

Respect for the Past:



Living in the Present

A Guide to Preservation Work in Historic Georgetown

Georgetown



Georgetown, the oldest historic district in the District of Columbia, is a world-renowned neighborhood — a living, bricks-and-mortar reflection of the early years of the American republic — and one of the most unique residential neighborhoods in the United States.

Congress passed the Old Georgetown Act in 1950 (Public Law 81-808), which set forth and designated the Georgetown Historic District. The Act defined the boundaries of historic Georgetown as we know it today and gave the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts (CFA) the authority to appoint a committee, the Old Georgetown Board (OGB), to conduct design reviews of public and private structures within Georgetown's boundaries.

Generations of Georgetowners have been protected by legislation, regulation, and private action to maintain the celebrated character of our historic neighborhood. This law, and the substantial volunteer activity by citizens over the years, provides a concrete reminder that living in Georgetown is both a privilege and a responsibility.

This brochure gives an overview of the historic and permit review process and lists sources for more complete information. All plans for new construction, exterior alteration, most interior alterations, and demolition in the Georgetown historic district require a building permit.

Practical Guidance

The following are general guidelines to assist along the way:

- ◆ Discuss your plans with neighbors who might be affected by your project. Securing their support can be very helpful in the review process.
- ◆ Consider availing yourself of an architect or designer who is familiar with the Georgetown preservation process. Though not required, it can ease the way to approval.
- ◆ Apply for the proper permits for both interior and exterior work. The Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs offers guidance at: www.dkra.dc.gov.
- ◆ Study your property carefully and learn as much as possible about the history, style, and period of your building. Look around the neighborhood and acquaint yourself with architectural features that are significant. This is what the appropriate boards –the Advisory Neighborhood Commission (ANC), the Historic Preservation Review Board (HPRB), and the Old Georgetown Board (OGB), including the Citizens Association of Georgetown – will take into consideration when evaluating proposals.
- ◆ Respect the modest scale of Georgetown. Attempts to dramatically increase building volumes, which could potentially overshadow the original building on the site or neighboring buildings, will not be supported.
- ◆ Understand the zoning regulations for your property. For zoning information, refer to the official guidebook at www.dcoz.dc.gov/resources/guidebook.shtml or contact the Office of Zoning at www.dcoz.dc.gov.
- ◆ If your home has a preservation easement on it, all changes to it, including, in some cases, removal of trees, or changing your house color, must be first approved by your easement holder.

- ◆ Consider the removal of inappropriate elements which may have been added over the years, so as to restore original architectural integrity to your home or building.
- ◆ Good basic maintenance and repair work to original doors is always preferred. Historic doors that have been inappropriately altered should be replaced with doors that duplicate the design and detailing of the original.
- ◆ Repair historic windows whenever possible, or replace with historically appropriate real wood windows. Changing the location, covering-up or changing the dimensions of a window opening is almost never appropriate since it alters the character of the existing window.
- ◆ Shutters may or may not be appropriate additions to historic buildings. Adding shutters depends on the use and architectural style of a building, as well as documentation of their previous existence on the building. Operable shutters with hardware are the only appropriate type.
- ◆ Exterior walls and above-ground foundations are among the most important character-defining elements of historic buildings. Any changes to the existing exterior walls or foundations must be considered by the appropriate boards. Likewise, whenever a change in materials or style of the roof or roofline is anticipated, application for permit and review of the project is necessary.
- ◆ Keep exposed natural brick unpainted; if an exterior wall is painted, it should remain painted.
- ◆ Repairing existing secondary buildings, such as garages and sheds, is important to maintaining the character of historic districts. No alteration or demolition is permitted without application, review and approval.
- ◆ Try to place electric and gas meters indoors, or at the rear of the property or where they are not visible from public view. Rooftop air conditioning units must be mounted so as not to be seen from a public street. A ground-mounted unit should be located in the rear yard.
- ◆ Any roof-top structure should be located far enough behind the existing cornice so that it is hidden from view by pedestrians on the street. Roof decks are almost never approved.



Practical Guidance (cont.)

- ◆ Porches and steps should be maintained in the original state as much as possible. When repairs or maintenance are undertaken, care should be given to use the same materials and design.
- ◆ Know that additional curb cuts to create private parking access are usually not allowed; new parking pads or driveways, where a car is visible from public space, are normally denied in the review process.
- ◆ Fences should be constructed with approved traditional materials; rustic stockade-type fencing, for example, will almost never be approved in the review process.
- ◆ Make an effort to preserve the natural landscape. Trees are an important aspect of quality of life in Georgetown, and there are now city regulations addressing their removal and replacement.
- ◆ Be a good neighbor during your construction. Use frequent trash haulers rather than dumpsters, keep the sidewalks and street clean. Work is allowed from 7 am to 7 pm, 6 days a week. A special permit is required for work outside these hours or on Sunday.
- ◆ Remember that even after having hired professional help, the property owner is ultimately responsible for the successful application process, ensuring that contractors work within the guidelines of the work permits, and also responsible for timely completion of the project.
- ◆ If you observe construction or demolition under way which you find questionable or for which no permits are displayed, report the activity to the D.C. Historic Preservation Office (HPO) at 202.442.8800 or historic.preservation@dc.gov. A historic preservation inspector will investigate your complaint, which may remain anonymous.



