



CHRS CELEBRATING 60 YEARS OF PRESERVATION

NEWS

www.chrs.org

March 2022

Mapping the History of Washington’s Labyrinth of Buried Streams

By Christine Mullins

A record number of participants attended the CHRS Preservation Café on February 18 to hear Joe Arrowsmith, ecological engineer from Straughan Environmental, Josh Burch, project manager for this project from D.C. Department of Energy and Environment (DOEE), and David Ramos, design educator from American University and historic landscape specialist, describe the just-released interactive mapping project of Washington’s vast historic network of buried streams, tributaries, swimming holes, canals and waterways.

This project from the DC Department of Energy and Environment (DOEE) examined the disappearance of the city’s historic streams, as yesterday’s city planners drained, relocated, and forced an intricate network of waterways into drainage and sewer pipes, to build the city we know today.

Josh Burch explained that DOEE wanted to learn where the historic streams were buried to determine whether it would be feasible or beneficial to “daylight” any of these relatively small, but

important waterways. They learned that restoring these historic streams would not only enhance our parks and recreation areas, but it would allow us to clean our water and fix some past urban planning projects that may have been necessary at the time, but can now be engineered to benefit the environment more efficiently.

For example, bringing these diverted streams out of their pipes would allow us to clean and filter

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Upcoming Virtual CHRS Preservation Cafés

Arming a Navy: The Naval Gun Factory and Its Local Workforce

Tuesday, March 15, 2022 at 6:30 pm

Dr. Edward Valentin, Historian and Curator
National Museum of the United States Navy

A brief Membership Meeting will precede the talk.

Designing a Net Zero Energy Row House: A Case Study

Tuesday, April 19, 2022 at 6:30 pm

Will Teass, Teass \ Warren Architects

Not So Permastone: A History of a House in its Facade

Tuesday, May 17, 2022 at 6:30 pm

Peter May, Capitol Hill Homeowner

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CHRS Seeks Nominations for Board

By Beth Purcell

CHRS will hold elections for the 2022–2023 Board of Directors by postcard ballot in May. The Elections Committee, chaired by Beth Purcell, includes Elizabeth Nelson, Nancy Metzger, Christine Mullins and Brian Alcorn.

The committee is seeking recommendations of individuals who wish to be considered for positions on next year's CHRS Board of Directors. These positions include President,

First Vice President, Second Vice President, Treasurer and Secretary, each for one-year terms, and three At-Large Members for two-year terms. Nominations for the 2022–2023 CHRS Board of Directors will be announced at the end of April and ballots will be mailed to CHRS members in May.

If you wish to be considered, to recommend someone, or to find out more about the duties of each position, please contact the CHRS

office at (202) 543-0425 or email info@chrs.org and a member of the Elections Committee will respond. Each recommendation must cite the position for which the person wants to be considered and must include his or her resume.

Recommendations must be submitted by the end of the day on Friday, March 25, 2022. ★

March Preservation Café: *Arming a Navy: The Naval Gun Factory and Its Local Workforce*

The Washington Navy Yard, the Navy's oldest shore establishment, has supported U.S. naval operations since 1799. The establishment of the U.S. Naval Gun Factory at the Washington Navy Yard in 1886 dramatically shifted the base's mission from ship repair to ordnance production.

From 1886 until its closure in 1961, the Naval Gun Factory was one of the largest employers in Washington, DC, employing thousands of people from a diverse array of backgrounds. The Washington Navy Yard owes much of its 200-plus years of success to the contributions of workers in DC neighborhoods, especially the Capitol Hill District, Barney Circle, Anacostia, and Fairlawn.

During our CHRS Preservation Café on March 15, Dr. Edward Valentin will discuss one of the museum's newest temporary exhibits, "Arming a New Navy: The Naval Gun Factory and Its Local Workforce." He will discuss

the history of Building 76 in the Washington Navy Yard, the home of the National Museum of the United States Navy. He will describe the operations of the factory and provide a window into the experiences of the factor's diverse workforce.

