



CHRS CELEBRATING 60 YEARS OF PRESERVATION

NEWS

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December 2023/January 2024

Legislation Proposed to Protect Historic Homes

By Marci Hilt

Ward 6 Councilmember Charles Allen introduced legislation in mid-November that would protect historic homes in DC from unauthorized destruction and demolition. The *Protecting Historic Homes Amendment Act of 2023* would, depending on the severity of the violation, have fines that start at \$10,000 and not exceed \$100,000 per violation.

“Currently it appears there are no penalties or consequences for violations of building permits that result in the loss of historic homes,” said ANC6B02 Commissioner Jerry Sroufe.

“Two recent instances of historic residences being largely torn down—one in 2019 and another in 2023—are only the tip of the iceberg,” Sroufe said. “These examples of going well beyond the permitted actions are not accidental and I think they should be regarded as criminal.” Both residences were in Sroufe’s Single Member District.

Allen’s proposed legislation would create a stronger and more flexible fine system to permit the Office of Planning (OP) and Historic Preservation Review Board (HPRB) to take decisive action. The legislation would create scaled, higher fines for significant violations and provide that penalties assessed by HPRB must vary by degree of severity of the damage, up to \$100,000.

“This legislation will give DC more flexibility to enforce against bad actors for significant violations of historic preservation law,” Allen said. “Right now these companies can skirt the law and tear down history just by writing a small check to the city. And even excellent enforcement can only go so far, if the ceiling on fines for the worst behavior is about the same as a few new doors or windows.”

Nothing in the bill changes enforcement from how it exists today, Allen said.

“It instead strengthens the existing fines and allows for greater flexibility,” he said. “The current fine is very rigid and can apply equally to small, accidental violations as well as to far more egregious ones. DC’s Department of Building’s (DOB) existing enforcement process includes routine inspections as part of the permitting process—meaning an inspector will visit a site to ensure the work matches what was permitted. It also includes complaint-based reports of illegal construction. In either case, this adds more teeth to their enforcement work.”

No timeline for the proposed legislation has been set for when a hearing before the Committee of Whole might take place.

The amount of the fines in the proposed legislation have more to

do with the cost of major renovation, not the sale of the home, Allen said. “Because that’s where the damage would be done,” he said. “And with a wholesale renovation up to \$500,000, the \$100,000 could represent 20 percent of the total cost. That would be very significant.

“However,” he added, “this is also a perfect issue to discuss further during a public hearing on the bill. But it is already a significant increase on current fines, which rarely exceed \$10,000.”

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A Message from the President

The holidays are often a time for reflection and I continue to be thankful for my neighborhood. The Hill is such a special place—a small town of sorts in the shadow of the US Capitol. I am thankful that CHRS has been around since 1955 to protect and promote Capitol Hill.

CHRS continues to be the largest civic organization in Washington, DC. The public and our members are mostly aware of our public activities and programs that include:

- Annual House and Garden Tour
- The Dick Wolf Memorial Lecture
- The Fall House Expo
- Online Preservation Cafes
- Spring and Fall Walking Tours throughout the neighborhood

But there's so much work by dedicated volunteers that goes on in the background! This year we have also been involved in:

- Creating a special tour to celebrate the 150th anniversary of Eastern Market and training the tour guides
- Developing relationships and working on coalitions with other preservation groups and local Historic Districts
- Studying and commenting on proposed zoning regulations
- Attending public meetings about proposed projects by developers and District officials, such as the redesign of Union Station and potential use of the RFK site
- Researching, writing and often sponsoring the nomination proposals of historic buildings for designation to the DC Inventory of Historic Sites
- Answering any questions sent in to caphrs420@gmail.com

I believe that it is essential for CHRS to educate the public about our neighborhood so that people will appreciate it and be open to ways to preserve and protect it - not to stop progress, but to not lose our rich history in the process. The new and old can coexist if we are thoughtful and careful in planning. As we work with District and federal officials on changes to our neighborhood, it's good to know we have CHRS members on board.

We deeply appreciate your support and look forward to working for you (and the Hill) in 2024!