Tudor Place at 1644 31st Street, one of the finest neo-classical houses in the United States.

How to Apply for a Permit

Permission to build or remodel must be sought from the city—in this case, the Permit Processing Center of the D.C. Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs (DCRA). New construction and additions must comply with zoning ordinances which address many things from lot occupancy to setbacks and allowable height and more. The District, by law, cannot issue a permit until it receives confirmation of project design approval from the D.C. Historic Preservation Review Board (HPRB) and from the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts (CFA). The CFA has jurisdiction over projects visible from public space – including from streets, sidewalks, parks, and public alleys. Work that is not visible from public space will only be reviewed by the HPRB.

An appointment may be arranged with a D.C. Historic Preservation Office (HPO) staff member to discuss a proposed project, deadlines for providing the necessary documentation, and information on the monthly public meetings held for the application review.

The CFA delegates primary review of Georgetown projects to its Old Georgetown Board (OGB), a three-member panel of architects, although the Commission makes a final determination after having received the OGB recommendation (website: www.cfa.gov). HPO typically weighs in by commenting on projects at the monthly OGB hearing and then approves permits after the CFA has done so. Depending on the scale and complexity of the project, there may be two stages to this review: concept review and permit review. The OGB and the HPRB obtain the critical views of Georgetown property owners and neighbors through the Citizens Association of Georgetown (CAG) advocacy and that of Georgetown's elected Advisory Neighborhood Commission 2E (ANC 2E).

The ANC, at their regular monthly meeting, considers proposed projects within the Georgetown Historic District and will make recommendations to the appropriate board regarding the merits of a project. At the ANC meeting, the applicant and/or architect should be present to discuss their proposal. Neighbors also have a chance to support or oppose the project. Information about the ANC is available at www.ANC2E.com.

Old Georgetown

For information on the historic review process, contact:

1. Citizens Association of Georgetown (CAG)

1365 Wisconsin Avenue NW, Suite 200
Washington DC 20007
202.337.7313
www.cagtown.org

2. Advisory Neighborhood Commission 2E (ANC)

3265 S Street NW
Washington DC 20007
202.724.7098
www.ANC2E.com

3. Old Georgetown Board/Commission of Fine Arts (OGB/CFA)

401 F Street NW, Suite 312
Washington DC 20001-2728
202.504.2200
www.cfa.gov

4. DC Historic Preservation Review Board (HPRB) & DC Office of Planning

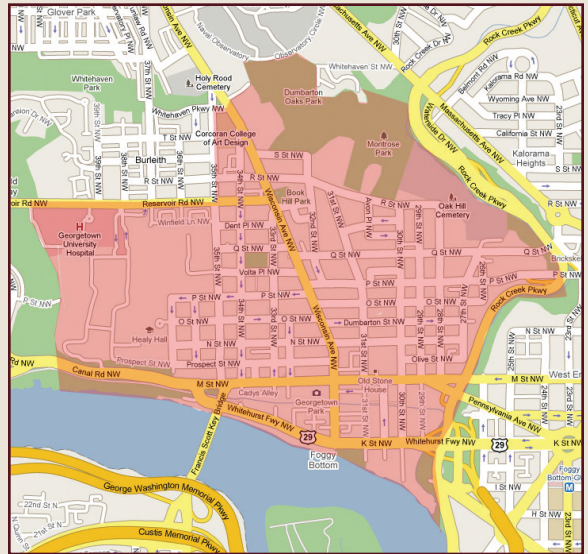
1100 4th Street SW
Washington, DC 20024
202.442.7600
www.planning.dc.gov/historicpreservation

5. DCRA - DC Permit Processing Center

1100 4th Street SW
Washington, DC 20024
202.442.4400
www.dcra.dc.gov

6. DC Zoning Office

1100 4th Street SW
Washington, DC 20024
202.727.6311
www.dcoz.dc.gov



The Georgetown Historic District is bounded on the east by Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway from the Potomac River to the north boundary of Dumbarton Oaks Park, Whitehaven Street and Whitehaven Parkway to Thirty-fifth Street, south along the middle of Thirty-fifth Street to Reservoir Road, west along the middle of Reservoir Road to Glover-Archbold Parkway, on the west by Glover-Archbold Parkway from Reservoir Road to the Potomac River, on the south by the Potomac River to the Rock Creek Parkway.

Originally compiled and edited by Nola Klamberg
and Barbara Zartman in 2005

Updated in 2015

Historic Preservation & Zoning Committee
Citizens Association of Georgetown (CAG)

Photos ©Maxwell MacKenzie

With sincere appreciation to Hilary and Joe Gibbons for providing funding for this guide, and to Maxwell MacKenzie for providing all photographs. With thanks to others who contributed time and expertise: Joe Gibbons, Richard Hinds, Catherine Marquardt, Pamela Moore, and Victoria Rixey.

For more information or to join CAG's efforts, contact:



Citizens Association of Georgetown
1365 Wisconsin Avenue NW, Suite 200
Washington, DC 20007
202.337.7313 phone ♦ 202.333.1088 fax
cagmail@cagtown.org ♦ www.cagtown.org

©2015 Citizens Association of Georgetown

CITIZENS ASSOCIATION
of GEORGETOWN