

# Georgetown



Autumn on 28th Street

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 semi-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. Only by working together can the ambience of Georgetown, enjoyed today by residents, business owners, and visitors, be preserved.

Anyone considering construction or remodeling in Georgetown should be aware of their responsibilities. This brochure gives an overview of the permit review process and lists sources for more complete information. It briefly describes when you need a permit, how you apply for a permit, who reviews your application, and details the main steps in the process. It also provides some practical guidance designed to help you avoid common mistakes, and thereby expedite your review process.

The oldest house in Georgetown, the Old Stone House at 3051 M Street



# Practical Guidance

All plans for new construction, exterior alteration, demolition, and/or subdivision in a historic district require a building permit and must be reviewed by the Historic Preservation Review Board (HPRB) and the Commission of Fine Arts (CFA). Contact the professionals at HPRB about proposed plans and arrange to meet with staff — at no charge to you. Their website is [www.planning.dc.gov/presentation](http://www.planning.dc.gov/presentation).



Federal architecture of Smith Row (1815) along the 3200 block of N Street

- ◆ Discuss your plans with neighbors who might be affected by your project. Securing their support can be very helpful in the review process.
- ◆ Apply for the proper permits for both interior and exterior work. The Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs offers guidance at: [www.dcrs.dc.gov](http://www.dcrs.dc.gov).
- ◆ Consider availing yourself of an architect or designer who is familiar with the Georgetown preservation process. This is certainly not required, but it can ease the way to approval.
- ◆ 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 Historic Preservation Review Board (HPRB), the Advisory Neighborhood Commission (ANC), and the Old Georgetown Board (OGB) — 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 in the review process.
- ◆ Understand the zoning regulations for your property, particularly with regard to regulations on lot coverage (60% is the limit), setbacks, and allowed uses. For further zoning information, contact the Board of Zoning Adjustment (BZA) at [www.dcoz.dc.gov](http://www.dcoz.dc.gov).
- ◆ 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, as closely as possible, the design and detailing of the original.
- ◆ Repair historic windows whenever possible, or replace with like-kind, 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.
- ◆ 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, and, if a wall is made of porous brick which has always been painted, it should remain painted.
- ◆ Repairing existing secondary buildings, such as garages and sheds, is important to maintaining the character of historic districts. No alterations or demolition is permitted without application and review.
- ◆ Try to place electric and gas meters at the rear of the property or where they are not visible from public view. Rooftop air-conditioning units should be mounted so as not to be seen from a public street. A ground-mounted unit should be located in the rear yard or screened if it can be seen from a public street.
- ◆ 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. If this is not possible, the design of the addition or its screening should be compatible with the character of the building.

Typical Georgetown facades on 30th Street



- ◆ 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 like-kind 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.
- ◆ Think about what you can do to move a project along (e.g., have dumpsters emptied frequently and have them removed as soon as possible). Remember that work is allowed from 7 am to 7 pm, 6 days a week...never 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 442-8837 or 442-8800. A staff member will take your information (it is not necessary to give your name) and make a visit to the site.



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

These are just a few of the many issues that may arise in the review process. These guidelines are for the benefit of all who live and work in Georgetown. By approaching this process with as much knowledge as possible, you can make better decisions, save money and time, and know that the resulting changes to your historic property will be an asset to you and to the community.

# 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). 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.

The applicant should submit descriptive photographs of the property and architectural drawings, along with an application fee. An appointment may be arranged with a D.C. Historic Preservation Office (HPO) staff member to discuss the proposed project, deadlines for providing the necessary documentation, and information on the monthly public meetings held for the application review. Depending on the scale and complexity of the project, there may be two stages to this review: concept review and permit 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](http://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. 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 (ANC).

The ANC, at the regular monthly meetings on the first Tuesday of each month, 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 the proposal, and neighbors also have a chance to support or oppose the project. More ANC information is available at [www.ANC2E.com](http://www.ANC2E.com), and materials providing guidance on restoring properties in the Georgetown Historic District are available at the CAG website: [www.cagtown.org](http://www.cagtown.org).

