



MERIDIAN HILL HISTORIC DISTRICT DESIGN GUIDELINES



D.C. HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD



INTRODUCTION

The Meridian Hill Historic District is being proposed for listing in the District of Columbia Inventory of Historic Sites as an historic district. Historic district designation will recognize and preserve the special architectural and landscape characteristics of the area as it evolved from an early twentieth-century enclave of mansions, foreign embassy and legation buildings organized around Meridian Hill Park to a denser neighborhood of large-scale apartment houses and churches built adjacent to the earlier mansions.



In a designated historic district, work requiring a D.C. building permit, such as exterior alterations, new construction, demolition, and subdivisions, are subject to a design review process under the D.C. preservation law. The purpose of the law is to ensure that such work preserves important character-defining features of historic properties and are compatible in character with the historic district.

These design 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 proposed Meridian Hill Historic District. These guidelines supplement the policies established by the city's preservation law, regulations and standards.



The preservation review process is administered by the D.C. Historic Preservation Office (HPO) 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) at its monthly meetings, for which the HPO can provide guidance and direction prior to the preparation of building plans.



For further information and full texts of the preservation law and regulations, visit the DC Historic Preservation Office at 1100 4th Street, SW, Suite 650, or see our website at www.preservation.dc.gov.

THE MERIDIAN HILL HISTORIC DISTRICT

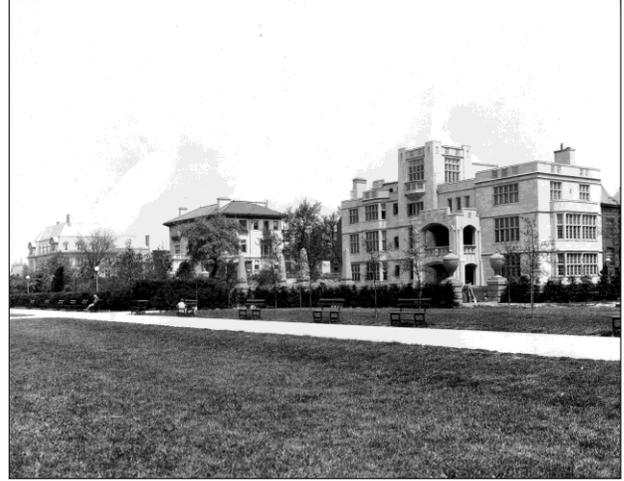
The Meridian Hill Historic District occupies a prominent site at an important rise in the city's topography and includes stretches of 15th and 16th Streets from V Street on the south to Irving Street on the north. At its center is the grand neo-Classical-style Meridian Hill Park surrounded by an important array of grand Beaux Arts-style mansions, foreign legations and large-scale apartment buildings. A cluster of imposing houses of worship dominates the northern end of the district at 16th Street and Columbia Road, providing a northern visual "gateway" to the city.

The proposed historic district contains a total of 62 buildings, Meridian Hill Park and the Henderson Castle Wall. Sixteen properties are listed in the D.C. Inventory of Historic Sites.



Meridian Hill is an excellent example of the application of "City Beautiful" principles to the development of an affluent residential neighborhood. During the first decade of the twentieth century, Meridian Hill resident, developer and promoter, Mary Foote Henderson, the wife of former Missouri senator John Henderson, successfully lobbied Congress to purchase a three-block tract of land on the hill to build the formidable European-style Meridian Hill Park. The park

became the framework around which she and her husband created a socially prominent enclave for wealthy statesmen and foreign emissaries.



This c. 1925 view shows several of the mansions built by Mrs. Henderson on 15th Street facing the upper terrace of Meridian Hill Park.

The mansions erected for or inspired by Mrs. Henderson, built between 1906 and 1928, are of exceptional architectural value and reflect the eclecticism of the Beaux Arts style of architecture. These mansions were sited to take advantage of views to and through the park along 15th and 16th streets.

During this period, Mrs. Henderson also encouraged the construction of churches, which she considered to be architecturally in keeping with her grand mansions.





An historic view from Meridian Mansions (the Envoy) looking northeast across 16th Street and the upper terrace of Meridian Hill Park. The spires of All Souls Church and National Memorial Baptist Church can be seen in the upper left background.

The formality of the Beaux Arts mansions arrayed along the 160-foot-wide 16th Street and the imposing church structures at a key intersection contribute to the neighborhood's feeling of order and balance. The park, with its tiered Renaissance-Revival fountain and high perimeter walls, provides a strong central axis and focal point.

