



# COLONY HILL HISTORIC DISTRICT DESIGN GUIDELINES



DC HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD





## INTRODUCTION

Colony Hill is proposed for designation as an historic district to be listed on the DC Inventory of Historic Sites and in the National Register of Historic Places. In an historic district, work requiring a D.C. building permit, such as exterior alterations, new construction, demolition, and subdivisions, is subject to a design review process under the D.C. historic preservation law. The purpose of the law is to ensure that such work preserves important character-defining features of historic properties and is compatible with the character of the historic district.

These guidelines have been developed to assist property owners in understanding the principles and practices of preserving and compatibly altering and adding to buildings in the Colony Hill Historic District. Guidelines seek to identify the important architectural characteristics of historic properties that should be retained during renovation projects, while also providing assurance to property owners that those alterations that do not affect important features will be allowed. They are intended to provide clarity, transparency and predictability to the decision-making process for property owners. These guidelines supplement the policies established by the city's preservation law, regulations and standards. In instances where policies within these district guidelines may differ from city-wide policies, the historic district guidelines shall take precedence.

These guidelines seek to provide flexibility in the application of design principles in a manner appropriate to the neighborhood and its history. Their focus is on maintaining the physical features that are most fundamental to the community's character while allowing substantial freedom in the treatment of less-significant features.

## PRESERVATION REVIEW

The city's preservation review process is administered by the D.C. Historic Preservation Office (HPO), a division of the Office of Planning, which has a professional staff of architects and preservation specialists who can provide architectural and technical assistance on products and methods appropriate to the renovation of older properties. Property owners are encouraged to consult informally with the HPO before submitting a building permit application for exterior work. The staff can approve most types of work, such as in-kind repair and replacement and minor alterations, in an expedited "over-the-counter" permit review process.

More substantial work, such as new construction or large additions, is subject to review by the D.C. Historic Preservation Review Board (HPRB). The HPRB meets monthly to consider these larger cases. HPO can provide guidance and direction on preparing for submission of a project for the Board's review.

*For further information and full texts of the preservation law and regulations, visit the DC Historic Preservation Office at 1100 4<sup>th</sup> Street, SW, Suite 650, or see the website: <http://preservation.dc.gov>.*

## PRESERVATION GOALS AND PRINCIPLES

The city's preservation law describes the public purposes of preservation and establishes the standards for the review of work affecting historic properties. These include **retaining and enhancing** historic properties, **ensuring that changes are compatible**, and **encouraging adaptation** of historic property for current use.

Design guidelines establish the principles applied for achieving these purposes. In giving more specific advice, these guidelines also reflect several well-established considerations applied in the design and review of work affecting historic property.

These considerations include:

### ***Visibility or prominence from the street.***

Changes to historic property that are visible to the public are more likely to affect a property's character or the character of the historic district. As a general rule, changes that are prominently visible from a street should be more carefully considered, while greater flexibility should be given for changes that are minimally visible or not visible from the street.

### ***Primary vs. Secondary Elevations***

Alterations to primary building elevations are more likely to affect a property's character than those undertaken on secondary elevations. Primary elevations are those that face a street or public open space or possess a significant architectural composition or features. A secondary elevation is one that does not face a street and does not possess significant architectural features. Alterations and additions to secondary elevations, particularly for rowhouses, are not uncommon and often necessary for the adaptation of buildings for current use.

### ***Temporary and additive change vs. permanent and destructive change:***

Alterations that are temporary or easily reversible have less of a lasting impact on the character of historic property, while alterations that permanently change or remove features have a greater impact. Adding a new element – while retaining significant characteristics – is a better preservation solution than destroying and replacing characteristic features.

***Contextual and compatible design:*** The design of features on historic property should display an awareness of and response to the specific qualities of the property and its environment.

***Quality of design and materials:*** Historic buildings often display a high quality of design and materials that should be retained.

Additions and alterations to historic property should exhibit this tradition of building excellence.

***Achieving a reasonable balance:*** Adapting old buildings requires a thoughtful consideration of practical needs and the civic benefits of protecting architectural and historical characteristics valued by the community.

## SIGNIFICANCE AND CHARACTER OF COLONY HILL

Colony Hill is a distinctive early 20<sup>th</sup> century planned residential subdivision located in the Foxhall neighborhood of Washington DC. It is bounded by Reservoir Road on the south, Foxhall Road on the west, Glover-Archbold Park on the east, and the rear lot lines of houses along Hoban Road on the north. The neighborhood is distinctive as an intact and cohesive collection of single-family Colonial Revival detached houses set within a naturalistic designed landscape.

