

Dupont Circle Conservancy

Preserving the historic and architectural character of the greater Dupont Circle neighborhood.

The Dupont Circle Conservancy ~

As a property owner in the Dupont Circle Historic District you have rights and responsibilities that come with living or working, perhaps both, in one of our city's premier neighborhoods. Designated in 1978, the Dupont Circle Historic District recognizes the architecture and history that make the neighborhood surrounding "the Circle," with its fountain, benches, and grassy expanses, unique in Washington, DC. Along with citywide groups and other neighborhood organizations, the Dupont Circle Conservancy works to preserve and protect the area's architecture and history. It does so by reviewing and developing positions on new buildings and additions to existing ones; making its positions known before government agencies and other bodies; and working to inform neighbors about historic preservation. The Conservancy, an all volunteer group, does this for not only the Dupont Circle Historic District, but for adjacent areas of the Greater U Street, Massachusetts Avenue, Sixteenth Street, and Strivers' Section Historic Districts.

The Historic Preservation Office ~

The Historic Preservation Office (HPO), part of the DC Office of Planning, is responsible for maintaining the integrity of 40-some historic districts consisting of over 24,000 buildings throughout the City of Washington. The HPO staff is a professional one with experts in the fields of administration, archaeology, architecture, architectural history, educational outreach, grant making, historic preservation, planning, and preservation enforcement. Staff is hard-working and brings their knowledge and understanding to bear in processing over 4,000 permit applications a year. If you are contemplating any work, large or not so large, on the exterior of your property, HPO is one of the first places you should contact. Consultations are free. HPO is located at 1100 4th Street SW, Washington DC 20024 (Waterfront Metro, on Green Line). Telephone: 202.442.8818. The staff members responsible for the Dupont Circle Historic District and surrounding historic districts are:

- Steve Callcott, steve.callcott@dc.gov 202.741.5247 Mass Ave & 14th Street NW & 16th Street NW
- Imania Price, imania.price@dc.gov 202.442.8827 U Street NW
- Anne Brockett, anne.brockett@dc.gov 202.442.8842 Strivers' Section & Dupont Circle

Interior work also requires permits, but unless you live or work in a building the interior of which has been designated historic, those permits may be obtained from the DC Department of Buildings (DOB) 1100 4th Street SW, Washington, DC 20024 [(202) 671-3500, <https://dob.dc.gov>]

- [Design guidelines from the Historic Preservation Office - https://planning.dc.gov/page/design-guidelines](https://planning.dc.gov/page/design-guidelines)
- [Permit information for homeowners - https://dob.dc.gov/page/homeowners-center](https://dob.dc.gov/page/homeowners-center)
- [Permit information for businesses - https://dob.dc.gov/page/overview-permitting-process-0](https://dob.dc.gov/page/overview-permitting-process-0)
- [Georgetown University Law Library's guide to historic preservation law in DC - https://www.law.georgetown.edu/library/digital/dc-historic-preservation-law/](https://www.law.georgetown.edu/library/digital/dc-historic-preservation-law/)
- [Historic Preservation Violations and Fines - https://planning.dc.gov/page/historic-preservation-violations-and-fines](https://planning.dc.gov/page/historic-preservation-violations-and-fines)

The Permit Process ~

Once you've decided on the exterior work that needs to be done, you need to find out if it requires a D.C. permit. Reputable contractors will know and may offer to get the permit for you, for a fee. If you're a skilled or handy person and plan to do the work yourself, you'll still need to know whether or not you need a permit. The reasons for getting permits go well beyond generating revenue for the city government. For an historic district, permits help ensure that work done is accomplished in such a way and within such guidelines that it contributes to the retention of the area's historic character. On another level, proper permit application review and issuance helps ensure your safety and that of your contractor and the general public. The following list indicates the kinds of actions or new and replacement work for which permits ARE REQUIRED:

- Demolition in whole or part of any building. Because the vast majority of buildings in any historic district contribute to its overall significance, demolition without proper approval will diminish its overall character. 10 DCMR (DC Municipal Code), Title 10A, Chapter 3, Section 305, details information on demolition permit requirements and is available online at <https://planning.dc.gov/page/permits-design-review>.
- New building construction
- Additions to existing structures
- Replacement doors, particularly those in front

- Energy conservation work such as installation of solar panels
- Replacement or refacing of landings and steps
- Making provisions for the disabled
- Masonry repairs and repointing
- Replacement or refacing of porches and steps
- Alteration or repair of visible roof elements
- Adding or altering rooftop decks and other roof additions
- Adding and removing shutters
- Adding or replacing signs
- Repair or alteration of walls and foundations
- Replacing windows (Standards for Window repair and replacement - 10DCMR Title 10A, Chapter 23 - is available online at <http://planning.dc.gov/node/936492>.)
- Satellite dishes are NOT allowed on front elevations of buildings in historic districts.

If you're planning permanent landscaping features on your property even as replacements for existing worn ones, you will need a permit. PERMITS ARE REQUIRED for such "hardscape" features as:

- Curb cuts and driveways
- Decks
- Fences
- Garages and sheds
- Patios
- Retaining walls
- Sidewalks, paths, or paving

HPO has a wealth of informational guidelines on new and replacement construction and other work in historic districts available free at their office or online at <https://planning.dc.gov/page/permits-design-review/>.

So, what can be done without a permit?

Is there anything you may do to the exterior of your property that doesn't require a permit? The answer is "Yes." Repair of existing windows and doors (reglazing, weather stripping, caulking, and paint removal), repair or replacement of non-visible roof elements, landscape planting, and paint color selection and painting do not require a D.C. building permit and are not subject to historic review. For additional information visit: <https://planning.dc.gov/page/building-permits-historic-property>

Financial Assistance ~

Note that some preservation projects qualify for financial assistance from local or federal sources. Some of the historic districts the Dupont Circle Conservancy oversees qualify for grants and all qualify for Federal Historic Preservation Tax Incentives.

Final Thoughts ~

The permit process is integral to retaining the historic character of the Dupont Circle Historic District or any other one for that matter, and it's every property owner's responsibility to ensure that he or she participates in that process when exterior work is planned and executed.

Preservation Inspectors work to ensure that permits are carried out as written, with some 4,000 permits issued annually, historic district residents have an important role to play in augmenting inspectors' work. If you see ongoing work and no permit posted in one of the building's front windows, you may request an inspection by HPO as described at this link:

<http://planning.dc.gov/node/886082> . To report a violation, send an email or call the Historic Preservation Office at (202) 442-7600. Please provide the following information: (1) The address of the violation; (2) Whether the work is in progress or has been completed; (3) A brief description of the work being done or completed; (4) If possible, the contractor's name, any license plate numbers of the vehicles on site performing the work, and make/model of the vehicles.

Historic preservation of the Dupont Circle Historic District's built environment and public spaces is the job of everyone who owns property in the district, as well as the responsibility of those who live, work, and play there. Working to retain its character, ambiance, and sense of place will ensure that the integrity of today's neighborhood is preserved for the future.