Mrs. Henderson's death and the onset of the Great Depression opened Meridian Hill to more intensive development. New construction was almost entirely in the form of apartments, a favorite building type of the city's speculative developers, satisfying the sudden demand for housing from New Deal workers.

PARK TOWER APARTMENT
 2440 16th Street
 AN ADDRESS OF DISTINCTION

ONE of the Capital's most distinguished apartment residences—in the heart of the Embassy section, directly opposite Meridian Hill Park. Accessible to downtown activities and but a few minutes from 18th and Columbia Road shops. Apartments spacious in plan, offering the facilities and conveniences to whom those seeking apartments of the better class are essential to modern, comfortable living.

*Available Are One Room and Bath to Six Rooms
 and Two Baths—\$45 to \$165*

SHANNON & LUCHS
 INC.

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The apartments were typically luxury buildings, constructed on vacant lots adjacent to the area's mansions. Today, these buildings are a dominant presence in the streetscape. Many of the first generation apartment buildings constructed in the 1920s and 1930s were designed in formal, Beaux-Arts and historicist styles in keeping with the expression of the earlier mansions of Meridian Hill.



Larger and more overtly modern apartment buildings emerged during and after the Second World War, reflective of the emerging aesthetic preferences of the era and the ever-increasing demand for housing.

DESIGN REVIEW PRINCIPLES

The Meridian Hill Historic District Guidelines seek to recognize and preserve the important aspects of the neighborhood and its history. The guidelines are based on the following principles:

1. The buildings of Meridian Hill survive largely intact and exhibit a high quality and integrity of design, materials, workmanship, setting and place. The district's buildings should be preserved, and alterations and new construction designed with extreme sensitivity.

The original developer of Meridian Hill intended to create a ceremonial gateway to the nation's capital and an elite diplomatic community through the design of distinctive buildings of the highest quality of construction and materials. This high standard was maintained through subsequent development phases and survives as a distinctive quality of Meridian Hill today.

2. The Meridian Hill Historic District consists of distinct building types, which may warrant different levels of treatment based on their relative significance and architectural characteristics. The mansions and churches of Meridian Hill represent the most significant aspect of the neighborhood's built environment and should be treated with the highest standards of sensitivity and care.

Meridian Hill was a formally inspired development with primary emphasis placed on the individual design of its initial buildings and their relationships to each other, the street, and the park. These mansions and churches were generally executed in the Beaux Arts tradition, offering an eclectic range of styles from the academically correct idioms of the French Renaissance and Baroque styles to the more informal Mediterranean Revival

style. The mansions and churches are all exceptional buildings executed by locally or nationally prominent architects and possess the highest qualities of design, materials and craftsmanship.

3. The apartment buildings of Meridian Hill are significant primarily for the architectural composition of their street-facing facades. While some level of alteration on secondary elevations may be appropriate, substantial alterations that adversely affect their character and the appearance of the neighborhood should be avoided.

Meridian Hill's location along 16th Street just beyond the center of the city encouraged the construction of apartment buildings that are an important visual aspect of the neighborhood today. Architecturally, the apartment buildings are varied in form and style. They include small and informal Arts and Crafts-inspired buildings, formal and restrained Classical Revival-style buildings, and larger and expansive "high rises" from the mid-20th century. The district's apartment buildings tend to place primary design emphasis on the front and side elevations facing public streets.

4. Meridian Hill Park is the centerpiece of the neighborhood. Its physical and visual centrality necessitates that alterations to surrounding buildings take into consideration views to and from this nationally significant urban garden.

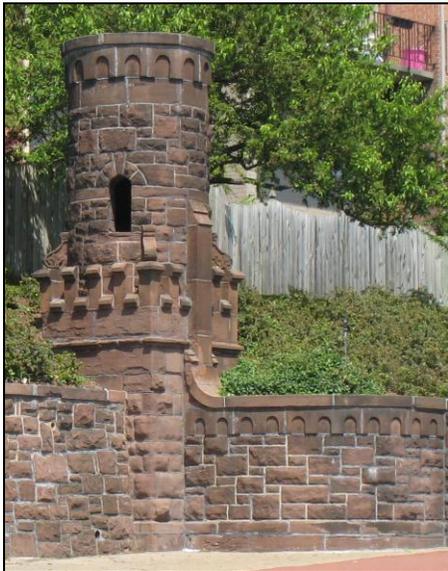
Meridian Hill Park, managed under the stewardship of the National Park Service, is protected under the National Historic Preservation Act. The park is a highly-designed, unique urban park and the focal point of the community. Noted for its urban planning, architecture and landscape design, it is listed as a National Historic Landmark—the nation's highest level of historic preservation recognition.

