

# ECKINGTON CIVIC ASSOCIATION

CARING FOR THE COMMUNITY WE LIVE IN

HISTORIC DESIGNATION PANEL DISCUSSION – JANUARY 11, 2016

## PANELISTS

**KIM WILLIAMS, DC HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE**

**TISHA ALLEN, DC HISTORIC PRESERVATION LEAGUE**

**PETER SEFTON, QED ASSOCIATES**

- **RANDY INTRODUCES THE MEETING.**
  - Historic Designation has two main components. The neighborhood must be historically significant and the community must support the designation.
  - Introduces Eckington Civic Association (ECA) board and Walt Cain, chair of Historic Designation committee.
  - Invites those present to join the ECA, and if interested to donate to the historic study.
- **CHARLENE INTRODUCES PANELISTS**
  - Kim Williams – Architectural historian, part of DC Hist Preservation office.
  - Peter Sefton – Researcher, writer, photographer, has done historic designation proposals for a number of DC locales.
  - Tisha Allen – DC Preservation League as Outreach & Grants manager. Liaison to community stakeholders.
- **KIM WILLIAMS EXPLAINS THE HISTORIC DESIGNATION PROCESS AND IMPLICATIONS.**
  - DC has had DC historic preservation law since 1975.
  - The purpose of this law:
    - To protect and enhance distinctive elements of city's past, promote use of historic landmark, encourage adaptation of landmarks for current use.
    - Not just to preserve and hold unmoving, but ensure that landmarks are important part of cityscape
  - Why designate?
    - The designation tells about a neighborhood's history and contributes to community identity. Helps foster civic pride and engagement with community. Enhances historic place.
  - Goals of designation: Save and restore historic buildings, adapt for new uses, achieve compatible design
  - Benefits
    - Community is involved in managing change

- Maintains community's sense of place & character
  - Promotes rehabilitation and renovation over demolition (specifically, the designation does not allow demolition of 'contributing resources')
  - May be opportunities for tax incentives – federal tax benefits, conservation easements, may allow for homeowner grant funds (not all districts or properties qualify)
- o What is the purpose of the historic preservation review? The Historic Preservation Office reviews alterations and additions to historic buildings to ensure compatibility with historic character of neighborhood, and to reduce loss of historic information and materials.
  - Compatibility is a key preservation principle that seeks a “harmonious relationship.” This principle does not require that new buildings/additions “match or copy” a building – just that the design is compatible and deferential.
  - Incompatible design is that which is incongruous, discordant, or creates a disagreeable relationship with the existing architecture.
  - This process seeks “managed change through preservation”
- o Types of review
  - “Over the counter” – 96% of projects (e.g., windows, doors, retaining walls, sheds, fences, awnings, signs)
  - Larger reviews: HPRB Review (4% or less) (demolitions, auditions, new construction, major alterations and repairs)
  - Everything that would need a permit needs historic review: Demolition, subdivision, new construction, alterations, additions, repair/replacement of building features
- o Challenges of Historic Designation
  - Additional review at permit stage (can add 1-2 months, sometimes even more time, to permitting process)
  - Replacement materials may be more expensive
  - May be seen as contributing to gentrification (no evidence supports this, but it is a common public perception)
- o DC Designation Criteria
  - Documentation has to address the significance of Eckington in the city's history (social, architectural, urban planning). This can include events, history, individuals
  - Kim is confident that Eckington would meet criteria; it's only a matter of documenting the evidence.
- PETER SEFTON, QED
  - o Peter and his colleagues are conducting the historic study of Eckington and have been assembling documentation since October.
  - o Goal: List neighborhood on DC list of historic sites and nation's register of historic sites
  - o The process: We submit their findings to the historic review board, gets historic designation, and then national register of historic sites