A brief Membership Meeting will precede the talk. ★

Our CHRS Preservation Cafés are free to CHRS members and non members. We hope to see you online on March 15 at 6:30 p.m. You can access the presentation link at chrs.org.

Capitol Hill Restoration Society (CHRS)

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To reach any of the above, please contact the Society offices at (202) 543-0425 or via e-mail: caphrs420@gmail.com.

ABOUT CHRS

Capitol Hill is a special place. We promote, preserve, and enhance the character of our historic neighborhoods.

Since its founding in 1955, CHRS has worked continuously to make Capitol Hill the desirable location it has now become. Due to CHRS's efforts, Capitol Hill won designation as a historic district in 1976. Today, that legacy of standing up for the community continues with our work in planning, zoning, historic preservation, and public safety.

CHRS is a volunteer organization, made up of Hill residents who love their historic neighborhoods and want to ensure that the unique character of the Hill is around for future generations. Come join us!

To learn more or join, please visit:
www.CHRS.org

2022 Mother's Day House and Garden Tour Update

By Elizabeth Nelson

CHRS is planning a traditional in-person House Tour for Mother's Day weekend, May 7 & 8. We'll offer a package that includes some houses that will be open to guests, some that will be virtual-only and guided walking tours. The projected tour area is south of Pennsylvania Avenue between 2nd and 11th Streets SE.

We're finalizing the list of houses, but we can tell you that St. Peter's Catholic Church, Christ Church and Hill Center will all be offering tours and artist Will Fleishell will be opening his studio on Archibald Walk. You can check our progress by visiting chrs.org/more-house-tour-2022 where details will be posted

as they become available. Tickets will be sold through Eventbrite in April and we will have an outreach booth at Eastern Market on weekends to publicize the Tour.

Would you like to be involved in this year's Tour? We are looking for volunteers for the outreach booth, to be docents for the houses, to host the refreshment break at the Hill Center and to run the "will call" locations where guests will present their vaccination cards and collect their tickets. If you can help with any of this, please contact the Committee at HouseTourCHRS@gmail.com. ★



IMAGE COURTESY ELIZABETH NELSON

Local artist Will Fleishell will be opening his studio on Archibald Walk for the 2022 CHRS House & Garden Tour.

Historic Preservation Briefs

By Beth Purcell

The Historic Preservation Review Board (HPRB or the Board) considered the following cases at its virtual hearing on January 27, 2022. HPRB is responsible for determining if proposed changes to a building are consistent with the DC Preservation Act. A "concept review" is a preliminary determination of a building owner's plan to alter the building, and if the concept is approved, the owner will return to the HPRB for a final review.

308 11th Street NE, HPA 20-390, concept/replace existing one-story garage with new two-story garage; roof deck and third floor addition. This contributing rowhouse is one of seven built in 1917 by owner F. M. Johnson and architect W. E. Howser. All seven rowhouses have one-story brick garages at the alley. This project does not include any alterations to the façade or the existing rear addition. Applicant planned to build a third story and roof deck over the existing house. The third-story frame addition, clad in hardie plank, will be over the existing rear addition and will open up to a roof deck over the front/main portion of the house. The roof deck will have a metal guardrail 12 feet back from the front of the house. The addition would be minimally visible from public space. The applicant also planned to demolish the east and west elevations of the one-story garage and build a new two-story garage in its place, 20 feet tall. The one-story brick garage appears to be historic and the garden/east facing elevation still retains historic integrity with two-over-two double-hung windows flanking a wooden door. The alley-facing/west elevation, clad in painted plywood with a modern garage door, no longer does retain

historic integrity. The new two-story brick garage would feature a simple symmetrical alley façade with two one-over-one double-hung windows on the second floor. There is another two-story garage on this alley. The Board has recently approved demolition of one-story garages to be replaced by new two-story garages. We believed that both sections of this project were compatible with the Capitol Hill Historic District. Over 40 neighbors objected to the project, including the alteration of the uniform one-story garage scape. While the Board found the project to be compatible, they added clarification of their support for the rear rooftop addition and requested that the applicant work with HPO Staff to make design revisions to the new garage in order to reflect the height of the existing row of garages, and delegated authority to HPO.