PRESERVATION CONSIDERATIONS

Walls and Wall Materials

The buildings of Meridian Hill are typically formal, classically-inspired structures with walls of brick, stone or stucco. Many are trimmed with secondary materials, such as stone, copper and iron. Copper is found on cornices, balconies, gutters, downspouts, and porch roofs, and iron is sometimes used as roof cresting. These and other high-quality materials are important character-defining features that should be properly maintained and repaired. If beyond repair, materials should be replaced in-kind with authentic materials. Masonry should not be sealed, coated or painted, and should be repointed with mortar that matches the color, texture and consistency of original mortar.

The HPO can provide more specific technical information on the repair, repointing and cleaning of masonry, and the maintenance and repair of historic metal work (see www.preservation.dc.gov).



The distinctive red Seneca sandstone retaining wall and corner turret along 16th Street is all that remains of Mrs. Henderson's castle.

Roofs and Roof Materials

In part due to the steep grade from Florida Avenue to Columbia Road, the roofs of the buildings on Meridian Hill are particularly prominent and important elements of the streetscape. The spires, towers and roofs of the churches and mansions are particularly noteworthy as landmarks in the cityscape.



The mansard roof on the former French Embassy at 2460 16th Street includes slate shingles, copper cresting and a metal-clad tower with oculus windows.

The mansions in particular have a variety of roof forms and materials that are indicative of their classical influences. The French Renaissance buildings tend to have steeply sloped Mansard roofs with slate shingles, while the Mediterranean roof forms are generally low pitched and clad with red terra cotta tiles. Roofs may have secondary roofing materials of note, such as iron or copper cresting and other detailing.

If visible from the street, replacement roofing should match the material, color, texture, size, finish and profiles of the original. Roofing not visible from a street can be replaced either in-kind or with alternative materials. The HPO can provide more specific technical information on the repair and replacement of metal, slate, and terra cotta roofs (see www.preservation.dc.gov).



Locating this satellite dish further back from the street, or on the rear wing, would have minimized its visual impact and not interfered with the profile and appearance of the building's roofline.

Altering the height, proportions or profile of mansion and church roofs is strongly discouraged. Mechanical, solar and communications equipment should be mounted so that it is not visible from surrounding streets, or on secondary or rear wings of a building.

The district's apartment buildings typically have flat roofs not visible from below, but they may feature elaborate cornices, pergolas or towers. Mechanical, solar and communications equipment should be set back from the facades, typically at a distance at least equal to their height.

Windows

The design, materials, configuration and variety of windows are extremely important to the architectural character of the buildings on Meridian Hill. Due to the range of building types and styles, there is no uniform or standard window. The mansions and churches typically have elaborately detailed, custom-designed windows that reflect a high degree of craftsmanship. Original windows on mansions and churches should be preserved and repaired, and replaced only if not original or severely deteriorated beyond repair.

Replacement windows on mansions and churches should replicate the originals in all visual characteristics.

Windows in the district's apartment buildings tend to be more standardized. However, these buildings derive much of their character and scale from the design, scale and repetition of windows. Repair of original windows is encouraged. If replaced, new windows on primary elevations should accurately replicate the pane configuration, operation, profiles, dimensions and appearance of the originals. Replication of original materials is encouraged but not required. Windows on secondary elevations should replicate the general appearance of historic windows but a more flexible standard is applied.

If a building no longer retains its original windows, the appearance of replacement windows should be based upon historic photographs of the building or similar buildings from the period. The HPO can provide more specific technical information on the repair and replacement of windows for historic property (www.preservation.dc.gov).



A distinctive studio window at the Meridian Hill Club at 2633 15th Street, NW

Entrances and Doors

Projecting entry pavilions, recessed entryways, porte-cocheres, entry stairs, gracious landings, and elaborate door surrounds are common elements to the buildings of Meridian Hill. Doors themselves are often recessed and sometimes less noticeable, although many of the original doors are intact and lend architectural distinction to the facades.



The covered porte cochere entrance to the Old Hungarian Embassy at 2347 15th Street, NW

If an original door is beyond repair, a replacement door should match the size, shape, materials and details of the original. If the original door does not exist, the replacement door should be of the style and appearance of the original door as suggested by historic photographs or drawings, or based on those existing on buildings of similar character.

