

Support the proposed Chevy Chase DC Historic District

Creating a historic district offers us a way to manage change that respects our 100-year-old community and preserves the qualities of scale and architectural distinction we admire about Chevy Chase. There are 43 historic districts in Washington, including 26 designated neighborhoods such as Cleveland Park, Takoma Park, Dupont Circle, Kalorama, Logan Circle, Georgetown and Capitol Hill. All have gained enormously from this protection and we believe our neighborhood would as well. As stewards of its architectural and physical heritage, we have a responsibility to preserve the best elements of Chevy Chase DC for ourselves and future generations to enjoy—just as earlier residents did for us. It is important to ensure that the many qualities that make Chevy Chase DC livable and unique for us now will remain long after we're gone.

A historic district is the only mechanism in place today that will prevent the demolition of properties built during our neighborhood's period of significance: 1907-1947. A historic district also takes into account the effect new construction will have on its surroundings and seeks compatibility between the old and the new. Zoning does not do this.

Stable, established, pedestrian-oriented neighborhoods like ours are highly desirable to developers because the infrastructure is already in place—sidewalks, tree-lined streets, alleys, good transportation systems, a low-scale commercial district, interesting and diverse architecture, well-built homes with porches, bay windows and uniform setbacks, established schools, libraries and parks. It's far more advantageous for developers to tie into older communities like ours than to start from scratch in less developed areas. Because our urban neighborhood is so highly sought-after, it is no longer possible to take for granted that what we appreciate and enjoy about Chevy Chase will remain for us tomorrow, unless we act to protect it today.

Particularly vulnerable are smaller houses and those on lots that haven't been built out to their zoning capacity. Builders also look for corner lots, where, if zoning allows it, a duplex or two single-family houses can replace one. There are many people who don't want to see our neighborhood reach the point other neighborhoods already have, where developers with no stake in a community come in and alter the fabric and rhythm of streets, by tearing down one house after another and constructing multi-million dollar homes that project closer to the sidewalk, tower over their neighbors and increase property taxes for everyone. Zoning permits this overdevelopment now. A historic district would not.

A historic district can also help revitalize our Connecticut Avenue commercial corridor. Look at the Avalon, which was once a struggling and decaying movie theatre. Thanks to generous people, city funds and an exterior historic designation that made it possible to obtain federal Rehabilitation Tax Credits, the Avalon is once again a thriving neighborhood gathering place--a destination point that brings people to our commercial district with money to spend. If no one had decided to preserve this beautiful theatre, it might not have become the place it is today. The Avalon symbolizes the best of what historic designation can do for our community--protect valuable assets from destruction and breathe new life into buildings for contemporary purposes and needs. A historic district can help sustain businesses like the Avalon because it will make it possible for owners of neighboring income-producing properties to also use federal tax credits to restore their buildings and create an even more vibrant Chevy Chase DC commercial corridor. This, in turn, will attract more people who will patronize these businesses and help them thrive. It's a fact, that historic districts are good for neighborhoods. They attract resident and tourist dollars alike. Property owners know that rehabilitated historic buildings are

good for communities and good for business and last year the city's Historic Preservation Office reviewed Rehabilitation Tax Credit projects totaling \$40 million in historic building investment.

A historic district will also help guide the design and scale of any new construction in our commercial district, particularly on the east side of Connecticut Avenue where buildings could be demolished because they were built after 1947. This includes the Wachovia Bank building at Oliver and Northampton Streets (which is for sale now), down to the Safeway at McKinley, the Exxon at Morrison and the shops at Livingston. A historic district will also help guide any new residential construction proposed for the vacant parcel of land bordering Military Road, Connecticut Avenue and Kanawha Street.

Most of the permits issued in the city are for projects in historic districts. Last year, the Historic Preservation Office signed off on 4,666 permits--over 90% of which were handled the same day, giving this office the reputation of being one of the most efficient and professional offices in the District government. In general, only complicated or controversial exterior changes are reviewed by the Historic Preservation Review Board, a nine-member group that meets one or two times a month and is composed of citizens, architects, historians, an architectural historian and an archeologist.

The city does not review interior work, paint colors or landscaping in historic districts. Despite what you may have heard, handicapped ramps in historic districts are routinely approved all over the city. The Mt. Pleasant neighborhood ramp case involved an owner trying to get a permit for a ramp that didn't comply with ADA requirements or building codes. That case has since been resolved.

The staff is always available to assist homeowners free of charge at any stage of a project -- even providing referrals to companies and contractors if homeowners want them. Thousands of people have taken advantage of staff expertise and resources and speak highly of designs improved and money saved. The preservation office will also assist homeowners in creating an energy conservation strategy and in evaluating the thermal efficiency of foundations, walls, roofs, windows and doors. Guidelines for energy conservation of historic buildings are available to property owners who might have questions.

One of the goals of a historic district is to take advantage of modern technology and to allow for adaptation to modern needs while also respecting the historic integrity of homes and buildings. While the Preservation Board and staff encourage the retention and repair of original materials, they also recognize that many newer substitute materials such as artificial slate, solar panels and wood composites are acceptable replacements. At all turns, the preservation staff seeks to work with property owners and be a helpful resource.

For those concerned about property values in historic districts, dozens of independent economic studies show that real estate values in historic districts either stay the same or increase at greater rates than those in similar non-protected areas. In Washington, some of the most valuable and desirable residential neighborhoods are historically designated and protected.

We urge you to join hundreds of your neighbors who support a historic district for Chevy Chase DC. **If you'd like to sign a letter of support or display a yard sign in support**, please email Mary Rowse at MERowse@aol.com Or, you may call her at: (202) 362-9279. Thank you!

Chevy Chase Neighbors for a Historic District