— Angie

To make an end-of-year tax donation, please mail your contribution to CHRS, PO Box 15264, Washington, DC 20003-0264 or visit our website at chrs.org.

Legislation, *continued from cover*

Allen said he suspects Chairman Phil Mendelson, who chairs the Council's Committee of the Whole, will be interested in exploring the issue. "But," he said, "I cannot say for sure it will move so quickly as to go into law by early 2024."

Statistical data provided by DC's Office of Planning (OP) indicates that within Ward 6 between 2018 and 2022, there were 31 instances in which permits were violated and fines assessed, Sroufe said.

"Of these cases, 12 were dismissed and 1 was rescinded after several years," he said. "Actual fines, often reduced by DC's Office of Administrative Hearings, were collected in only 11 of the 31 instances

of permit violation. Essentially there are no penalties of consequence.

And basically, DC inspectors don't or won't do anything until they get a call about unauthorized demolition."

"Clearly the process of assessing fines, and the actual fines assessed, is currently inadequate for protecting historic homes in Ward 6," Sroufe said. "The difference in the fines assessed—even at the maximum, suggest that it may now be cheaper to tear down and pay the fine than to undertake permitted restoration."

After a historic home was nearly demolished on Capitol Hill earlier in 2023, Allen learned from the DC's Office of Planning (OP) that fines imposed for violations of

DC's historic preservation laws are neither nimble nor adequate enough to account for the severity of the violation. They can easily be absorbed as a cost of doing business. Without a significant deterrent, a property owner can easily absorb the relatively minor cost of a civil infraction, which, in turn, results in a historic home being destroyed. This, of course, diminishes the historic district.

CHRS has been in touch with Allen's office regarding this bill and will be monitoring the situation closely and offering guidance. ★

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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

Zoning Report

By Nick Alberti

On November 1, 2023, five members of the CHRS Zoning Committee met to discuss three cases. Representatives from two cases participated to present their proposals. The Committee voted to support one case, to oppose one case, and to postpone decisions on one case pending receipt of further information.

BZA #20975, 1602 D Street NE. The Committee postponed a vote on the applicant's request for special exceptions for the lot occupancy requirements and the rear yard requirements to construct a rear addition to an existing, attached, two-story principal dwelling unit in the RF-1 zone.

The applicant is proposing to construct a new rear deck structure, including a staircase to the yard, and a parking space under the deck. The applicant is proposing to increase lot occupancy from 53% to 68%. The rear deck extends more than 10 ft beyond an adjacent property and will extend to within 7.5 ft of the rear property line.

The applicant has provided sun studies showing, because it is an open-air deck, that the proposed structure will not have a significant impact on the natural light or air flow of the neighbors' rear yards. The applicant has received letters of support from neighbors and has received a letter of support from ANC 7D. The BZA hearing is currently scheduled for November 29, 2023.

The committee is supportive of the required zoning relief currently articulated by the Zoning Administrator. The committee questioned whether a rear deck with no roof would qualify as a first floor addition. A first floor addition that extends more than 10 ft past an adjacent neighbor would require

relief in addition to what has been currently identified. The committee has postponed its final determination until we discover if the Zoning Administrator will treat the deck as a first floor addition which requires additional relief.

BZA #20996, 106 13th Street SE. The committee voted to oppose (1-3-1) the applicant's request for a use variance for the matter-of-right uses to expand an existing restaurant use to the second floor of a semi-detached, two-story with basement, commercial building in the RF-1 zone.

The restaurant, Pacci's, is currently operating on the ground floor and in the cellar; the second floor is vacant. They are proposing to add additional seating to the second floor (approx. 60 seats) to achieve profitability for the restaurant. Since 1990, only the first floor level of the property has been used as a restaurant; in 2022, the applicant obtained relief to use the cellar level for restaurant use, but not for the second floor.