The district includes a total of 50 single family houses, 37 of which are contributing (constructed between 1931-1941) and 13 of which are non-contributing (constructed between 1960-2015). Despite their later construction, the non-contributing buildings exhibit many of the same design qualities as the contributing buildings.

Colony Hill was developed by the real estate firm of Boss & Phelps, who initially worked with architect Horace Peaslee and landscape architect Rose Greely in designing the subdivision between 1931-1933. From 1934-1941, Harvey P. Baxter served as lead architect and Rock Creek Nurseries was the chief landscape consultant for the development.

The houses in Colony Hill were mostly designed in the Colonial Revival style and exhibit a consistency of material treatment and architectural styling that results in an aesthetic cohesiveness that characterizes the subdivision. The houses feature simple rectangular two or two-and-one-half-story main blocks, some of which have attached side wings, many of which incorporate garages. Additions are typically confined to the rear elevations, are largely hidden from street view, and are subordinate in scale relative to the main block.

Colony Hill contains no standardized or repetitive designs; each house is an original composition, reflecting the aesthetics of the Colonial Revival style based on the architects' knowledge of early

American architecture. Notable Colonial Revival details include accented main entrance surrounds, cornice detailing, and regular arrangement of double-hung, wood-sash windows, usually with six-over-six, or eight-over-eight configurations. Primary entrances often are accented with sidelights and transoms and/or have classical entablatures adorned with pilasters and pediments.

The more ornate houses have high-style classical elements, such as molded wood cornices with modillions and dentils, limestone belt and sill courses, quoining, Palladian windows, and entrance porticos with classical columns.

The houses are set back from the sidewalks with generous front and side yards and the district's streets are lined by large mature trees, providing a natural canopy that contributes to its suburban feel. The five curvilinear streets follow the contours of the natural topography, which varies across the subdivision. As a result, some houses are set at-grade while others are elevated above street level and feature brick retaining walls.



## DESIGN REVIEW PRINCIPLES

The Colony Hill Historic District design guidelines seek to recognize and preserve the important aspects of the neighborhood and its history, while also recognizing that it is a neighborhood that will continue to evolve. The guidelines are based on the following overarching characteristics and principles:

1. Colony Hill represents a prime example in Washington, D.C. of a 20<sup>th</sup> century planned residential subdivision, unified by its Colonial Revival-inspired architecture and set in a designed naturalistic landscape setting. The district's architecture and landscape work together to create a harmonious and visually distinctive community that retains a high degree of integrity. Alterations to the architecture and landscape should be carefully managed to retain the district's integrity.

2. Colony Hill features outstanding examples of the Colonial Revival style, one of the most popular forms of domestic architecture in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Colony Hill's developer, Boss & Phelps, worked with nationally renowned architect Horace Peaslee and local architect Harvey Baxter to develop a picturesque community in the revivalist aesthetic. The houses possess many Colonial Revival character-defining features, in many cases based on historic precedents and applied academically. The architectural character and original features of the neighborhood's historic buildings should be preserved, and alterations should be respectful to the specific character of Colony Hill.

3. Colony Hill's site and landscape plans were designed by landscape architect Rose Greely and Rock Creek Nurseries to be an integral aspect of the neighborhood's character. The subdivision's plan features curvilinear streets lined by mature street trees and houses set back from the streets on generous lots with open front yards. The original landscape

designs for each house are still reflected in the interplay of lawns, terraces, and trees framed and organized through the use of paths, gates, retaining walls, fences, ornamental lamp posts, and winding steps. The landscape imparts a harmonious, natural, suburban ambiance to the neighborhood that should be preserved.

4. The non-contributing houses in Colony Hill were designed to relate to the Colonial Revival character of the neighborhood and exhibit design features and quality materials consistent with the historic houses. While these non-contributing buildings are not specifically protected under the district designation and original features do not have to be retained, alterations to non-contributing buildings should be compatible with the overall character of the district.

## BUILDING FEATURES

### 1.0 *Walls*

The houses of Colony Hill feature exterior walls of natural red or painted brick or painted clapboard wood siding. Window openings are punctuated with brick or stone sills and lintels, and doors are trimmed with brick, stone or wood framing elements. The houses are freestanding with side and rear elevations finished in the same materials as the front.

- 1.1 No permit or preservation review is required to paint. Painted buildings can be re-painted and any unpainted building can be painted. However, painting unpainted masonry is discouraged as these materials have visual and material qualities that contribute to the visual continuity of the neighborhood and, once painted, will require regular maintenance and repainting.
- 1.2 Masonry walls should be repointed with mortar that replicates the color, texture and tooling of original mortar. Mortar for spot pointing should match and maintain visual continuity with adjacent mortar.
- 1.3 Original brick, stone and wood surfaces should remain uncovered. Applying siding or stucco over an original wall surface is not permitted.
- 1.4 Decorative masonry and wood wall features, such as window and door lintels, sills, cornices and door surrounds, should be maintained and repaired. Decorative wall features should not be removed or covered over with alternative materials.
- 1.5 If deteriorated beyond repair, wall surfaces and features should be replaced to match the original condition using the same materials. Substitute materials may be used only

if they match the visual appearance of the original.