- o They seek to answer five basic questions:
  - What? To answer this, they walk round neighborhood block by block.
  - When & Who: Learn when buildings were constructed, who designed & built them. What was there before, what has been demolished or altered?
    - Evidence includes a spreadsheet of building permit data 1877 to 1949 (downloadable from city database), as well as historic maps & photos, other records.
  - How & Why: How the neighborhood developed and why it evolved in this way.
    - Talk with people who live in the community about their experiences & history. Eckington has many residents and families who have lived here for generations.
- o The historic designation application would include information on the following sections: (1) Archeology of neighborhood by type and function, (2) Context analysis that places the neighborhood in a larger socioeconomic and cultural context, both local and national, and (3) Statement of significance describing what is distinctive about Eckington and its architecture, and the period in which things happened.
- o Preliminary findings (which could change – these are not final):
  - Named after country estate – owned by George Truesdale, Washington’s first streetcar suburb, who extended city street grid to Eckington. He built a streetcar to bring people downtown (the original DC city line was Florida ave). He built five large wooden houses scattered around Eckington – none of which still exist
  - Peter describes the earliest Eckington houses that are still standing, dating back to 1889, as well as the first brick house (1892), first rowhouses (1891) and first apartment buildings (1901). He also identifies the architects responsible for building much of Eckington.
  - 1903: The railroad spreads out, takes over some of residential neighborhoods, and more industrial buildings go up along railroad
  - 1905: Biggest rowhouse developers discovered Eckington: Wardman (who built thousands of rowhomes in DC), incorporated more modern homes – Colonial Revival, Craftsman style, arrived at Daylight Rowhouse model.
  - 1925: Eckington is built out, mostly just small apartments are built at this time.
  - See early signs of Modernism style, which would grip DC from 1950s-70s.
- **TISHA ALLEN – DC PRESERVATION LEAGUE**
  - o The League was founded in 1971 as “Don’t tear it down” to save some historic buildings in downtown DC.
  - o The League has multiple committees on preservation which work w/ residents and local government officials.
    - Education committee: Provides tours, education programs such as toolbox sessions where contractors help you find ways to weatherize house while keeping integrity of property.
    - Government Affairs: Deals with policies and laws governing historic properties and helping to maintain properties (e.g., demolition by neglect)

- Landmarks: Helps landmark properties, keeps track of demolition permits issued for historic districts, goes. to preservation hearings if necessary.
  - Project review: Advises developers on process – has architects, developers, architectural historians who help owners before going through process.
- o Offers preservation initiatives grant: The current grant is for mid-century modern or religious properties. It offers money for bricks and mortar work, outreach, etc.
- o Can handle mitigation funds if needed
- o Historic districts coalition
- o Includes over 27 historic district neighborhoods in DC. The coalition shares lessons learned, education, and outreach.

#### QUESTION & ANSWER PERIOD:

- If DC already has 27 historic districts, why should we preserve another, as there is no major push to bulldoze the neighborhood?
  - o Mark: 27 historic districts protect specific neighborhoods and offer no protection to Eckington. By becoming a historic district, Eckington would have same protections
  - o Kim: In determining historic districts, is based on our criteria, not “the best rowhouse neighborhood” or “best apartment neighborhood.” We are not limiting the number of historic districts. Every neighborhood has a history, and there is no other neighborhood like Eckington. Each has its own important story to tell. Look at each neighborhood independently of each other. In terms of building stock, it’s a pretty good number of buildings (27000 protected), but small percentage of total. Why would we do it before it’s being bulldozed? That’s the point – we want to protect historic character before it’s lost.
  - o Peter: No other neighborhood has Eckington’s history. And buildings are being lost in Eckington. The last standing EC Gardner building was just lost a few years ago. The time to get a handle on that is now.
  - o Tisha: I agree. We often get calls when it’s too late. Some resources are worthy of landmarking on their own, but Eckington has so many buildings that help contribute to neighborhood’s story as a whole.
- Will designation impact our ability to repair a building that isn’t very old, such as from the 1950s?
  - o When we establish a historic district, we establish the “status” for each building as contributing or not contributing. If a building is “contributing,” – meaning that it is from the period of history that lends to a neighborhood’s status, the building has to maintain integrity. So if a building is outside the period of significance, then the review process would be less stringent in sense that it would not review according to the building itself, but how it would fit in with street scape and character of building. For example, the review would check that changes are not egregious or incongruous in terms of massing

or materials. But there would be less attention to a specific building to make sure it's in character with time period.