The Committee believes that the applicant has not met the burden of proof for a use variance, which is to show that the application of the zoning regulation would result in exceptional and undue hardship upon the owner of the property and would not cause substantial detriment to public good. The second floor could reasonably be used as a residence, its original and past use. The property is located on a densely populated residential block on a lot with limited capacity for trash. The additional trash from expanded restaurant capacity would cause substantial detriment to the neighborhood environs. The BZA hearing is scheduled for December 6, 2023.

Continued page 7

Historic Preservation Briefs

By Beth Purcell

Interested in learning more about historic district designation?

Contact CHRS at info@chrs.org.

The Historic Preservation Review Board (HPRB or the Board), considered the following case at its virtual hearing on November 2, 2023. 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.

5 Walter Houp Court NE, HPA 23-507.

This alley dwelling was built in two sections:

- 1) A rear section, a stable, designed by William B. Webster and built in 1907 by W. A. Greer for Cecila R. Greer.
- 2) A section fronting on the alley, built between 1909 and 1919, and modified in the 1960s, 1970s or 1980s, with a garage opening, door and two windows on the ground floor, awning windows on the upper floor, and on the roof, a roof access structure, deck, and solar panels.

Both sections are contributing. There is a public alley on three sides. The applicants plan to renovate the existing roof deck, relocate the roof stair access, add a stairwell enclosure, remove the spiral stairs, install new stairs and a dumbwaiter.

The staff report notes that no permits could be found for the existing features, which are very visible and not compatible with the Capitol Hill Historic District. The Board agreed and found the proposed alterations for visible roof structures incompatible with the Capitol Hill Historic District. ★



IMAGE COURTESY BETH PURCELL

The alley dwelling at 5 Walter Houp Court NE.

Photo Contest: “The Capitol Hill Home”

By Elizabeth Nelson

Again this year, CHRS is sponsoring a photo contest to spark excitement about our annual House & Garden Tour: It’s always a treat to see the images that exemplify your vision of what makes a home a “Capitol Hill Home.” Certainly, there are plenty of photogenic subjects.

We’re privileged to live in an environment that is a delight to the eye, with tree shaded streets, lush gardens, yard ornaments, and houses with a wealth of architectural detail. Iron stoops, arched windows, stained glass transoms, ornate brickwork, welcoming porches.... Can’t decide which image you like best? Send your favorites and let us be the judges.

Email your high resolution images (> 1MB), exterior shots only, to HouseTourCHRS@gmail.com; cell phone photos can be texted to (202) 329-7864. Be sure to include your name and address, email address, and the address of the property in the photo. The winner will be awarded two complimentary passes to the 2024 House Tour. If you need inspiration, please visit chrs.org/photo-contest-2024 for details and links to past winning entries.

Entries are due Friday, March 8, 2024. Early notice gives you more time to take that winning shot—and our next newsletter doesn’t come out until February.

February Preservation Café: Restoring and Re-imagining Capitol Hill's Southeast Library

By Chris Mullins

Join CHRS as Jaspreet Pahwa, director of capital planning and construction, and Martha Saccocio, director of community engagement for DC Public Library, discuss the renovation of Capitol Hill's historic Southeast Library on February 27, 2024, at 6:30 pm.

On January 4, the Southeast Library will close for a multi-year, \$33 million renovation that will modernize, expand, and restore parts of the historic library, one of the oldest in the DC Public Library system. The work will go through 2026.

The Southeast Neighborhood Library was constructed in 1922. Designed by renowned library architect Edward L. Tilton, it was funded by American industrialist and philanthropist Andrew Carnegie. In March 2021, the DC Historic Preservation Board designated the Library as a historic landmark.

The library has served the Capitol Hill community for more than 100 years. Given its age and evolved community needs, the qualitative and quantitative improvements will expand the two-floor, 8,500-square-foot historic structure to a three-floor, 19,900-square-foot library, maximizing the footprint of the library above ground and below grade. The modernization will preserve, rehabilitate, and re-interpret the historic site and create a new universally-accessible public entry at ground level with meeting spaces.

We hope to see you online! ★

CHRS Preservation Cafés are free to members and non-members. Register to attend at chrs.org/category/chrs-activities/preservation-cafes.

