

## GUIDELINES FOR ROWHOUSES IN THE WOODLEY PARK HISTORIC DISTRICT

Retaining the architectural integrity and cohesiveness of the old Woodley Park section of the city of Washington was a primary motivation for the decision of the Woodley Park Community Association (WPCA) to file an application in 1990 for designation of Old Woodley Park as an historic district. As part of that process, the WPCA set forth design guidelines with respect to those characteristics of the rowhouse buildings and grounds in the Woodley Park Historic District that were deemed of primary consideration and historic worthiness. WPCA's purpose in maintaining these guidelines is to express to the Historic Preservation Review Board (HPRB) the sense of the residents of the Woodley Park Historic District as to the characteristics deemed of importance and worthy of preservation. These guidelines supplement the various guidelines that the Historic Preservation Office issues and maintains.

Several distinguishing features characterize the Woodley Park Historic District. These features flow from the dominant rowhouse nature of the residential streets. Woodley Park retains an integral unity for which historic district status was requested. The architectural merit and the architectural space created by the buildings are primarily understood from the street. Thus, most characteristics identified for preservation in these guidelines are ones that contribute to retaining the context of the street facade as derived from the architectural history of the district. Importantly, however, nearly all historic rowhouses also back onto and are visible from alleys.

Of prime concern architecturally, visually, and esthetically, are the delicate scale and the intricate facades of the fronts of the rowhouses that constitute the overwhelming portion of housing stock in the Woodley Park Historic District. Similarly, the set back of the rowhouses and the open greensward in front of them running in a line visually unimpaired from the building line to the sidewalk is another significant characteristic of the neighborhood. Decorative detail, restrained in nature and color and delicate in proportion, enriches the facades. Wooden windows—round headed, Palladian and double hung—complement fan and door lights. Front porches are common and may occupy less than one-half to two-thirds of the front of the rowhouse. Many of the buildings are part of a repeating pattern of architectural detail (e.g. every second or third house), which gives an architectural rhythm to the block face. These are all distinguishing characteristics of the neighborhood.

Also of concern are the more utilitarian rears of the rowhouses where distinguishing features arise from widely prevailing architectural characteristics. These include set backs, rhythm, massing, scale, proportions, and uniform sight lines created by the backs of the houses, the sleeping porches, the rear open spaces (back yards) where they exist, and the garages, all of which affect views from the alleys and contribute to consistent patterns along particular alleys. In alleys where sleeping porches were not constructed with the original building, additions have similarly preserved the scale, proportions, and uniform sightlines, forming consistent patterns.

Accordingly, the WPCA states its view to the HPRB and the Historic Preservation Office of the Office of Planning, so that they may be better guided in their regulatory actions to maintain the character of the historic district. In addition, the WPCA maintains these guidelines to advise the HPRB, the staff, and community residents of its position so that they will understand what aspects of renovation would not alter the integrity of the community's historic character, as well as what might harm that integrity. As a result, WPCA hopes that residents will be able to assist in maintaining the historic nature of the district and at the same time expeditiously maintain their properties.

## SPECIFIC GUIDELINES

### **Landscaping**

The naturalistic front yards (and side yards of corner properties) comprise a continuous greensward that is an essential characteristic of the historic district that should be maintained. The natural topography should be retained and these areas should remain predominately planted greenspace. Cutting through a brick wall below grade, such as with an English basement, would be permissible so long as there was no cutting through the berm in order to provide egress to the English basement. Front fences and retaining walls projecting above ground level should be low and open to maintain the flow and open space characteristic of the greensward.

### **Fronts**

The front facades of the buildings display decorative detail that is delicate in scale and restrained in color and articulation, including interesting patterns of brick and tile and keystones, cornices and medallions, which should be maintained.

Many of the buildings are part of a repeating pattern of architectural detail (e.g. every second or third house) that gives an architectural rhythm to the block face. Therefore preservation of this pattern of detail is considered of historical significance to the neighborhood.