- What about new construction, if a developer has already changed the whole character of a building?
  - If an “intrusion” was built outside the period of significance, we would look to help improve the intrusion by bringing back into character any “out of character” elements. These changes are not imposed unless any alterations/renovations are proposed. (NOTE: In other words, the Designation would not automatically force anyone to make changes to their building. However, if the building sought to make changes/renovations, these changes would be subject to review.)
- How big is planned district?
  - Peter – The very last part of the research process is laying out themes, what's on the ground. The last steps are drawing the boundaries. In Eckington, streets that have been regarded as boundaries – Florida Ave, North Capitol St, Rhode Island Ave– may be boundaries for the historic district, but that hasn't been worked out in detail.
  - Walt –Part of application is defining what we as a neighborhood want boundaries to be.
- I've heard stories of how onerous the review process can be for over-the-counter modifications. How can we make process easier, and what happens if we don't follow guidelines?
  - Over-the-counter reviews are pretty easy, but the more extensive review process can be more lengthy if there is disagreement. If changes are not implemented, it will be burdensome, onerous process. Usually recommendations (such as for window replacements) are made known through historic guidelines, so residents will be informed about what's appropriate and what's not. It should also be clear how to get through process.
  - If a resident refuse to go through guidelines, s/he won't get permit and won't be able to do what you want to do. We are very flexible regarding window replacements beyond front elevations. The number of windows on the front elevation of rowhouse is not that great –in Eckington, 6 windows for most homes.
  - Do replacements still require in-kind materials (i.e., replacing with the same kind of material the object was originally made from)?
    - Most window guidelines recommend that windows need to be replaced with historically compatible windows – match window configuration, profiles, reflective qualities, but do not need to match actual materials. If you have wood windows, replacement doesn't have to be wood, but has to match qualities of wood windows. Replacement materials are getting better- there are more options than were in past.
- How will the historic designation affect development along North Capitol?
  - We would review construction in terms of compatibility, assuming they're within district boundaries. This would affect development in positive way because it offers an opportunity for community engagement and historic review.
  - Follow-up – in terms of Zoning – Most is R4, along North Cap is C2AFN (?)

- Historic preservation review doesn't address zoning – that process is separate. Oftentimes, zoning is done after preservation review, so they would consider historic preservation issues, concerns, and recommendations.
- What is the timeline for confirming designation? During application process, will further development by large corporations be halted while we're being considered?
  - The timeframe is up to community. It's a process that takes a lot of public engagement and back-and-forth. The office needs to be assured that designation is will of community before we hear the case. Want to be assured that ECA and historic designation sponsors have gotten out into community, held meetings, informed everyone, and invited everyone. If office feels steps have been taken and is will of community, they will receive the application and "notice" it. Noticing takes 45 days minimum, then put to hearing. Would not take place before at least 45 days to inform ANC. There is a backlog, so the process would most likely be many months. After the Historic Designation Board receives the nomination, could be 3 months to a year before we hear case.
  - Development is not frozen.
  - Eckington will have more townhalls in March, May. Earliest we would submit application would be June to allow ample time for folks to learn, have conversation.
  - Next few meetings – same as this?
    - Want to use feedback to inform panelists & substance of upcoming town halls. Do you want to hear from zoning folks, etc – use feedback to inform town hall.
- What if community is not behind it? How are you finding if community is behind it? The people in this room are not representative of people in Eckington. Historic designation does add a lot of cost, and it may be more onerous than you realize. Need to get true representation of community.
  - That's why we're having multiple town halls, want to start with word of mouth. Put fliers on every door in neighborhood, but neighborhood will talk to each other more than we can. We would like you to tell your neighbors about it. Tell people how to find out more.
  - Follow-up: How gauging community interest?
    - Yes, will be surveying community – online, meetings, email, letters.
    - If community is not in support, office does not favor application.
- As a community, we have a housing affordability problem. To what extent is infill development allowed, and is building up ever allowed.
  - In-fill: Vacant lots, new construction is allowed – go through permitting process w/ historic review to ensure that construction is compatible in terms of size, massing.
  - Building up: rooftop additions – can only be built on buildings if not visible from public right-of-way. If addition can be done w/out being seen from street, they can be done. This may be a challenge in Eckington b/c of topography of neighborhood, uniformity of rows. Difficult circumstances for successful rooftop additions. Case-by-case situation, must be designed to not be visible.
  - Bump-backs at rear – typically if not visible from front of property, we would likely approve as long as they're not intrusive and above roofline. Review is how changes

affect the character of streetscape, so if addition is not visible on street scape/from right of way, can be approved.