Consent calendar. The Board approved the following cases on the consent calendar:

- **310 9th Street SE**, HPA 22-086, concept/rear addition.
- **751 10th Street SE**, HPA 22-091, concept/two-story rear addition, two-story garage. The Board commented that the applicant should continue to work with staff to finalize the material choice for the side elevations.
- **327 Constitution Avenue NE**, HPA 22-094, concept/two-story rear addition. ★



IMAGE COURTESY BETH PURCELL

Northeast Library Turns 90

The Northeast Library (330 7th Street NE) is celebrating 90 years of library service with a weekend full of events March 11–13, including coloring to make decorations for the library, story time in the garden, birding with the Smithsonian's Bruce Beehler, a photo contest, and an outdoor concert with the band Too Much Talent.

For details and schedule visit: dclibrary.org/northeast.

Zoning and Variances

By Gary Peterson

If variances did not exist, they would have to be invented to prevent the unwanted or unfair consequences of the zoning regulations making a property unusable. However, zoning variances are the most confusing part of DC zoning law because of the confusing wording of the regulation regarding variances. 11 DCMR, subtitle X, section 10 states:

With respect to variances, the Board of Zoning Adjustment has the power under § 8 of the Zoning Act, D.C. Official Code § 6-641.07(g) (3) (formerly codified at D.C. Official Code § 5-424(g)(3) (2012 Repl.)), “[w]here, by reason of exceptional narrowness, shallowness, or shape of a specific piece of property at the time of the original adoption of the regulations, or by reason of exceptional topographical conditions or other extraordinary or exceptional situation or condition of a specific piece of property, the strict application of any regulation adopted under D.C. Official Code §§ 6-641.01 to 6-651.02 would result in peculiar and exceptional practical difficulties to or exceptional and undue hardship upon the owner of the property, to authorize, upon an appeal relating to the property, a variance from the strict application so as to relieve the difficulties or hardship; provided, that the relief can be granted without substantial detriment to the public good and without substantially impairing the intent, purpose, and integrity of the zone plan as embodied in the Zoning Regulations and Map.”

This language has not only confused the layman but also many lawyers and the BZA. (I challenge English majors to diagram the sentence and send it for publication.) The Zoning Regulations of 2016

attempted to clarify the matter by adding a section right after the general statement on variance types and the burden of proof.

First, there are two types of variances: area variances and use variances. Area variances are a request to deviate from area requirements such as size, location, height, lot occupancy and parking that are not permitted by a special exception. Use variances are a request to permit a use that is not permitted as a matter of right or as a special exception.

The burden of proof for a variance depends on whether it is a use variance or an area variance. The applicant for an area variance must prove that, because of the attributes of a specific piece of property, the strict application of a zoning regulation would result in peculiar and exceptional practical difficulties to the owner of the property.

The applicant for a use variance must prove that, because of the attributes of a specific piece of property, the strict application of a zoning regulation would result in exceptional and undue hardship upon the owner of the property.

Requests for area variances are the most common request in the RF Zone on Capitol Hill. There are three tests for an area variance: uniqueness of the property; that the uniqueness results in practical difficulties; and that the granting of the variance would not impair the public good or the intent and integrity of the zone plan and regulations.

Most applications on Capitol Hill fail for this lack of uniqueness. The proof that the attributes of the property are unique is critical for an area variance to avoid requests from similar properties. If there

Thank You, CHRS Supporters!

CHRS wishes to thank the following donors for their invaluable support:

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GENERAL DONATIONS

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Memberships

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GOLD

Kathryn Powers

are other similar properties and requests, the variance process becomes an amendment to the zoning regulations, an action reserved to the Zoning Commission and not the BZA.

