
**HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD
STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION**

Landmark/District: **1644-1662 Park Road NW/Mount Pleasant Historic District**
Address: **1656-1658 Park Road NW** (x) Agenda
Meeting Date: **July 25, 2019** (x) Alteration
Case Number: **19-402** (x) Permit

The applicant, property owner 1656-58 Park LLC, requests the Board’s review of an application for approval of exterior work after the fact. The work includes the replacement of the slate roofing on the houses’ mansards with faux slate and the paving of most of the front yard with flagstones.

Background

These properties contain two three-story semidetached houses that were originally single-family dwellings. They are two of a dozen—1644 to 1662 Park Road—erected in 1906 by Osterman and Butler to designs by prominent D.C. architect Appleton P. Clark, Jr. The Colonial Revival/Free-Classic Revival homes were collectively designated a historic landmark in 1984 and were listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1986.

Housing demand during the Great Depression and World War II induced conversions to two or more units in every house before 1960. Much of the block is now zoned for apartments. The present owner purchased the two subject properties in January 2018.

In March and April, the Board reviewed a garage addition at and subdivision (consolidation) of these properties. That case required staff visits to the property, at which time the recent alterations were noted. In anticipation of the Board’s review of that case and aware of the staff’s recommendation with regard to roofing, on March 29, the applicant obtained permits to correct the roofing at the front of the houses:

Replace slate and roof trim on the mansard at the front of the house, correcting unpermitted replacement with faux slate. The replacement slate shall be gray-colored true slates, to match the color, cut, width and exposure/coursing that was on the roof originally, as seen in the Google Streetview photos of July 2017 and earlier, and as on the contemporaneous neighboring houses at 1660-1662 Park Road.

Because the roofing permits were for corrective work, the work was given a completion deadline of 60 days after issuance, a period that expired at the end of May without the work being accomplished.

In April, the Board recommended approval of the garage addition and subdivision, conditioned

upon these two alterations being corrected.¹ The applicant has instead requested approval of the previously unpermitted alterations as-is.

No building-permit application has been opened for the re-roofing as already performed, and no public-space application has been opened for the front-yard paving.

Roofing

The slates on the mansard roofs were replaced with faux slate, front and rear. HPO would not have supported or cleared such roofing on the *front* of the building, because it is so prominent, and the faux slates can be easily picked out in comparison to the real ones next door, for differences in color, finish and dimension. This row not only contributes to the character of the Mount Pleasant Historic District, but it is a landmark. The preservation law expressly encourages the restoration of landmarks.² HPO considered the correction of just the front to be a reasonable compromise. There is not so much roof surface at the front of the building that the use of real slate there would have been cost-prohibitive in comparison to faux-slate products.



Paving

The front had straight-run concrete lead walks and steps, bisecting grassed yards, consistent with the rest of the row. Previous owners, rather than repairing or replacing the century-old walks, stuck flagstones over them and installed similar stepping stones as a walk around the buildings.

¹ The Board recommended approval of the project on its consent calendar, subject to the conditions set forth in the staff report, including “*that the unpermitted work at the properties be corrected, specifically that:*

6. the restoration of true slate to the front roof—to match the color, cut, dimensions and coursing/exposure of the original slates—be carried out by May 28 or be subject to HPO enforcement action; and

7. that the removal of the new paving from the front yard be carried out under a separate permit, to be cleared by HPO before or concurrent with the clearance of the subdivision and the addition permit.”

² D.C. Official Code § 6-1101(b)(2)(b).



The latter is consistent with the historic preservation design guidelines, the former is not, in this instance, because nearly all of the lead walks in Mount Pleasant were concrete.³

Now, nearly the entire surface of the yard has been covered with flagstones, limiting the green areas to planters at the public sidewalk (see photos, page 5). This work requires a public-space permit and would not have been supported by HPO, because the Board's policy has long been to

³ The guidelines *Landscaping, Landscape Features and Secondary Buildings in Historic Districts* state that "Historically they were constructed of concrete, although other materials can be found. Often sidewalks and paths were constructed at the same time as the main building. Others were added over the years, sometimes using inappropriate materials such as brick or flagstone.... Spalled and powdered concrete should be removed and replaced with new concrete, colored and finished to match the existing."

minimize front-yard paving, consistent with the published preservation design guidelines, the planning history of the District of Columbia, and recent comprehensive plans.