- o Follow-up: If 2 streets where you can see – front and side, can you do bump out if it can be seen from the side?
  - There is a chance it would be approved, but would be reviewed and design would play in. If on corner and visible, we want to make sure design is compatible w/ character of building.
- Any assistance or exemptions, especially for low-income residents?
  - o We have homeowner grants available, but they are not automatic. We have identified those historic districts for which grant program qualifies. If Eckington is designated, would need your councilmember to put up bill to have Eckington counted as a district receiving funds. Once Eckington is a grant district, you have to meet a certain minimum income to qualify – but grants are sizeable and help people do additions, restorations to property. E.g., restoring front porches in Anacostia.
  - o How many people get it in one year?
    - Not limited by #, limited by funds.
  - o Who dispurses fund?
    - DC Gov, controlled by Office of Planning, Hist Preservation
- Have there been studies on how historic designation impacts lower-impact community members?
  - o Studies on effect – have been studies in other places, not DC. No direct relationship between historic district designation and gentrification; has to do more w/ values – property values rising in historic neighborhoods that are attracting people of greater means. So it's not the historic designation itself, but the historic character attracting people of greater means, pushing out low-income residents.
  - o Tisha: can send national trust studies; have grant program available – homeowners can apply for preservation planning grants, research
  - o Follow-up: For grant that will be available – what stipulations are attached? Some available to landlords, homeowners, that limits selling/leaving home – are these accompanied?
    - Don't know all stipulations, may be worth bringing in expert on grant program
- In other neighborhoods that receive historic designation, have there been challenges in selling homes. Ours has many vacant homes – will this reduce likelihood that homes are sold and fixed up?
  - o Don't think historic designation plays into challenges in selling homes. Some historic designation districts are some of most booming neighborhoods – Shaw, U st, 14<sup>th</sup>, Dupont. No problem w/ vacant buildings – some of those are some of most successful projects in those neighborhoods – Florida Ave, others.
- Concerned about repairs to home – replacing windows or putting in energy efficient front door.
  - o We do not require changes to house if you're in a historic designation district. IF asking, do I have to make changes, or Can I make changes. You are not required to do anything

to your house – any non-compatible alteration is grandfathered in. You can certainly put in energy efficient doors and windows, have to be reviewed & appropriate.

- o Energy efficient door: have beveled glass door – if I wanted to change to more energy efficient, would I run into problem?
  - If it is an original door, we want to look at other alternatives to replacement – always prefer repair over replacement. Would look at options like interior storm door. If still want to replace, would allow as long as done in kind and in character.
- How would a non-historic structure undergoing renovation be treated?
  - o Non-contributing resources are looked at for effect on streetscape, how can we make them compatible.
- Will any restrictions be placed on solar panels on roof
  - o If visible front-facing slope, yes, there are restrictions. We encourage solar panels on panels not facing front. Encourage other types of receptors – if no other slopes, look at solar shingles or other receptors in yard that would do same thing. Solar panel tech improving, many successful additions.
  - o R4 zoning – has paragraph about solar panels on pop-ups. R4 zoning allows property owner to put solar panels; doesn't allow people to pop-up if blocks solar panels. If conflicting guidelines, which trumps which? Won't disagree w/ zoning. In Bloomington, encourage solar panels to prevent pop-ups.
    - Zoning issue, not historic designation issue.
    - Randy notes – will have panelists from zoning
- Are historic designation districts taxed at different rate? Any impact on homes under homestead act?
  - o No, and No.
- What happens in emergency – e.g., a door needs to be replaced asap on weekend for safety.
  - o Do allow temporary replacements in matters of urgency, have exceptions but would have to be replaced again.
  - o Is there a list of approved doors/windows so that we could get something quickly?
    - Would be historic designation guidelines for Eckington, which would address appropriate way to replace things – appropriate door, window, etc. And regular doors/windows guidelines. In every historic district, goal is to have historic guidelines to help property owners make decisions.
- How would this affect Flower Market development?
  - o This project is already in pipeline, so there is no impact since Eckington is not a historic district now
  - o Would affect large projects coming in after Eckington becomes historic designation district?
  - o Any permit gotten before Historic District Designation goes into effect is grandfathered in, even if working still ongoing. Only applies to permits after Historic designation district goes into effect.