- 1.6 Alteration or removal of wall finishes – such as for an addition – should generally be limited to rear elevations that are not visible from public street view.

### 2.0 *Roofs*

The roofs of houses in Colony Hill typically consist of simple gabled or hipped forms clad in slate. Many houses have small gabled dormer windows, and most roofs are punctuated by a prominent brick chimney.

- 2.1 Original roof forms, dormers, chimneys, and other roof features that contribute to a property's architectural character should be preserved and maintained. Removal of character-defining roof features other than for repair or in-kind reconstruction is not permitted.
- 2.2 Replacement of deteriorated roof materials should replicate the pattern, color, scale, finish and visual appearance of the original roof material. Replication of the original material is encouraged but substitute materials may be used if they match the visual qualities of the original.
- 2.3 New dormers should be located on secondary elevations and replicate the form, size, scale, detailing and materials of dormers on stylistically similar buildings in the neighborhood.
- 2.4 Skylights, mechanical and communications equipment should be placed on rear elevations so that they are not prominently visible from street view.
- 2.5 If possible, solar equipment should be installed on rear elevations. If it is necessary to install panels on a front-facing elevation, they should be low profile, set flush with the roof, and blend with the color of the underlying roof. The use of a solar skin or

shingles that match the texture and appearance of the roof is encouraged.

### **3.0 Windows**

The windows on houses in Colony Hill are primarily wood, multi-pane double hung sash, with occasional decorative fixed or casement windows also found. Almost all houses retain their original windows in very good condition.

- 3.1** Original windows that are prominently visible from street view should be retained unless they are deteriorated beyond the point of reasonable repair.
- 3.2** Expanding window openings or blocking them down in size is not permitted on elevations that are prominently visible from street view.
- 3.3** Replacement windows on prominently visible elevations should replicate the appearance of original windows. Replacement windows should fit properly within the original openings, replicate the pane configuration, dimensions and profiles of the sash, framing elements and muntins, and match the finish and visual qualities of the historic windows. Replication of the original material is encouraged but alternative materials are permitted if they replicate the appearance of the original windows.
- 3.4** Altering original window openings on elevations that are not prominently visible from street view is permitted if the new window openings are proportional to the scale of the house.
- 3.5** Replacement windows on elevations that are not prominently visible from street view should be compatible in scale and general size with the character of the house but precise replication of original conditions is not required.
- 3.6** Original wood shutters should be retained unless they are deteriorated beyond the point of reasonable repair.

Replacement shutters should be wood and installed on operable hinges.

- 3.6** Storm windows and insect screens are permitted and installation of these elements does not require a building permit or preservation approval.

*For more information, see "Window Repair and Replacement: Preservation and Design Guidelines"*

<https://planning.dc.gov/node/936492>

### **4.0 Doors**

Front doors in Colony Hill are typically paneled wood. Most doors are solid without glass panes. Many houses feature transoms and/or sidelights and decorative surrounds in wood, brick or stone that are important Colonial Revival character-defining features.

- 4.1** Original front doors, sidelights, and transoms should be retained unless they are deteriorated beyond the point of reasonable repair.
- 4.2** Expanding or reducing the width of a front door opening is not permitted.
- 4.3** Replacement front doors, sidelights and transom windows should replicate the appearance of the original features in appearance, material and detailing. Replication of the original material(s) is encouraged but alternative material are permitted if they replicate the appearance of the original features.
- 4.4** The size, material and appearance of replacement doors on elevations that are not prominently visible from a street are not required to match the original appearance but should be proportional in size and scale with the house. Door openings on these elevations may be expanded or reduced in size, and new openings created.
- 4.5** Installation of storm and screen doors is allowed and does not require a building permit or preservation review.



- 4.6 Garage doors that face or are visible from street view should be multi-paneled and convey the appearance of a traditional Colonial Revival wood garage door.

*For more information, see “Door Repair and Replacement for Historic Properties” (<https://planning.dc.gov/node/1323021>).*

## 5.0 **Additions**

The houses of Colony Hill consist of carefully composed masses of simple forms. With few exceptions, additions have typically been made only to the rears of buildings.

- 5.1 Additions should be distinguishable and clearly subordinate in height, footprint and overall size to the main mass(es) of the house.
- 5.2 Additions that are visible from street view should be designed with careful attention to the overall massing, scale, materials and detailing of the house and context. Greater design flexibility will be permitted for additions that are not visible from street view.
- 5.3 Rooftop additions are not permitted.

