

Designating Your Home As ‘Historic’ Was A Bad Idea in 2008 It Is A Terrible Idea Today – Part II

Living Chevy Chase is a group of homeowners who believe that a “Historic District” would unnecessarily and inequitably restrict the property rights of homeowners in the proposed district. And imposing historic status on our homes in order to regulate the Connecticut Avenue commercial strip is the wrong tool to govern future development, taking it out of the hands of the neighborhood and giving control to an unelected bureaucracy with an extremely narrow agenda. Fourteen years ago, our community voted overwhelmingly against a proposal for an historic district. We did so for reasons which were valid then and are valid now:

Our neighborhood has continually grown and developed over the past 120 years, and the results have almost always been homes that are at least as interesting and pleasing to the eye as they were when new.

- Our living neighborhood is the result of 120 years of organic development. Times change, and Chevy Chase DC is more attractive and more functional now than it was when our houses were first built. That process should be allowed to continue.
- Homeowners’ and the neighborhood’s needs change – e.g., the dramatically increased need for home office space since COVID. Homeowners should be able to adapt their homes without satisfying the aesthetic choices of an unelected, citywide bureaucracy trying to be “compatible” with its notion of what the neighborhood looked like 100 years ago.

Historic status is not needed to prevent replacement/additions to smaller houses

- Historic district coverage is not necessary to prevent replacement of smaller houses. Most or all of the small handful of house replacements in the last 30 years have been entirely in keeping with the neighborhood.
- But be clear that the owners of smaller homes will be disproportionately penalized by historic status. Additions are much more constrained in historic districts, where they must be “subordinate” to the original structure and “invisible” from the street, and to satisfy the aesthetic choices of the HPRB bureaucracy on even the smallest details.
- Many of us have already adapted and added to our homes, often in ways which would have been more difficult, more costly, or just impossible in a historic district. Should those who have not yet made changes lose the ability to do the same (and likely suffer a loss in value as a result)?

Imposing historic status on more than 400 private homeowners is the wrong tool to regulate new development in the 4-block Connecticut Ave commercial strip. It is not responsive to our needs or desires, but instead transfers enormous power over our homes to an unelected, citywide bureaucracy.

- Historic preservation review is limited by law to viewing all development proposals through one and only one lens – design “compatibility” with an arbitrary past historical period. It does not and *under the law cannot* consider any other values, such as

economic vitality, the need to adapt to climate concerns or to the post-Covid world, or the desire to provide dedicated, affordable housing and take measures to reverse the history of exclusionary practices.

- The HPRB process gives no special voice to, *and is in no way answerable to*, our community's desires.
- HPRB has frequently rejected the wishes of homeowners, neighbors, and/or the local ANC on matters large and small.
- Other processes – zoning, the city's OurRFP process for the Civic Core lot, etc. – can address the development of Connecticut Avenue without cutting the HPRB in as a not-silent partner in everyone's repair and home improvement projects.

Your house may not be inside the boundaries of the current historic district application but if this application is granted it soon could be.

- The 2008 proposed Chevy Chase Historic District proposal covered twice as many homes – nearly 1000. The current proposal is smaller, likely for strategic reasons – the proponents think there will be less opposition to the smaller district. But don't be fooled – a historic district would be headed for you in the future.
- Nearly all of the larger historic districts in DC have had their boundaries extended (there are several pending boundary extension applications). The current proponents have openly stated that if this application is granted they will apply immediately to expand the district's boundaries. And there is every reason to think that expansion will not stop even at the 2008 boundaries.

Proponents are trying to cram a historic district down your throat and turn over control of your house to the HPRB! For more info, get in touch. If you're willing to help, even better – we need all the help we can get. And visit our website: LivingChevyChase.com

At the very least we are asking that you not commit to supporting historic designation and that you keep an open mind until after you have had a chance to hear from both sides.

Living Chevy Chase DC

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For more information, please check out the following websites:

- **LivingChevyChase.com**
- **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>
- **HPRB Design Guidelines By Topic** - <https://planning.dc.gov/node/1183905>