Doors on rear or secondary elevations not visible from a street do not have to match the original in terms of configuration or material, but should be generally compatible for the building. The HPO can provide specific technical information.



The entrance to the embassy at 2535 15th Street, NW features a decorative iron and glass marquee.

Architectural Detailing

Over time, some of the character-defining features of buildings on Meridian Hill have been removed, detracting from their architectural character and integrity. The reconstruction of missing historic elements, such as a roof pergola, parapet walls, cornice or roof cresting is encouraged but not required. Replacement of missing elements should be based upon historic photographs, drawings or physical evidence.



Meridian Mansions (now the Envoy) was originally capped by a roof terrace with pavilions, railings and decorative light fixtures. Replication of such missing elements is encouraged.

Additions and New Construction

While additions are a common and accepted means of adapting historic buildings for modern uses, they should be designed to be compatible with the character of the original building and its context in terms of siting, massing, size, scale, and materials.

An addition to the rear of a building is generally the best way to add extra space without negatively affecting the architectural character of the building or character of the surrounding streetscape. A rear addition should be subordinate to the historic building – generally lower in height and smaller in footprint than the building to which it is being added – and should not alter the primary form of the original roof.



The modern apartment building abutting this mansion overwhelms the historic building. In contrast, the rear addition, although clearly contemporary, is appropriately scaled, subordinate in size, and compatible in coloration and materials.

Additions to the mansions of Meridian Hill should respect the three-dimensional quality of the buildings and not alter their scale, height, or an understanding of these buildings as private mansions or embassies. Connections should be minimal and

preferably reversible, enabling the mansions to retain their freestanding character. Additions to apartment buildings should respect the original form, character and façade composition of the building. Rooftop additions on flat-roofed apartment buildings may be appropriate if set back from the façade and where they do not compromise or compete with decorative roof elements.

While there are few opportunities for new construction on Meridian Hill, new buildings should be designed to respect the character of the district and be sensitive to their immediate surroundings. As with additions, particular attention should be paid to their siting, massing, size, scale and materials.

Secondary Buildings

Garages, chancery offices, conservatories and other outbuildings can be found on Meridian Hill at the rear or in the side yards of many of the mansions and embassy buildings. Typically, these outbuildings are designed in a manner that is compatible with the main building on the property. The outbuildings are contributing resources within the historic district and should be given the same preservation consideration as the principal buildings.



The garage at the Mexican Embassy was designed with the same architectural character as the mansion and is an integral part of the complex.

New outbuildings, if appropriate for a site, should be set behind the plane of the primary elevation of the principal building and should not compete with or detract from the architecture of the principal building. The design should be compatible with the materials and general character of the primary structure, and respect the primacy of the mansion by being subordinate in size. Construction should not result in the loss of or damage to significant landscape features and should be harmonious with the property or overall streetscape.

Landscape Features

The visual and spatial relationships formed by broad streets flanked by formally composed buildings set in continuous park-like grounds is one of the most important character-defining features of the Meridian Hill Historic District. The deep front yards and landscaped gardens of Meridian Hill should be retained and maintained as an essential characteristic of the neighborhood.



This c. 1925 photograph of 16th Street shows the continuous linear landscape that unites the buildings on Meridian Hill. While the later apartment buildings would change the street's scale and skyline, they continued the tradition of buildings located within a garden setting.

While predominately planted green space, many front yards include some paving for

walkways and driveways. The mansions and apartment buildings commonly have semicircular driveways leading to the front door or covered porte cochère. These driveways should be retained as important elements of the formal landscape. Expanding driveways for the creation of parking in front of buildings is not appropriate.

Front gardens were historically not fenced. Where fences have been added, they are open and low, preserving the continuous linear character of the streetscape. The natural or originally designed sloping topography should be retained where it exists. Walls and terracing of the landscape is discouraged and should be proposed only when necessary to retain natural grades.

Exterior Lighting

New or replacement light fixtures should be of a size that is proportional to the scale of the subject building and finished in a manner that is harmonious with the building's palette of materials. Lighting should be installed in locations that will not cause damage to significant architectural features. The level of illumination should be commensurate to the dignified character of the buildings and the residential qualities of the district.



Distinctive light fixtures should be retained and repaired. While new fixtures do not have to replicate originals, they should be in proportional in scale and appropriate in coloration with the building.

Non-Contributing Buildings

Buildings that were built after 1949 (the end date of the established Period of Significance for the Meridian Hill Historic District), or that may have been built before 1949 but which lack the characteristics that contribute to the quality and significance of the historic district, are classified as “non-contributing” buildings. (see *Appendix A* for a list of contributing and non-contributing buildings.)

