

# Bloomington Historic Preservation Committee

## June 23, 2015 Meeting: Index-card questions

- What is the minimum number of houses that can apply for preservation?
- There is no minimum number, but it should be a meaningful grouping of physically adjacent properties that share common architecture and history and that provide an architectural and historical microcosm of the larger area.
- In my neighborhood (Park View) it seems the threat of the anti-pop-up legislation spurred a rush to get as many homes purchased and popped as fast as possible. Is there any way to stall these explorations while being evaluated?
- No, there is currently no regulatory tool or moratorium to stall new construction. As of July 2015, however, the Zoning Administrator approved new zoning regulations that make pop-ups of a certain height and size subject to a variance as opposed to a matter-of-right. Any moratorium on the issuance of building permits would need to be introduced and taken up by City Council.
- Will the presence of compromised conversions jeopardize consideration for historic status?
- If the number of altered properties is such that it compromises the architectural integrity and the historic character, then yes, it may compromise consideration for historic status. Right now, the overall integrity of Bloomington remains high and its potential eligibility is not compromised by alterations.
- Why is it thought that historic designation can contribute to gentrification? Please be specific.
- Some people have made the argument that the historic designation of a neighborhood causes the socio-economics to change largely due to the cost of historic preservation. People argue, for instance, that if a house is historic, it is more expensive to repair and long-time owners cannot afford to make such changes, leading to the sale of the house. However, studies of historic neighborhoods don't really support this. Historic preservation regulations do not require any changes to historic houses and, in the event that repairs are necessary, preservation encourages repair over replacement of historic elements. Repair of historic features is actually more often less expensive than replacement, so is not in itself a good example of how such gentrification occurs.

A more important point may be that gentrification is a widespread phenomenon driven by the inherent desirability of certain neighborhoods—both historic and non-historic—and the value of

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their housing stock in Washington's hot real estate market. This underlying factor driving gentrification is likely to continue as long as the city remains attractive to new residents.

- Can exceptions on preservation rules be made for older, longtime residents? For example replacing slate with shingles for roof repair?
- As noted above, repair of historic materials is often less expensive than wholesale replacement. The District's preservation law also includes a provision to allow a low-income owner to request an exception in the case of an onerous and excessive financial burden. In addition, the District's targeted historic homeowner grant program is available to assist low- and moderate-income homeowners where there are historic districts in lower-income communities.
- Is it easier to add to an existing historic district as an incremental stage, rather than establish Bloomington as its own historic district? Bloomington is frequently included with LeDroit in real estate references.
- In some cases, it may be easier to add to an existing historic district, but such an addition would need to be justified through the history and architecture. The addition would need to share the architectural characteristics found in the existing historic district, and have a common history. The current Le Droit Park Historic District is well-defined by its original plat boundaries and though an expansion may be justified, it would need to be researched, documented and argued as the most appropriate approach.
- What has been the experience of neighborhoods with historic preservation in terms of new restaurants, businesses, and other amenities being attracted to the neighborhood?
- Historic district designation does not discourage commercial development. Historic designation does not control uses, so many former residential and institutional buildings are being adapted for commercial uses. Indeed, many of Washington's historic districts are vibrant commercial areas, such as U Street, 14<sup>th</sup> Street, Dupont Circle and Georgetown Historic Districts to name a few.
- How much money, time, and work do developers commit to spreading misinformation and fear to try shutting down our historic designation?
- Do not know
- Can you talk about where demolition/additions/alterations are allowed? Backyard additions, interior alterations? Does that prevent me from making 2 flats or 3 if there are no alterations?

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- The historic preservation process does not control the use or intensity of use of a building; these are regulated by the zoning regulations. Similarly, interior modifications are not subject to historic review, but would be subject to zoning regulations and building codes. If the zoning allows conversion of a single-family dwelling to 2 or 3 flats, the historic preservation review process would review any exterior modifications that would be necessary for that conversion to ensure that the alterations preserve the character of the property and are compatible with the historic district. Any addition or alteration needs to be found compatible with the historic district and the characteristics of the building. Additions and alterations at the rear of a rowhouse are generally given a good degree of flexibility, as they are not visible from a public right-of-way or affect the designed character of a neighborhood's streetscapes. Conversely, an addition that is visible on top or in front of the building is probably going to adversely affect the roofline or appearance of the building and its surroundings, so are generally not compatible. The Historic Preservation Office has Guidelines for additions and new construction in historic districts.
- Is there a more stringent or less stringent historic preservation concept?
- In the District of Columbia, the historic preservation process allows for the designation of properties as historic landmarks or as part of historic districts. Currently, there are no alternatives.
- Feedback. Announce e-mail address.
- What role, if any, would historic preservation play on any plans to develop the McMillan Reservoir/Park?
- The Historic Preservation Office has been and continues to review the development plans for McMillan Reservoir/Park.
- If historic designation is obtained is there any possibility that later work to structures currently not in historic compliance would require compliance?
- No. For instance if repairs are needed on a house that historically had a slate roof and now has an asphalt shingle roof, then those repairs can be done with a compatible asphalt shingle. However, if a substantial amount of new work is being proposed on a property that has been significantly altered from its original condition, then the historic preservation review would require appropriate alterations in keeping with the historic character. For instance, if a tower is

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missing and a new project proposes an addition to the roof, the historic preservation review could require that a tower be rebuilt as part of that addition.

- Question to Chris Fromboluti: Please state, in your opinion, why specifically the historic preservation effort failed in the Chevy Chase area?
  
- How much community input is involved in the historic preservation application process?
- What role do historic districts play in solving the affordable housing crisis in DC?
- Historic preservation plays an important role in that many low income housing projects are benefitting from historic preservation tax credits because the apartment buildings are historic landmarks or within historic districts. Historic tax credits provide major financial incentives to re-develop historic buildings for affordable housing.
- I believe that Conservation District is more suitable given the development in the Bloomingtondale neighborhood. What is the process to have a Conservation District designation?
- The District of Columbia does not have Conservations Districts. Conservation districts would need to be enacted by City Council. There is no legislation currently pending or known to be coming forward.
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