



HISTORIC MOUNT PLEASANT NEWSLETTER

LIVING IN AN HISTORIC DISTRICT: POP-UPS? IN MT. PLEASANT?

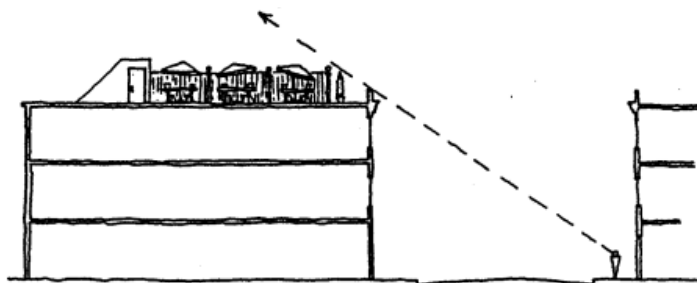
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Our Historic Mount Pleasant (HMP) Newsletter strives to inform community members by illuminating [historic district permit requirements](#), technical issues and solutions, and other aspects of the historic district, including its history.

There are pop-ups, and there are pop-ups

The [pop-ups we usually see in non-historic districts](#) seldom succeed in complementing their neighbors or even fitting in with the architectural character of their neighborhood. Legal restrictions in those areas are zoning-based and design, a matter of taste. Pop-ups - also known as rooftop additions - are seldom literally seen in historic districts because, when they are permitted, they must follow the District of Columbia Historic Preservation Office (HPO) [guidelines for roof additions](#) which require that they not be visible from the street or public vantage points, or alter important character-defining features of the building or streetscape, and are compatible with their historic context.

Successful additions reflect an understanding of context. That's why a project that works in the center of a block will not be approved at the end of the same block. While less stringent, there are also requirements for compatibility of the addition as viewed from the rear of the house, with consideration of projections and setbacks.



Required Sight Line Diagram

Other issues include the proposed materials or form of the addition, which should keep the additional mass light. Roof additions typically require a substantial setback, depending on the height of the building and its adjacent structures, topography of the area, street width, and the relationship of the building to its surroundings. This is particularly important in Mount Pleasant, where the uniformity of residential row houses is a character-defining feature.

The burden of proof is on the applicant to illustrate to the HPO the full impact and visibility of the addition, as well as to demonstrate how the addition is compatible with the character of the historic property to which it is being added. The likelihood of success is increased with the assistance of an architectural designer with historic district experience.

Why Do Houses Keep Popping Up?

In residential areas, if you can't enlarge your house forward (for historic district reasons), or back up to ten feet beyond the rear of your neighbor's house (for allowable lot coverage (Floor Area Ratio) reasons), the simplest remaining way to go is up (height-limit permitting).

New houses have been [getting bigger and bigger](#) over the years (In 2023, new homes averaged [2,469 SF](#) (988 SF/person)), and households have gotten significantly smaller. But today, homeowners want more and larger closets and bathrooms, larger kitchens, and home offices, and family, breakfast, laundry and media rooms. And, people have also [changed the way they live](#), like an 87.4% increase over the past two decades of young adults living in a parent's home, and a tripling of the number of [people working from home](#) since 2019.

MT. PLEASANT HISTORY

Not Typical of the Period

Houses in Mount Pleasant were not typical houses of the period when they were built. They were much larger. In 1910, the average new, single-family house was [945 square feet](#) (SF) (210 SF/person), while most of Mount Pleasant's rowhouses - almost all of which were built from the 1890's through late 1940's - were two to four times that size. And while the vast majority of American houses had no indoor bathrooms - even the new ones - all of Mount Pleasant's new houses had at least one full bath, and many had three. With few exceptions, they all featured both gas (into the 1910's) and electric lighting.

The [Mount Pleasant Historic District National Register nomination](#) describes the neighborhood's "unique and harmonious sense of place" resulting from "the use of a common vocabulary, regard for scale and proportion, and sensitivity to the hilly terrain [and] the work of many different architects and builders from many different periods of time..." This nomination and an earlier one for the mansions on the North side of Park Road NW describe Mount Pleasant houses as being for "Washingtonians who worked in the city and wanted the amenities of living in a convenient, suburban community."

Developers aimed at distinct economic classes in the neighborhood with smaller rowhouses serving middle-class workers, larger rowhouses serving an upper a middle-class working population, and large detached houses serving the prosperous merchant class, with a large range in prices reflecting those differences. Before 1915, while houses priced under \$2,300 were available in other neighborhoods, Mount Pleasant offerings included "One of those [attractive two-story houses near 16th street](#). Mount Pleasant, for \$4,500;" "[the most beautiful artistic home in Ingleside](#) (Mt. Pleasant)" for \$14,000 at 3208 18th St. NW; and a "[handsome residence at 1835 Park road](#)" for \$20,000 bought by "a prominent Washingtonian" with "a large stable."



Below are the full newspaper pages:

1. [The Evening Star June 24, 1911](#), advertisement for the attractive two-story house near 16th St. NW.
2. [The Evening Star November 11, 1911](#), advertisement for 3208 18th Street NW.
3. [The Washington Times April 17, 1909](#), article about 1835 Park Road NW.