L'Enfant's plan for the federal city envisioned broad streets flanked by trees, monuments and greenswards. This idea was enshrined in the 1870 Parking Act, which allowed the city government to set aside parts of the street rights-of-way as parkland "to be adorned with shade-trees, walks, and enclosed with curbstones." After the consolidation of the District of Columbia government, these green "parking" areas were partly given over to private maintenance and even enclosure, as long as fences were low and open in character. Such "parking" was extended to the inner-ring suburbs and later promoted in the farther ones by the establishment of building-restriction lines. The *Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital* (Policy HP-2.5.4) addresses landscaped yards in part, by promoting the preservation "of the continuous and open green quality of landscaped front and side yards in public space. Take special care at historic landmarks and in historic districts to protect this public environment from intrusions, whether from excess paving, vehicular access and parking, high walls and fencing, or undue disruption of the natural contours or bermed terraces."

According to the historic preservation design guidelines for landscaping,

In many of the city's rowhouse neighborhoods the private use of public space extends 14 to 18 feet over the property line, which is typically where the front facade is located. In other areas, private use of public space may extend as far as 40 feet in front of the property line. To retain the park-like appearance envisioned in the 1870 Act, landscaping is restricted to flowers, ground cover, grass, low shrubs and trees. Vegetable gardens, shrubs and hedges over three feet high and *substantial paving of green space is not allowed* [emphasis added]. Only short, open fencing is allowed.

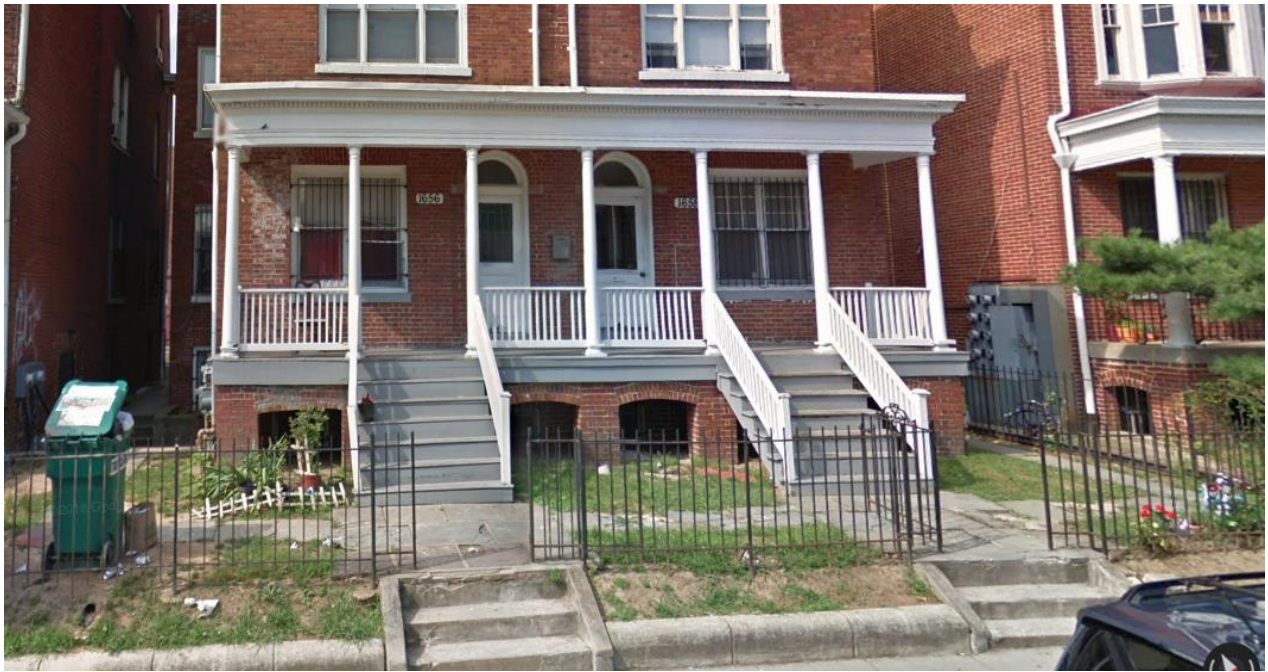
Recommendation

HPO recommends that the Board recommend denial of permit applications to cover the front yard in flagstone and to roof the entire mansard with faux slate.

HPO recommends that the Board recommend, consistent with its conditions on the previous project, that:

- 1. true slate be restored to at least the front roof—to match the color, cut, dimensions and coursing/exposure of the original slates; and*
- 2. that the removal of the new paving from the front yard be carried out under a separate public-space permit, with the paving to be limited to the extent seen in the Google Streetview photos dated September 2007 through July 2017, namely, on the lead walks and a narrow walk around the houses.⁴*

⁴ Of course, it is much preferred and much more compatible that the lead walks be replaced with concrete to match the original, consistent with the guidelines.



*Above: The houses' front yard prior to the recent paving/repaving.
Below: The front yard "after."*

