



MONTGOMERY COUNTY PLANNING DEPARTMENT
THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

February 19, 2020

MEMORANDUM

To: Historic Preservation Commission
From: John Liebertz, Historic Preservation Specialist
Subject: Mihran Mesrobian House (M:35-99-1), 7410 Connecticut Avenue (MD 185),
Amendment to the *Master Plan for Historic Preservation*

Staff Recommendation: That the HPC recommend that the Planning Board amend the *Master Plan for Historic Preservation*, in order to list the Mihran Mesrobian House, 7410 Connecticut Avenue, as a Master Plan Historic Site.

Background: The National Park Service listed the subject property in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) for local significance under Criterion C (architecture) in 2017. The property's listing in the NRHP provides owners with access to state and federal historic preservation tax credits but offers no protection for the resource outside of a federal-funded project. On January 7, 2020, Caroline Hickman, representing the heirs of Mihran Mesrobian, requested evaluation of the subject property for potential listing and protection under §24A of the Montgomery County Ordinance.

Discussion: Historic Preservation staff reviewed existing NRHP documentation, conducted an architectural survey of the exterior of the building, and performed limited archival research. As noted in Section J of the Designation Report, staff finds that the subject property satisfies two Designation Criteria listed in §24A-3 of the Montgomery County Ordinance.

2.A Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction

The Mesrobian House is a premiere example of an Art Moderne-styled dwelling with restrained traditional building elements that responds to the surrounding predominance of Colonial Revival architecture. In general, Art Moderne-styled houses emphasized horizontality and featured multi-dimensional rectangular and square forms, smooth exterior wall surfaces, flat or shallow roofs, rounded corners, a high ratio of solid to void, and minimal applied ornamentation.

Responding to the requirements of the Chevy Chase Land Company, Mesrobian respected the surrounding architectural landscape, but incorporated his masterful interpretation of the Art Moderne-style for his own home. The dwelling features an amalgamation of square, rectangular, and rounded forms that create a sculptural quality to the building, but with a massing that aligns with the surrounding Colonial Revival styled-houses. Mesrobian further wove modern building methods and traditional materials. He omitted a stucco or parged finish in lieu of a concrete block structural system with a six-course, American-bond, whitewashed brick veneer. This allowed the traditional building material to be visible but created a smoother finish typical of the Art Moderne-style. Glass block windows with no sills or surrounds amplified the smoothness of the exterior walls, but steel-sash windows (a hallmark of the style) were recessed and had traditional brick sills. Chimneys flank the

entry and add the only vertical emphasis to the dwelling, but frame a sweeping, curved glass block wall that leads to the recessed main door.

Mesrobian deftly recognized and incorporated elements of the surrounding traditional architecture to create a modern building that embodied the ideal of variation and expression. This Art Moderne-styled building reflected that architecture can be unmistakably modern while producing the look of permanent beauty and comfort recognized by the populace.

2.B Represents the work of a master

Mihran Mesrobian is recognized as a master architect in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan region. His projects include signature hotels, office buildings, apartments, and residences constructed for a variety of socio-economic constituencies in diverse neighborhoods, for prominent and lesser-known real estate developers. Many of these buildings are designated national and local landmarks. While Mesrobian is known for his Beaux-Arts, classically inspired designs, and Art Deco buildings, the subject Art Moderne-styled building is a showcase of his design skill and individuality. He had a preference towards forward-looking designs, forms, and materials and implemented these elements on his own dwelling.

Conclusion: The Mesrobian House retains integrity to express its period of significance. The building has integrity of location and setting. The house remains in its original location at the intersection of Connecticut Avenue and Woodbine Street. The property's landscaping retains the major components of Mesrobian's scheme, including the red brick and cinderblock fence, trees, and shrubbery. In addition, the suburban setting remains intact as the surrounding residences were constructed prior to the Mesrobian House. The house has integrity of design, workmanship, and materials. Almost no alterations have occurred as the dwelling continues to represent the Art-Moderne style with traditional architectural influences. Other than the original front door, all character defining features of the plan, form, style, and materials of the building remain intact. The house has integrity of association and feeling. The building continues to evoke its historic character and its use as a single-family dwelling.

Therefore, the Mesrobian House meets the applicable designation criteria. The Historic Preservation staff recommends the property be listed in the *Master Plan for Historic Preservation*. If recommended for listing by the Historic Preservation Commission and approved by the Planning Board, next steps would be to bring the item through the multi-step public process with the Montgomery County Council to amend *Master Plan for Historic Preservation* in order to list the Mihran Mesrobian House, 7410 Connecticut Avenue, as a Master Plan Historic Site.