- o Note: After board votes, has to be “noticed” for 30 days before district goes into effect. Permits put in throughout historic designation process- got permit day before historic designation goes into effect, building was demolished.
- Some industrial buildings in terrible condition and don’t lend to history. What happens to them?
  - o From visual perspective, buildings seem too far gone. From structural perspective, probably fairly sound can be renovated with new structural supports. Any historic building, for the most part, can be renovated and restored. Don’t see any in Eckington that are beyond repair
- What will historic designation do for value of property?
  - o Won’t do anything specifically – will shift by whims of market.
- Will Historic designation affect use and maintenance of MBT bike trail?
  - o Won’t affect at all?
  - o May affect if boundaries include trail, alterations to trail under purview of preservation office, but don’t know that we would be including, wouldn’t be contributing element.
- What is process after this? Is there a vote?
  - o 2 more town halls, ECA will consider the question of do we move forward w/ application.
  - o Once Board receives app, notice every property w/in boundaries. Notice says we received application for historic designation for Eckington, you are property owner in boundaries, on file, will have hearing, if you object to listing in national register, here’s steps you can take to send letter of objection.
- Will zoning of area change under this?
  - o No – zoning regulated by DCRA.
- How will you get buy-in/message to whole community?
  - o Doing everything we know to do – fliers, google groups, meetings, but rely on residents talking to neighbors. Open to suggestions about how we can do more. Reached out to churches, schools, businesses, other stakeholders
  - o Next Door website – forum for neighborhoods – Eck forum is quite active
- What data do you have that becoming Historic designation doesn’t lead to removal of long-term residents?
  - o Several studies, will pass along to put on website. Studies have looked at economic impact.
  - o Follow-up: How neighborhoods have changed. Changed from 40s-50s – not diversity living in community. Talking about community, do you have #s on displacement of people since they became historic designation district.
  - o Some historians looking at how things have changed in DC, it has changed a lot. No evidence to link to historic designation. Places like Anacostia & LeDroit Park still have diversity, depends on neighborhood. But don’t know if anyone’s done comprehensive study.
- St Martins’ not mentioned in ppt.
  - o Tonight’s presentation is still a work in progress, St Martin’s significant part of community.

- o Wasn't it designated historic, so had to move instead of torn down, Landmark nomination on St Martin's, agreement reached – if building were saved by moving, landmark application would be withdrawn. Worked out deal outside of preservation process.
- o League – sometimes set up agreements, developer will set up agreement in lieu of presentation. Tisha will look into it.
- o Believe it was agreement w/ community group. Had to spend a \$1million, to move building. Wasn't in original plan for complex here.
- o Hist district designation – people know in advance, can't make plans w/out going through review process. Was surprise – catholic church made plans to demolish bldg that others considered historic. Unknown caused some problems. Better to know you have historic designation, work w/in process. Individ buildings eligible for landmark status.
- Todd Place- would that be considered part of dist?
  - o Very likely – developed in same patterns as everything around it
- For those who resided in Eck for decades, will rehab be restricted by Historic designation?
  - o Encourage rehab – wouldn't be restricted, would be reviewed.
  - o 30 yr resident – is there a grandfather clause – if you're already here and area becomes historic, must I adhere to historic designation?
    - Yes – must adhere with any future alterations. Not required to upgrade house to meet guidelines. If you do project in future, must meet guidelines.
- Grants – what is dollar amount for bricks and mortar grant?
  - o Up to \$50k for the DC Preservation League Grant, but currently for midcentury modern & religious. May be other grants in future.
- If additional questions, send to Walt.