMP reusable shopping bags (navy with a white logo) were introduced that day and later sold at the farmers market. We donated bags to the Business Association for their Christmas celebration in Lamont Park for neighborhood children. If you don't have yours yet, let us know and we will get one or more to you for the nominal fee of \$1/each.

We spoke last year about the desirability of having a single website for the neighborhood. The goal would be to make it easier to find information about events, businesses and resources that already exists on line but is spread over a number of websites maintained (but not necessarily kept up to date) by different organizations in Mount Pleasant. A new website -- www.mtpleasantdc.com -- was launched in conjunction with the June 10 event. While other organizations such as HMP have not yet been linked to it, we hope to work this coming year with the Business Association and specifically Phil Lepanto of Old School Hardware to transform this skeletal website into an information hub for the neighborhood.

Annual Meeting

In accordance with our by-laws (and longstanding practice), HMP held the Annual Membership Meeting on March 3, 2012, at Stoddard Baptist Home. The President briefly recapped the highlights of the preceding year, distributed copies of the Board's Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2011, and outlined potential activities for 2012. The members present unanimously approved the proposed slate of Board members and Officers for the coming year. Design awards were given to Jimmy Edgerton and the National Housing Trust for the sensitive exterior restorations of 1724 Park and 1636 Kenyon (The St. Dennis), respectively, both of which had long been neighborhood eyesores. The featured speaker was John DeFerrari, who blogs about Washington history at www.streetsofashington.com, selections from which have been published as Lost Washington, D.C. He spoke about the evolution of Rock Creek Park from rustic refuge to twentieth century thoroughfare, with particular emphasis on the bridges built in the park.

Historic Districts Coalition

HMP continues to participate in the Historic Districts Coalition, 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 have appeared on a regular basis at budget and oversight hearings for the Office of Planning, which includes HPO. In addition, in January 2012, HDC testified before the Committee on Libraries, Parks, Recreation and Planning in favor of the nomination to the HPRB of long-term HDC coordinator Nancy

Metzger. HMP joined the HDC statement and offered separate testimony in favor of the renomination to HPRB of Maria Casarella-Cunningham, whose work on the Board was not personally known to other HDC participants. Both nominees were confirmed. Shortly thereafter, the Mayor submitted five more nominations to HPRB, as these other positions were being filled by individuals whose terms had expired. This round of nominations, all of whom were confirmed, brought three strong new architects to the HPRB, as HDC members and others had urged in previous years.

Last spring, several HDC members, including the HMP President, were invited by HPO to participate in a steering committee to provide input on the 2015 Historic Preservation Plan being developed. This is a bureaucratic requirement that seeks to pull together in one document all the various lines of the action of the office. In July, HMP provided written comments on the Draft 2013 HPO Work Plan. We asked that the plan explicitly give “priority” to “improving enforcement efforts” instead of simply aiming to “maintain an effective inspections and compliance program,” a phrase we pointed out did not reflect current reality. We took issue with language that seemed to sidestep the need for new regulations on demolition by neglect, to implement language from the 1978 preservation law that remains without operational effect. We also noted the need to update and clarify rules for project review authorities delegated to staff and the need for better information about the details of projects actually approved, so that mistakes made at the staff level (e.g., 1830 Lamont) can be corrected and deviations from approved building plans can be more readily identified. We hope to continue discussions on these and other issues with HPO and other historic district representatives in the coming year.

HDC remains in a transition period with the departure of its long-term coordinator. HMP Board members have been working with other volunteers and the staff of the DC Preservation League to redefine the coalition more as a virtual organization focused explicitly on advocacy before local officials. By setting aside responsibilities for coordinating regular meetings and occasional programs and designating a small team to work with DCPL trustees and staff, HDC hopes to be able to sustain the advocacy position it has developed without relying too much on any one individual. An effective HDC is essential to ensure that neighborhood groups such as ours know when an issue affecting their interests is coming before the DC Council and to help coordinate responses to it.

Zoning Rewrite

For the last five years, the Office of Planning (OP) has been engaged in a massive effort to update the Zoning Code for the first time since 1958. HMP Board members have attended public working group meetings on historic districts and more recently public outreach sessions on the emerging draft. 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 semi-detached

dwelling is being converted. This is what occurred at 1738 Park Road and what was averted last December at 3307 18th Street, when the would-be developer backed out of the deal.

The new draft code proposes to replace the current broad residential zone categories with a more refined scale that takes specific neighborhood characteristics into account. The current draft (available at www.dczoningrewrite.org) already refers to Foggy Bottom, Dupont Circle, and Georgetown – among others – by name. OP is preparing instructions for other neighborhoods that wish to avail themselves of this unique opportunity to request “customized zoning.” Under the current rules, there are numerous points of disagreement between what is allowed by zoning and what should be required to protect the integrity of historic districts. HMP has begun to analyze the issues as they relate to Mount Pleasant and intends to create a task force to develop recommendations for OP. We will be working with other organizations in the neighborhood and the ANC and ask those interested in working on these issues to contact us without delay. Time is of the essence as OP will be presenting drafts to the Zoning Commission this spring.

Promoting Broader Membership and Involvement

The annual Holiday Party, held on the first Friday in December, has long been our main membership drive. We express our sincere appreciation to Leslie Blakey and Joe Wohlmuth for hosting the party at their home on Park Road. 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 2012, 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. It remains difficult to attract new membership without broader participation by members in outreach and other activities.

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.

A financial statement for the fiscal year follows. Please note the \$500 grant to Alex’s Unisex Salon to help defray the cost of its new sign as part of a broader façade upgrade and the \$175 contribution to Stoddard Baptist Home in recognition of its 110th anniversary.