More Upcoming Preservation Cafés

March

To Be Announced
Tuesday, March 26 at 6:30 pm

April

To Be Announced
Tuesday, April 23 at 6:30 pm

May

The Story of Capitol Hill's Historic Eastern High School
Jen Harris, Executive Director / Founder, and Erin Roth, Development Director, The Story of Our Schools
Tuesday, May 28 at 6:30 pm

IMAGE COURTESY ELIZABETH NELSON



The historic Southeast Library will close on January 4, 2024 for a multi-year renovation.

New Historic Landmarks on Capitol Hill

By Beth Purcell

The PNC Bank (originally the Northeast Savings Bank) at 800 H Street NE has been added to the DC Inventory of Historic Sites. DC Preservation League and CHRS sponsored the nomination.

The bank building was built as a bank in 1921 and has continued as a bank. It was designed by the well-known architect B. Stanley Simmons, and has classical elements, similar to many banks built from 1900 into the 1920s. The bank was built to serve the needs of the expanding H Street community and weathered



IMAGE COURTESY BETH PURCELL

B. Stanley Simmons



B. Stanley Simmons (1872–1931) was one of the leading architects in Washington for 40 years, noted for his apartment houses, hotels, and banks. Simmons was born in Charles County, MD and moved to Washington at age 10. He studied architecture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, returned to Washington after graduation and began designing rowhouses, including several on Capitol Hill: 1345–1363

Constitution Avenue NE (1892) and 300 F Street NE, and 601–607 3rd Street NE (1894).

By age 26 he had moved on to designing apartment buildings. His first apartment building was the Arno, 1035 20th Street NW (1897) (demolished). In 1900, Simmons began designing apartment buildings for the developer Lester A. Barr at 1400 M Street, NW (demolished), and 1326-1328 and 1330-1332 U Street NW. Simmons also designed apartment buildings for Barr's business partner, Franklin T. Sanner. Barr and Sanner engaged Simmons to design the Wyoming Apartments at 2022 Columbia Road NW (1905-1911). Simmons designed the DuPont, 1717 20th Street NW (1902); The Embassy, 1613 Harvard Street, NW (1924); and Highview Mount Pleasant and Argonne Streets NW for Herman R. Howenstein (1925); and Highview and Castle Manor on 13th Street NW (both in 1925). Simmons also designed hotels, such as the Randolph Hotel, 14th Street and Pennsylvania Avenue NW (1907, demolished), and the Fairfax Hotel (later the Ritz Carlton Hotel), 2100 Massachusetts Avenue NW (1921). Simmons's other noted buildings include the Barr Building (1926) on Farragut Square NW, and the Jewish Community Center on 16th Street, NW (1926).

The H Street PNC Bank building, designed by B. Stanley Simmons, has been added to the DC Inventory of Historic Sites.

economic crises from the Depression to the riots following the death of Dr. Martin Luther King, a long period of disinvestment after the riots, and eventual recovery.

In other local news, Eastern High School, nominated by CHRS to be placed on the DC Inventory of Historic Sites earlier in the year, has now been added to the National Register of Historic Places. For prior coverage see CHRS News (September 2023). And the Buchanan School Plaza/Peter Bug Shoe Academy, 1320 E Street, SE, entered as a landmark on the D.C. Inventory of Historic Sites in 2022, has now been added to the National Register of Historic Places. CHRS supported this nomination. ★

ILLUSTRATION COURTESY DC PUBLIC LIBRARY DIGITAL ARCHIVES

Updated Design for 601 Massachusetts Avenue NE

By Beth Purcell

Located on a corner at a major intersection, 601 Massachusetts Avenue NE occupies a very visible location. This one-story masonry building, most recently occupied by a drycleaner, was built as a store in 1954 and was a noncontributing building. HPRB allows noncontributing buildings to be demolished and replaced with new construction.¹

The developer originally proposed to add two stories to the drycleaner's building. Traditionally,

Capitol Hill builders lavished special attention on their corner buildings, adding towers, witches' hats or bayfronts. We believed that the developer's first design was a missed opportunity to add a memorable building at this corner.

