

Historic District: Get Ready for Hassles and Added Expenses!!!

Recently, we received a flyer supporting the designation of our block as a historic district. It should be noted that only half (or less) of the supporters who signed the leaflet live within the proposed historic district. We who actually live here still have the chance to stop something that will make our lives miserable for no good reason.

What's the harm in historic designation? Simple. It will cost you time and money as you go through the regular routines of homeownership and try to do what's right for your family.

The flyer says that 95% of Historic Preservation Office (HPO) reviews take 3–4 business days and don't add any time because it can be done simultaneously with getting a building permit. This is extremely misleading, because this 3–4 days includes HPO review of many routine jobs that—outside of a historic district— can be permitted instantly online and do not require a trip downtown. Further, you would incur the needless expense of drawing up design documents and must conform to the taste of others.

Permits Required Only in Historic Districts. Currently, because we do not live in a historic district, we do not need a permit for any of the following:

- Pointing, cleaning and waterproofing masonry
- Replacing roofing, including shingles
- Replacing siding
- Replacing gutters or downspouts
- Replacing a walkway or driveway or patio
- Installing a small shed
- Installing a retaining wall

We *would* need the approval of the HPO for any of the above if we were designated a historic district. *Do you really want to have to go downtown to file for a permit and wait 3–4 days for city employees to approve a roof or gutter repair?*

No More Postcard Permits for Exterior Work. If we become a historic district, we lose our ability to obtain a “postcard permit” online, instantly, for the following:

- Installing or replacing an air conditioning unit
- Repairing or replacing a fence
- Repairing a front or rear porch
- Repairing exterior stairs or handrails
- Replacing up to 5 windows
- Replacing up to 5 doors
- Exterior venting needed for a new furnace, water heater, stove, etc.

You or your contractor must apply in person, and the permits office cannot issue a building permit without the approval of the Historic Preservation Office. *Do you really want to wait 3–4 days to replace your air conditioning unit next summer?*

Design Choices Made by Others. If you want to do things to make your home your own—to meet your family's needs—this is where things really become a hassle. Here are some of the little things that will have to comply with HPO's assessment rather than your own personal tastes:

- Fences, retaining walls, steps, walkways, and garden features

- Patios, garden sheds, and swimming pools
- Rear porches and decks
- Exterior lighting
- New windows and doors

Concealing Functional Parts of Your Home. Here are some of the things that HPO can force you to make less visible, possibly preventing you from needed improvements:

- Solar panels
- Air conditioning units
- Antennas or satellite dishes
- Heating, ventilation, and air conditioning
- Utility meters and plumbing

Unelected Board Overruling You and Your Architect. If you want to do any significant work to your house, like an addition or bumping out the roof to finish your attic, then you will need to go in front of the Historic Preservation Review Board (consisting of mayoral appointees), where one person could lead the charge to stop you from doing what is right for you and your family. You'll need a detailed proposal and will have to notify beforehand the ANC and "community groups," which may have been formed to prevent any kind of change. Anyone can submit comments to the board to stop you from doing what you want to do, whether they live on our block or outside the historic district. Some recent actions of the board include requiring:

- Relocation of an air conditioning unit and (suggested) replacement with a raised planter (6/30)
- Removal of window boxes from new construction and redesign of windows (6/30)
- Redesigning a rear addition to be lower (4/28)
- Relocation of electric meters and windows on new construction (4/28)
- Redesign of a rear addition to be less visible (3/24)

More Expensive Windows. If you want to replace your windows, get ready to pay a lot more. There have been claims thrown around that the Historic Preservation Office will be lenient about window replacement, but there are at least two kinds of windows in wide use in this neighborhood (vinyl and windows with muntins between glass panels) that will not be permitted for use as replacement windows in this neighborhood.

If you would like more information, please check out the following websites:

- **HPO Main Page** - <https://planning.dc.gov/page/historic-preservation-office>
- **Work Qualifying for HPO Review** - <https://planning.dc.gov/node/1180431>
- **Historic Property – Special Permit** - <https://dcra.dc.gov/node/1423961>

Historic District is not the Right Tool and is not Necessary for Ensuring Neighborhood Compatibility of New Multiuse/Commercial Construction on Connecticut Av.

The leaflet incorrectly claims that the DC Council last year approved zoning changes for Upper Connecticut Av which permit matter-of-right construction if new buildings are a "minimum" of 50 feet

or planned unit developments which are a “minimum” of 65 feet. These are **maximum** heights and are lower than the apartment buildings at Livingston and Connecticut. Moreover the Chevy Chase Small Area Plan, which was just approved by the City Council, requires the city to work with our ANC to devise a new form-based building zone specific to our commercial strip which would give the community, individuals and the ANC the same input on design compatibility of new Connecticut Av buildings that it would get through historic designation.

Historic Designation is Neither Needed nor Appropriate for Preventing Replacement or Additions to Smaller Houses

The leaflet specifically targets the owners of smaller homes, claiming that the demolition protection provided by historic district coverage is necessary to preserve smaller “affordable” homes. The same rationale would apply, of course, to any smaller home owner who wanted to make their home larger through an addition.

This is both nonsense and grossly unfair to owners of smaller homes. There are precisely zero affordable homes in the proposed district. There have been only a small handful of house replacements in the proposed district in the last 30 years. In no instance was the replacement house out of character with the neighborhood. Many of us have added to our homes in ways which would not be permitted if they had been in an historic district. Houses need to adapt to changing needs, such as the new need for home offices. It is very unfair to change the rules of the game so that folks who bought their homes when they were not “historic” cannot make the kinds of changes that the rest of us have already made.

I hope you will join us in voting “NO” when given the opportunity.