

## II. PRESERVATION IN MONTGOMERY COUNTY

### CREATION AND OPERATION OF HISTORIC DISTRICTS IN MONTGOMERY COUNTY

#### General Evaluation Requirements

The Montgomery County Advisory Committee on Historic Sites was formed in 1977 by the Montgomery County Planning Board. The purpose of the Advisory Committee was to develop a **Master Plan of Historic Sites** and Districts in Montgomery County and an ordinance for the regulation and preservation of the historic resources placed on the **Master Plan**. The following evaluation criteria were developed and used by the Montgomery County Advisory Committee on Historic Sites, and are included in the **Ordinance** for use by the Historic Preservation Commission, the Montgomery County Planning Board, and the Montgomery County Council in their decisions (**Montgomery County Master Plan for Historic Preservation**).

1. Historical and cultural significance The historic resource:
  - a. has character, interest, or value as part of the development, heritage or cultural characteristics of the County, State, or Nation;
  - b. is the site of a significant historic event;
  - c. is identified with a person or a group of persons who influenced society;
  - d. exemplifies the cultural, economic, social, political or historic heritage of the County and its communities.
  
2. Architectural and design significance The historic resource:
  - a. embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction;
  - b. represents the work of a master;
  - c. possesses high artistic values;
  - d. represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or
  - e. represents an established and familiar visual feature of the neighborhood, community, or County due to its singular physical characteristic or landscape.

With regard to historic districts, the Preservation Commission's general philosophy is that districts are living and working areas where special attention is paid to protecting those qualities which make them significant resources for the County. They must not become areas where protective concerns override all other activities. For example, in rural districts not only can vernacular architecture and important settings be protected, but working farms should be sustained to provide close to market produce, and rural villages retained to provide local, small-scale goods and services.

There are two major types of historic resources: 1. residential and commercial areas illustrating the history of suburban development in the County; and 2. rural areas where the vernacular

architecture and agricultural landscape reflect centuries of history. Most of the rural landscape is seen from the road, thus the protection of byways and scenic roads and their vistas is required.

A Historic District as identified, and if approved for inclusion in the County's **Master Plan for Historic Preservation**, consists of the entire area represented by **all** of the historic resources with their appurtenances and environmental setting. Non-historic properties within the boundaries of the Historic District are also subject to regulation, as they are considered appurtenances and environmental setting of the historic resources of the District. The **Ordinance** does require the Preservation Commission to be lenient in its judgment of plans for structures of little historic or design significance or for plans involving new construction unless such plans would seriously impair the historic or architectural value of surrounding resources or impair the character of the District

The historic resource is reviewed in its total environment/community setting. The more these historic resources are seen as clusters, districts, or networks, the more systematically planning and protection of them can proceed. The **Master Plan** does not, in most cases, attempt to specifically delineate the appurtenances and environmental setting of each resource. As a general rule, the appurtenances and environmental setting of each resource include the original or existing property boundaries, or in the event of subdivision, at least the minimum size lot permitted by the zone in which the resource occurs, unless the Planning Board, after receiving advice of the Historic Preservation Commission, finds that a larger area is essential to preserve the integrity of the resource.

The Commission documents that each site has real merit which warrants its protection as a valuable community resource. The **Ordinance** criteria does not set a date restriction on resources to be considered, and it is anticipated that as the Commission's work proceeds, more 20th century resources will be reviewed. Age alone does not qualify a resource for the strong protection offered by the ordinance. In addition to the proven inherent historic, architectural and cultural value of the historic resources, priority is given to those offering other public benefits, such as enhancing neighborhoods and communities, meeting needs for housing, education, recreation, and being visible and accessible to the public.

## THE HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION AND ITS PROCEDURES

### **Regulation by the Historic Preservation Ordinance**

Once designated on the **Master Plan**, any significant change to the exterior of an individual Historic Site or to any properties within the Historic District must be reviewed by the Montgomery County Historic Preservation Commission and a historic area work permit issued under Sections 24A6, 7, and 8 of the Historic Preservation Ordinance.

When the Commission finds that the exterior architectural features of an historic resource listed on the Master Plan become deteriorated to a point which imperils their preservation as the result of ‘willful neglect, purpose or design,’ the ordinance proposes that the Director of Environmental Protection may be directed to issue a written notice to the property owner about the condition of deterioration.

### **Montgomery County Historic Preservation Commission**

The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission is a bi-county agency created by the General Assembly of Maryland in 1927. The Commission’s geographic authority extends to the great majority of Montgomery and Prince George’s Counties: the Maryland-Washington Regional District (M-NCPPC planning jurisdiction) comprises of 1,001 square miles, while the Metropolitan District (parks) comprises of 919 square miles, in the two Counties.

The Commission has three major functions:

1. the preparation, adoption, and from time to time amendment or extension of the General Plan for the physical development of the Maryland-Washington Regional District;
2. the acquisition, development, operation, and maintenance of a public park system; and
3. in Prince George’s County only, the operation of the entire County public recreation program.

The Commission operates in each county through a Planning Board appointed by and responsible to the county government. All local plans, recommendations on zoning amendments, administration of subdivision regulation, and general administration of parks are the responsibilities of the Planning Board.

The purpose of the **Master Plan for Historic Preservation** is to propose a system for protecting and enhancing Montgomery County’s heritage for the benefit of present and future County residents, by dealing with the architecture and history resources of the County in a systematic and comprehensive manner.

## **GOALS FOR PRESERVATION IN MONTGOMERY COUNTY**

Montgomery County's historic resources range from those in Rockville, Takoma Park, and Poolesville, to early garden apartments, the C&O Canal, and an agricultural heritage recognized as a landscape of regional character and national historical significance. A diverse array of vernacular architectural and historical resources is scattered throughout the County. Some of these resources are significant by themselves; some significant for their benefits as a group; and others significant for their larger environmental context, whether in suburban communities or in rural settings. These resources include buildings and districts containing homes, industries, or commerce. They provide economic and social benefits to the owners and to the County at large.

The challenge is to combine protection of these scattered historical resources into the County planning system so as to maximize general public support for preservation of the County's heritage and minimize infringement on private property rights. Cooperation and participation by all sectors of the economy must be fostered in the interest of historic preservation for the benefit of all.