## 6.0 **Secondary Buildings**

With the exception of small rear yard garden sheds, secondary buildings are not common in Colony Hill. Garages are almost uniformly attached to houses.

- 6.1 Small rear yard storage sheds should be cited to minimize visibility from public streets.
- 6.2 New free-standing garages are not permitted.

## 7.0 **Non-Contributing Buildings and New Construction**

The non-contributing buildings in Colony Hill express many of the same design qualities, materials, and stylistic details as the contributing buildings. While they do not contribute to the district’s history by virtue of their more recent age, they do relate and

reinforce the neighborhood’s aesthetic and visual continuity. At the time of historic district designation, there are no vacant sites or opportunities for new construction.

- 7.1 Alterations to non-contributing buildings should be compatible with the context of the neighborhood and ensure visual continuity with the district’s contributing buildings.

- 7.2 While it is not required to retain original features on non-contributing buildings, replacement features should be consistent with the materials, proportions, scale, and detailing of the neighborhood.

- 7.2 If a non-contributing building is proposed for replacement, new construction should be designed to relate to the specific context of the Colony Hill Historic District and be compatible in height, massing, proportions, scale, fenestration, façade composition, materials, and detailing with the character of neighborhood’s contributing buildings.

*For more information, see “New Construction in Historic Districts” (<https://planning.dc.gov/node/594262>)*

## 8.0 **Site and Landscape Features**

The open planted yards that surround the houses in Colony Hill provide a unifying landscaped setting to the district. Site features include front walks, stairs, driveways and retaining walls finished in brick, stone or concrete. Front yards have rolling, naturalistic grades and are open without enclosing fences.

- 8.1 Existing masonry steps, walkways and retaining walls in front yards should be preserved, maintained, and repaired. Removal of original masonry site features in front yards, other than for repair or in-kind reconstruction, is not permitted.

- 8.2 If replacement is necessary, front walks and driveways should be recreated to replicate the existing location, width and overall dimensions of the original condition. New walks or driveways or expanding the width or amount of paving for a reconstructed front walk or driveway is not permitted.
- 8.3 Front walks and driveways should be repaved either to replicate original materials or be of brushed aggregate concrete, natural local stone, brick or interlocking pavers. Asphalt is not permitted.
- 8.4 Front and side yards that are visible from street view should remain open, naturalistic planted green space. Existing grades and topography should be retained.
- 8.5 Fences in front and side yards that abut a street are not permitted. Side and rear yard fences are permitted if set behind the front corners of the house.
- 8.6 New retaining walls may be permitted if necessary to retain existing grades and should be consistent in materials, height and scale with the subject property and streetscape.
- 8.7 New basement stairs, basement window wells, at-grade patios or other paved site features should be located on side or rear elevations where they are not prominently visible from street view.
- 8.8 Replacing or adding metal handrails, even if the stairs did not have them originally, is permitted. New metal handrails should be simple and unornamented in design.

## **BUILDING PERMIT REVIEW**

### ***Work Subject to Review***

Exterior work in the Colony Hill Historic District that requires a DC building permit is

subject to historic preservation design review. Interior work, whether it requires a building permit or not, is not subject to historic preservation design review unless such work affects a building's structural system or support members. The below types of work require a building permit and are thus subject to historic preservation review:

- Roof replacement
- Masonry repair and repointing
- Window and door replacement
- Fences, retaining walls and paving
- Exterior mechanical equipment
- Additions and new construction
- Other exterior alterations

### ***Work Not Subject to Review***

The following work on property in the Colony Hill Historic District is not subject to historic preservation design review:

- Interior alterations, except those involving substantial structural demolition;
- Painting and paint colors;
- Installing window screens, storm windows, security bars, and removable window air conditioning units;
- Landscaping, including planting, maintenance, or removal of trees and shrubs. However, before removing trees, owners should consult with the DC Department of Transportation's Urban Forestry Division ([www.ddot.dc.gov/ufa](http://www.ddot.dc.gov/ufa));
- Impermanent and moveable site features not requiring a foundation, including outdoor furniture, play equipment, seasonal displays, and garden sculpture or ornaments.

Permit applications can be downloaded from the DC Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs website ([www.dcr.dc.gov](http://www.dcr.dc.gov)), and homeowners seeking their own permits can take advantage of expedited service at the

Homeowner Center at the DCRA Permit Office at 1100 4<sup>th</sup> Street, SW on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor (Waterfront Metro). To discuss a project with Historic Preservation Office staff prior to applying for a permit, please call HPO at 442-8800 to speak to a preservation specialist.

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