Construction requires zoning and building code review in addition to preservation and design review. The DCRA performs those functions before issuing permits. Keep in mind that, particularly

for new construction and additions, there may be zoning or even building constraints that affect building massing, even window placement, and materials. If you need a zoning variance in order to build a project, you would have to make application to the D.C. Board of Zoning Adjustment (BZA). Code issues, on the other hand, are usually worked out through consultation with the code officials at DCRA.

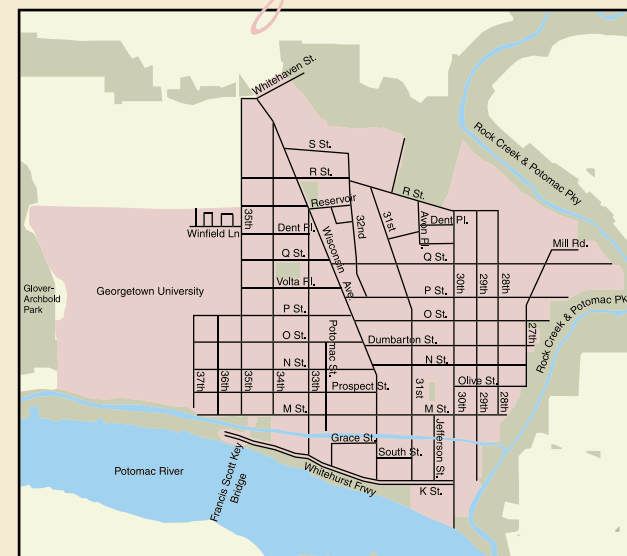
The historic preservation laws and regulations have been successfully administered for over 50 years in Georgetown. If the points addressed herein are kept in mind, a homeowner's successful completion of the permit and historic review process may be greatly expedited. By adhering to the historic preservation guidelines, Georgetown will continue to be the wonderful historic village it is today.



### **For information on the historic review process, contact:**

- 1. Citizens Association of Georgetown (CAG)**  
1365 Wisconsin Avenue NW ♦ Washington DC 20007  
202-337-7313 ♦ [www.cagtown.org](http://www.cagtown.org)
- 2. Advisory Neighborhood Commission 2E (ANC)**  
3265 S Street NW ♦ Washington DC 20007  
202-338-7427 ♦ [www.ANC2E.com](http://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](http://www.cfa.gov)
- 4. DC Historic Preservation Review Board (HPRB)**  
DC Office of Planning  
801 North Capitol Street NE, 3rd floor ♦ Washington DC 20001  
202-442-8818 or 442-8800 ♦ <http://planning.dc.gov>
- 5. DC Permit Processing Center**  
941 North Capitol Street NE, Room 2100 ♦ Washington DC 20001  
202-442-4589 ♦ [www.DCRA.dc.gov](http://www.DCRA.dc.gov)
- 6. DC Board of Zoning Adjustment (BZA)**  
441 4th Street NW, Room 2100 ♦ Washington DC 20001  
202-727-6311 ♦ [www.dcoz.dc.gov](http://www.dcoz.dc.gov)
- 7. DC Preservation League**  
401 F Street NW, Room 324 ♦ Washington DC 20001  
202-783-5144 ♦ [www.dcpreservation.org](http://www.dcpreservation.org)

# Old Georgetown

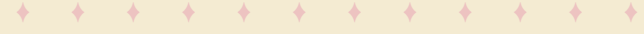


The Georgetown Historic District is bounded on the east by Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway from the Potomac River to the north boundary of Dumbarton Oaks Park, Whitehaven Street and Whitehaven Parkway to Thirty-fifth Street, south along the middle of Reservoir Road to Glover-Archbold Parkway, on the west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

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

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Washington, DC 20007  
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[cagmail@cagtown.org](mailto:cagmail@cagtown.org) ♦ [www.cagtown.org](http://www.cagtown.org)  
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# Respect for the Past:



Maxwell McKenzie

# Living in the Present

A Guide to Preservation Work  
in Historic Georgetown