Recently constructed corner buildings show the possibilities to enhance a corner location:

- Butterfield House Condominiums, 1020 Pennsylvania Avenue, SE (2008, Sassan Gharai)
 - 518 C Street, NE (1990, Amy Weinstein).
- 1 504 C Street NE (built in 1981, razed in 2017). HPA 17-122. 810 C Street NE, razed, HPA 21-416.

HPRB approved the developer's request to demolish the drycleaners and construct a new three-story brick building with a corner element. For prior coverage, see the May 2023 issue of CHRS *News*.



LEFT: Current one-story drycleaner building at 601 Massachusetts Avenue NE. RIGHT: Proposed new building with corner element.

Zoning Report, *continued from page 3*

BZA #21027, 630 G Street SE. The Committee voted to support (5-0-0) the applicant's request for special exceptions for the penthouse requirements, the side yard requirements, and the height requirements to construct a new three-story rear addition, and penthouse with roof deck, to an existing detached, three-story flat in the RF-1 zone contingent on the support of two adjacent neighbors.

The Committee notes that the building is currently a non-conforming structure. The existing

height is 42ft. The existing roof will be lowered by two feet so that the height of the penthouse will be 46' 6½". The proposed small penthouse will serve as an entry to a roof deck stairway. The side yard is also non-conforming and will not be affected by the addition.

The committee concluded that the shadow studies provided by the architect were not helpful toward alleviating its concerns about the effects of light on neighboring properties. The committee recommends support provided that

the two most affected neighbors are satisfied that shadows produced by the new addition are not a substantial concern. The BZA hearing is scheduled for January 31, 2024. ★

November Preservation Café: Designing and Creating a Private Garden

By Christine Mullins

November 28 was a cold and blustery day in Washington—perfect for enjoying a relaxing and inspirational presentation on how to design the perfect garden by Claudia Kousoulas, author of *Private Gardens of the Potomac & Chesapeake* (Schiffer, 2023).

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Kousoulas shared the welcoming and colorful photographs of her book, which is part of a series on regionalism and sustainability in landscape design. The book features the many different environments in the Washington region—from the green space of our smaller, urban gardens to engaging suburban environments to complex rural landscapes and waterfront estates. She hopes attendees can apply some of these same ideas of symmetry, lines, balance, and color to their own private gardens, regardless of their size.

She discussed the unseen engineering in most gardens that must solve practical issues such as drainage from rainwater. Kousoulas pointed to the structural elements that support one of the first green roofs in the country, which Lisa Delplace of Oehme Van Sweden, OvS, created in Georgetown. Other landscape architects have since adopted the OvS style, which features a natural, painterly, layered approach with native plants and wildflowers for artistry, habitat and sustainability.

Kousoulas showed how the designers of the OSLOatlas coliving apartments at 1219 Florida Avenue NE, incorporated light and natural elements to transform concrete areas into a peaceful urban sanctuary.

Designers adopted a more traditional style when they repurposed the abandoned Chapman Stables, a former stopping point



for travelers to park their horses at 57 N Street NW, into trendy but clearly historic condominiums with a stunning herringbone brick entryway.

She later noted how the wrought iron fences that surround many of our gardens on Capitol Hill signal that this is where people live. Entry is a key element, dividing our public, semi-public, and private spaces.

Kousoulas said landscape designers bring their expertise and fine eye to each project – ensuring water protection for the Chesapeake Bay, creating habitats with a palette of native plants, creating visually arresting environments, and fitting gardens into historic communities. Each one upends our expectations for residential gardens.

You can access the recorded presentation link at chrs.org/designing-garden-pc.

CHRS Preservation Cafés are free to CHRS members and non-members.

The 2024 House & Garden Tour Begins to Take Shape

By Fynnette Eaton, Jackie Krieger and Angie Schmidt

It's never too early to start thinking about the 2024 House and Garden Tour. We have started meeting with interested homeowners and reaching out to intriguing houses in the neighborhood—we think the area will be situated around the 700–1000 block of East Capitol, with homes in the immediate blocks in both NE and SE.