Front porches, usually two-thirds to one-half across the front of the house, but some extending across the whole front of the house and others covering only the entrance, are a characteristic of the neighborhood and should be retained. In this regard, such porches should not be enclosed and their scale, original materials, detailing and design should be retained. The flooring on the porches is not of historic nature and no restriction should be placed on that aspect of the porches. For example, slate, tile or brick flooring on porches would be acceptable as would wood. In addition, a skylight for the increase of light to interiors, if not in the form of a "bubble" that extends above the roofline, would be acceptable as long as it does not change the view from the street.

Front windows, as character defining features of buildings, should maintain the depth of set-in, profile of moldings and material of the original windows, or acceptable substitute materials as allowed by HPRB.

No additions to the front of buildings should be permitted, as additions in height or mass would disturb the unity of the row. By this we mean additional rooms, enclosing porches, etc. Front porches previously removed may be restored.

Original walks and steps were almost universally concrete and retaining walls were granite or brick. These materials should be retained. Where the original material of walks, steps, and retaining walls may not be known the materials used should be compatible with the existing pattern in the community.

Railings on porches, above walls and along walkways and steps in the front of the house should be compatible with historic examples or kept as is. If there is no information available as to the original nature of such railings, keeping them as is or compatible with historic examples from neighboring houses is the most appropriate course of action.

### **Roofs**

The roofs that are visible to the street should be maintained as is with existing materials or returned to the original materials, or acceptable substitute materials as allowed by HPRB.

There should be no change to the roofline of buildings, *i.e.*, there should be no additions to buildings that raise the height of the roof that fronts on the street and are visible from the street. Heating and cooling equipment, attic additions, solar panels, roof decks and other roof appurtenances should be installed so that they are not visible from the street. Items placed on roofs should, as much as is feasible, show sensitivity to rooflines and to the character of the house as viewed from the alley.

### **Rears**

The rears of all houses, and sides of houses to the extent they do not face on a street, are of lesser significance, yet we recommend that changes or renovations respect the historic character of the rears of the Historic District rowhouses. The exception to this is where the side or rear of a building faces directly on the street, in which case it is subject to the above guidelines for the fronts of houses.

Typical changes include enclosure of sleeping porches, finishes, siding, window, and door replacements, rear decks at the ground level or first floor, fences, and air conditioners through walls. In some cases, additions have been built for houses where sleeping porches were not constructed with the original building.

We suggest small additions respect the existing rhythm, scale, and proportions relative to the original building. They should not disturb uniform sightlines or consistent patterns of a particular alley or portion of an alley in cases where such sightlines or patterns exist. The exception to this is alleys or portions alleys that do not have uniform

sightlines or consistent patterns. We favor preserving some of the rear open space where it exists.

Stand-alone, automatic garage doors and gates are permitted, including those that roll up or slide.

Stand-alone garages on alleys should be maintained with the historic character of the alley in mind. We encourage new and remodeled garages respect set backs, height, massing, scale, proportions, and sight lines of nearby garages along a particular alley. Modifications to accommodate larger passenger cars are acceptable.

Changes that are visible from the alley should strive to preserve the historic character of the neighborhood. Indeed, some alleys or portions of alleys appear much as they did when the neighborhood was built. Greater respect should be paid where the conditions are relatively uniform and intact, and greater scrutiny should be given to proposals for visible change in such circumstances.

### **Mechanical**

We urge placement of heating and air conditioning condensers out of public view and not in front or side yards that are visible from a street. Through-wall heating and cooling units are not appropriate on elevations that are visible from a street.

Utility meters should be placed in discreet locations out of public view, wherever possible.

### **Maintenance, Repair and Replacement**

Maintaining existing materials, elements, and systems is always the best method of preserving the character of a historic building. However, no matter how well maintained, most historic buildings will eventually require repair. If economically and technically feasible, repairs should be done so that the original materials and elements remain intact. If repair proves not to be technically or economically feasible, the building owner should evaluate the feasibility of replacing the deteriorated portion in-kind, i.e., using the same material as the original for replacement. This will help insure that the original character of the building is not altered. If, for technical or economic reasons, replacement in-kind also proves not to be feasible, the building owner may then consider replacing the deteriorated material or element in a compatible substitute material. However, the substitute material should have the same appearance, size, shape, texture, color, and other defining characteristics as the original. The substitute material should also be physically and chemically compatible with adjacent materials so that it does not cause future maintenance problems.