Alterations and additions to non-contributing buildings are reviewed to ensure that proposed alterations or additions don't negatively impact the character of the streetscape and surrounding district rather than to preserve the particular qualities of the buildings. Replacement of features, such as windows and doors, should be done in consideration of the scale, proportions and architectural quality found in the historic district; retention and replication of existing elements is not required. The review process is not intended to discourage good contemporary design or creative architectural expression but to ensure non-contributing buildings maintain a harmonious and respectful relationship to the contributing buildings in the district.

While visible roof additions are generally not appropriate for contributing buildings, visible roof additions on non-contributing buildings are permitted if compatible with the immediate context and designed with a commensurate level of architectural quality, craftsmanship and materials as is found in the historic district. Roof appurtenances, such as mechanical, solar, and telecommunications equipment, skylights, roof decks and stair access enclosures, should be placed and designed to minimize public visibility to the extent feasible and to maintain an overall harmonious roofline.

Unlike contributing buildings, non-contributing buildings can be demolished in the historic district. Any new construction on

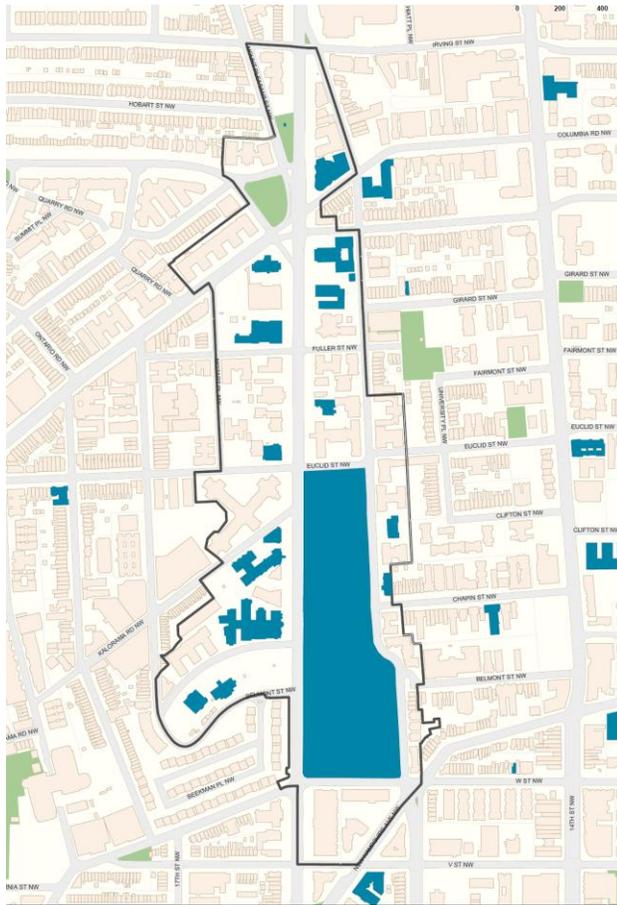
the site of a non-contributing building will be reviewed to promote design compatibility with the surrounding historic buildings and the character of the streetscape.



Clearly contemporary in design, the rooftop addition on this non-contributing building respects the height of the adjacent buildings and has a high level of architectural quality, craftsmanship and materials that are compatible with the historic district.

THE PROPOSED MERIDIAN HILL HISTORIC DISTRICT

The boundaries of the proposed historic district would include properties fronting on Meridian Hill Park along 15th and 16th Streets, and properties lining 16th Street from the Park north to Irving Street, NW.



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 Government of the District of Columbia
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Proposed Meridian Hill Historic District

- Historic Landmarks
- Proposed Historic District
- Buildings



Work Not Subject to Review

The following work on property in the Meridian Hill Historic District is not subject to historic preservation design review and does not require a building permit:

- Interior alterations, except involving substantial structural demolition
- Exterior painting and paint colors of already painted surfaces
- Window appurtenances, including screens, storm windows, security bars, and removable window air conditioning units
- Landscaping, including planting, maintenance, or removal of trees and shrubs. Before removing trees, owners should consult with the D.C. Department of Transportation's Urban Forestry Division (www.ddot.dc.gov/ufo)
- Impermanent and moveable site features not requiring a foundation, including outdoor furniture, play equipment, and garden sculpture or ornaments.

Work Subject to Permit Review

The following work on property in the Meridian Hill Historic District is subject to historic preservation design review and requires a building permit:

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

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