Are you in that area and have ever considered having your home on the Tour? Or have you undertaken some new projects and renovations and are really happy

with them? Maybe your garden or outdoor living space has blossomed in the last few years? Reach out and we would be happy to visit to discuss the Tour.

We also will be looking for docents and house captains for the Tour—they are the reason we are able to protect the properties and manage the crowds. All volunteers are able to visit the other homes when they aren't working, so please consider helping out and block off your calendar for May 11th and 12th, 2024. ☆

Sidewalk Talk

By Libby Quaid

What were Capitol Hill's earliest sidewalks paved with? The answer appears to be "everything"! Welcome to another edition of Sidewalk Talk, an occasional look at how sidewalks developed in DC.

Sidewalks and roads were paved during the explosive growth of the city after the Civil War. An 1894 Washington Post article announced the opening of bids for brick, asphalt, tile and block, vitrified brick and vitrified block sidewalks. (Vitrified means converted to a stronger glassy substance with heat.)

The Post in 1888 reported on "a new kind of sidewalk," made of square and hexagonal asphalt block. "The old-fashioned brick footways are slowly being replaced by pavements of a better character and appearance through private enterprise, but there is no style of pavement known to District authorities that they would adopt

as the official sidewalk, as it were, because those that would be tolerably satisfactory are too expensive."

We've been trying to figure out why different materials were used in different parts of the city but haven't reached a conclusion. We did find a Post notice from 1889 in which Mr. A.T. Kingsley was reported to

have been denied a petition to get the city to lay brick pavement on the sidewalk in front of 927 and 929 Louisiana Avenue NW. "The Commissioners have replied that brick sidewalks cannot be laid in that section of the city. He can lay an asphalt block pavement there at his own expense if he desires to." ☆

Know a Sidewalk In Need of Repair?

CHRS is partnering with the Capitol Hill Village to address unsafe sidewalk conditions. You can help the CHV Sidewalk Safety Team by taking a picture of dangerous brick conditions, labeling it with the closest house address (number, street, quadrant), and sending it to CHVpedestriansafety@gmail.com. A team member will respond. Capitol Hill Village will file complaints in the DC 311 system and track the repairs through completion. Thank you for helping to make our sidewalks safer!



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 or postponements will be posted as they are known.



CHRS CELEBRATING 60 YEARS OF PRESERVATION

DECEMBER

20 Wednesday, 6 pm
Board meeting, Northeast Library,
330 7th Street NE.

JANUARY

2 Tuesday, 6:30 pm
Historic Preservation Committee meeting,
420 10th Street SE, first floor.

3 Wednesday, 7 pm
Zoning Committee Meeting,
Kirby House, 420 10th Street SE.

17 Wednesday, 6 pm
Board meeting, Northeast Library,
330 7th Street NE.

FEBRUARY

5 Monday, 6:30 pm
Historic Preservation Committee meeting,
420 10th Street SE, first floor.

7 Wednesday, 7 pm
Zoning Committee Meeting,
Kirby House, 420 10th Street SE.

21 Wednesday, 6 pm
Board meeting, Northeast Library,
330 7th Street NE.

27 Tuesday, 6:30 pm
Preservation Café, “Restoring and
Reimagining Capitol Hill’s Southeast
Library.” Virtual presentation. Details:
chrs.org/selibrary-renovation-pc.

MARCH

4 Monday, 6:30 pm
Historic Preservation Committee meeting,
420 10th Street SE, first floor.

6 Wednesday, 7 pm
Zoning Committee Meeting, Kirby
House, 420 10th Street SE.

8 Friday
Entries due for 2024 Capitol Hill Home
Photo Contest. Details: chrs.org/photo-contest-2024.

20 Wednesday, 6 pm
Board meeting, Northeast Library
330 7th Street NE.



Please consider joining CHRS! Annual membership is only \$35 and includes the newsletter, a set of historic guidelines, and early access to events, including our annual House and Garden Tour. Scan this QR code or visit chrs.org for more information.