“A variance, therefore, as an exception to the rule, must not be granted lightly and must arise out of an exceptional condition affecting a particular property, and not all or most similarly situated properties.” BZA Application No. 16927, Final Order, August 15, 2003.

This is enough for you to digest at one reading. Next time we will discuss uses permitted in the RF Zone. ★

the rainwater that runs quickly and directly into the Potomac and the Anacostia Rivers, control erosion, introduce plants and trees that grow in a stream environment, and promote biodiversity with “new” species of fish and birds that had once graced our urban environment.

Joe Arrowsmith explained that his team at Straughan Environmental, the DOEE project grant recipient, began their work by building an extensive mapping survey. With the help of the Library of Congress, they sorted through nine maps (from 1719 to 1917), and carefully hand-traced the location of every stream in the District.

Using geographic information system (GIS) mapping software, they created layers of maps which compare the locations of every stream and waterway so they could see exactly what had previously existed in Washington and what is now missing. A key marker was their discovery that approximately 70 percent of the city’s streams have disappeared from our landscape since 1792.

David Ramos described the District’s historic landscape, which he noted had once been much wetter. For example Ellicott’s map from 1793 features the Tiber Creek, a significant, flowing stream that once ran through the center of the city. The District’s second-largest stream after Rock Creek, Tiber Creek originated from springs, seeps, and small tributaries near the McMillan Reservoir, Park View, and the Old Soldier’s Home. The Tiber Creek watershed was originally called Goose Creek due to its abundant waterfowl.

Tiber Creek emptied into the Washington City Canal, just south of what is now the National Mall, and eventually flowed into the Potomac. Over the years, Tiber Creek brought with it all of the sediment and waste from the city. The Washington City

Canal eventually became a de facto sewer and was arched over during the 1870s.

A significant victory for public health at the time, in 1890 the District began to enclose many of its streams to create a sewer system to carry away its sanitary sewage and rain runoff. One of the major brick sewers that captured Tiber Creek still runs under South Capitol Street. It is 20 feet wide and 10 feet high.

Tiber Creek and the Washington City Canal eventually drained into James Creek which flowed into the Anacostia River between Greenleaf and Buzzard Points. Newspaper reports later complained that James Creek, once a thriving natural creek, had become a “foul steam of death” flowing out of the most populous areas of the city. James Creek was filled in around 1950 due to its unsanitary conditions and to make way for future development.

Where did the streams go? Arrowsmith explained that we buried many of them with dirt. The groundwater level was now further below the surface. We also paved over the landscape which reduced the amount of water that fed our streams. Lest we think of his vocation too harshly, Arrowsmith explained that the District engineers created ways to put every drop of water to work. The waterways provided drinking water for the population, irrigated the farmland that surrounded our city at the time, provided fire control, and provided the means to transport human waste away from the city’s neighborhoods. The District continues to have one of the most advanced sewage treatment plants in the world at Blue Plains, which was built in 1937.

During the 1970’s, the District government began separating rain and storm water from the sewage with the founding of the Environmental Protection Agency. In DC, sewage was sent to Blue Plains

for treatment, while stormwater was emptied into Rock Creek and the Anacostia River. Today, both sewage and stormwater go for treatment at Blue Plains, as we envision a day when we will be able to swim in the Anacostia.

Burch explained that in 2014, DOEE coordinated with the National Park Service to break through 1,500 linear feet of pipe to create a pathway for two watersheds of the Broad Branch River that they believed did not have to drain into pipes. This daylighting of the Broad Branch has created an incredibly lush area that includes a flowing stream, with water lilies and a walking trail for residents.

The project managers visited and examined more than 100 sites for future restoration projects, ranked all of the sites, and worked with DOEE to create a concept design for four future projects. For example, DOEE is looking at a daylighting opportunity for Stickfoot Branch which runs along Suitland Parkway and outfalls into the Anacostia River at Poplar Point. Their visioning plan will create historic tidal wetlands in Fort Dupont Park where streams will eventually meander through Anacostia Park.

A second site is a conceptual design to daylight two historic streams that once ran through the middle of the Langston Golf Course. This would solve some problems the golf course has had with the piped stream network and create a natural environment for their golfers. The northernmost stream used to run from the Arboretum property southeast to Kingman Lake. The second historic stream ran from where Spingarn High School used to be before it closed in 2013, to Kingman Lake.

Arrowsmith closed the presentation by explaining that yesterday’s engineers made these public works investments to solve the big problems of the past, such as public health, but we have many different challenges

March Guided Walking Tours—Tickets Available

By Elizabeth Nelson

Ticket sales are underway for guided walking tours on Saturday and Sunday, March 26 & 27. We'll have four showings each of the popular Architecture of Capitol Hill and Capitol Hill Alleys tours plus an updated version of the Our Industrial Past tour, which was last offered in May 2021. The cut-off date is March 24 at midnight. So if you'd like to join us—and we hope you will—please confirm your plans while there's still time. Complete information with a link to Eventbrite ticket sales is posted at: chrs.org/guided-walking-tours-march-2022. ★



IMAGES COURTESY ELIZABETH NELSON

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT: Join the Industrial Past tour to find the location of an original Piggly Wiggly; Gessford Court in September 2021; tour goers meet a Cluss Court resident in November 2021.

today, such as climate change and others. He cautioned against being constrained by the past. We should follow the lead of our predecessors and not be afraid of making big investments to create a healthier, more resilient future.

We encourage you to visit the DOEE website which includes a virtual tour of the District, with interactive maps, historical references, information about the founding of DC, artwork, photographs, articles, and newspaper clippings. You can

even type in your address to see which streams may have run through your neighborhood. You can find a direct link to the project on the DOEE website and watch the entire recording of this informative presentation at chrs.org/buried-streams-pc. ★



CHRS CELEBRATING 60 YEARS OF PRESERVATION

Capitol Hill Restoration Society
420 10th Street SE
Washington, DC 20003

Mark Your Calendar!

Please check website for current information—cancellations and postponements are expected and will be posted as they are known.

MARCH

11–13 Friday–Sunday
Northeast Library (330 7th Street NE)
celebrates 90 years of library service.
Details: dclibrary.org/northeast.

13 Sunday
Photo Contest 2022: “The Capitol Hill Home.” Entries are due Sunday, March 13, 2022. Detail: chrs.org/photo-contest-2022.

15 Tuesday, 6:30 pm
Preservation Café: *Arming a Navy: The Naval Gun Factory and Its Local Workforce*. A brief Membership Meeting will precede the talk. A Zoom link will be posted prior to the meeting. Details: chrs.org/naval-gun-factory-pc.

16 Wednesday, 6 pm
CHRS Board of Directors meeting.
Northeast Library, 330 7th Street NE,
second floor Mezzanine Room. Details:
info@chrs.org.

26/27 Saturday/Sunday
Guided Walking Tours 2022. Reservations
can be made through Eventbrite. Details:
chrs.org/guided-walking-tours-march-2022.

APRIL

19 Tuesday, 6:30 pm
Preservation Café: *Designing a Net Zero Energy Row House: a Case Study*. A Zoom link will be posted prior to the meeting. Details: chrs.org/designing-net-zero-row-house-pc.

If you received a complimentary copy of this newsletter, please consider joining CHRS!

Annual membership is \$35 and includes a subscription to the newsletter, a set of historic guidelines and early access to the Walking Tours and annual House and Garden Tour. Learn more at: chrs.org

MAY

7/8 Saturday/Sunday
Mother’s Day House & Garden Tour with a mix of virtual, in-person house tours and outdoor guided walking tours. Plans are ongoing, but preview here: chrs.org/more-house-tour-2022. Details: chrs.org/mothers-day-house-garden-tour.

17 Tuesday, 6:30 pm
Preservation Café: Removing Permastone. A Zoom link will be posted prior to the meeting. Details: chrs.org/removing-permastone-pc.