

# PLANNING BOARD DRAFT PLAN


for the

# MESROBIAN HOUSE









The *Mihran Mesrobian House: An Amendment to the Master Plan for Historic Preservation*, contains the text and supporting documentation for the Planning Board Draft. If adopted by the Montgomery County Council and approved by the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, this document amends the *Master Plan for Historic Preservation in Montgomery County, Maryland* (1979), as amended; *Bethesda-Chevy Chase Master Plan* (1990), as amended; and *The General Plan (on Wedges and Corridors) for the Physical Development of the Maryland-Washington Regional District in Montgomery and Prince George's Counties* (1964), as amended.

The Planning Board Draft presents the Montgomery County Planning Board's recommendation for the Mihran Mesrobian House located at 7410 Connecticut Avenue, Town of Chevy Chase. The heirs of Mihran Mesrobian, requested the evaluation of the subject property for potential listing and protection under Chapter 24A of the Montgomery County Code. In February 2020, the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) recommended that the subject property be listed in the *Locational Atlas and Index of Historic Sites in Montgomery County* and subsequently designated in the *Master Plan for Historic Preservation*. In July 2020, the Planning Board listed the subject property in the *Locational Atlas and Index of Historic Sites in Montgomery County* and recommends designation in the *Master Plan for Historic Preservation*.



## The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning 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 1,001 square miles, while the Metropolitan District (parks) comprises 919 square miles, in the two counties.

The Commission is charged with preparing, adopting and amending or extending The General Plan (On Wedges and Corridors) for the Physical Development of the Maryland-Washington Regional District in Montgomery and Prince George's counties. The Commission operates in each county through Planning Boards appointed by those county governments. The Planning Boards are responsible for implementation of local plans, zoning ordinances, and subdivision regulations and the administration of the bi-county park system.

The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission encourages the involvement and participation of individuals with disabilities through its accessible facilities. For assistance with special needs (e.g., large print materials, listening devices, sign language interpretation, etc.), please contact the M-NCPPC Montgomery County Commissioners Office by telephone 301-495-4605 or by email at [mcpchair@mncppc-mc.org](mailto:mcpchair@mncppc-mc.org). Maryland residents can also use the free Maryland Relay Service for assistance with calls to or from hearing- or speech-impaired persons; for information, go to [www.mdrelay.org/](http://www.mdrelay.org/) or call 866-269-9006.

## Master Plan for Historic Preservation

The *Master Plan for Historic Preservation* is a functional master plan with countywide application. The plan and the Historic Preservation Ordinance, Chapter 24A of the Montgomery County Code, are designed to protect and preserve Montgomery County's historic and architectural heritage. When a historic resource is placed in the *Master Plan for Historic Preservation*, the adoption action officially designates the property as a historic site or historic district, and subjects it to the further procedural requirements of the Historic Preservation Ordinance.

Designation of historic sites and districts serves to highlight the values that are important in maintaining the individual character of the County and its communities. It is the intent of the County's preservation program to provide a rational system for evaluating, protecting and enhancing the historic and architectural heritage of the County for the benefit of present and future generations.

The following criteria apply, as stated in §24A-3 of the County Code when historic resources are evaluated for designation in the Master Plan for Historic Preservation:

### Evaluation Criterion (1): Historical and Cultural

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; or
- d. exemplifies the cultural, economic, social, political or historic heritage of the County and its communities; or

### Evaluation Criterion (2): Architectural and Design

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.



## The Process of Amending the Master Plan for Historic Preservation

The Staff Draft Plan (comprised of the Master Plan Historic Site Designation Form and Historic Preservation staff report) is prepared for presentation to the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC). The Staff Draft Plan reflects the recommendations of the Historic Preservation staff. The HPC holds a public hearing and receives testimony, after which it holds a public worksession to review the testimony and revise the Staff Draft Plan as appropriate. When the HPC's changes are incorporated, the document becomes the Public Hearing Draft Plan.

The Public Hearing Draft Plan reflects the HPC's recommendations for amending the Master Plan for Historic Preservation. The Planning Board holds a public hearing and receives testimony, after which it holds a public work session to review the testimony, consider the analysis and recommendations provided by the HPC and Historic Preservation staff, and revise the Public Hearing Draft Plan as appropriate. When the Planning Board's changes are made, the document becomes the Planning Board Draft Plan.

The Planning Board Draft Plan is the Planning Board's recommended Plan and reflects its revisions to the Public Hearing Draft Plan. The Regional District Act requires the Planning Board to transmit a master plan amendment to the County Council with copies to the County Executive who must, within 60 days, prepare and transmit a fiscal impact analysis of the Planning Board Draft Plan to the County Council. The County Executive may also forward to the County Council other comments and recommendations.

After receiving the Executive's fiscal impact analysis and comments, the County Council holds a public hearing to receive public testimony. After the hearing record is closed, the Council's Planning, Housing, and Economic Development (PHED) Committee holds public worksessions to review the testimony and make recommendations to the County Council. The Council holds its own worksessions, revises the Planning Board Draft according to its assessment of which resources and districts should be designated, then adopts a resolution approving the final amendment to the Master Plan for Historic Preservation.

After Council approval, the plan is forwarded to the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission for adoption. Once the Commission adopts the plan, it

officially amends the master plans, functional plans and sector plans cited in the Commission's adoption resolution.

## Implementing the Master Plan for Historic Preservation

Once designated in the *Master Plan for Historic Preservation*, historic resources are subject to protection under the Historic Preservation Ordinance, Chapter 24A of the County Code. Any substantial changes to the exterior of a resource or its environmental setting must be reviewed by the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) and a Historic Area Work Permit (HAWP) issued under the provisions of §24A-6 of the Ordinance. In accordance with the *Master Plan for Historic Preservation* and unless otherwise specified in the master plan amendment, the environmental setting or each site, as defined in §24A-2 of the Ordinance, is the entire parcel on which the resource is located as of the date it is designated on the Master Plan.

Designation of the entire parcel provides the County adequate review authority to preserve historic sites in the event of development. It also ensures that from the beginning of the development process, important features of these sites are recognized and incorporated in the future development of designated properties. In the case of large acreage parcels, the amendment may provide general guidance for the refinement of the setting by indicating when the setting is subject to reduction in the event of development; by describing an appropriate area to preserve the integrity of the resource; and by identifying buildings and features associated with the site which should be protected as part of the setting. For most of the sites designated, the appropriate point at which to refine the environmental setting will be when the property is subdivided.

Public improvements can profoundly affect the integrity of an historic area. Section §24A-6 of the Ordinance states that a HAWP for work on public or private property must be issued prior to altering a historic resource or its environmental setting. The design of public facilities in the vicinity of historic resources should be sensitive to and maintain the character of the area. Specific design considerations should be reflected as part of the Mandatory Referral review processes.

In many cases, historic resources and their associated parcels are also affected by other planned facilities in a master plan; this is particularly true with respect to transportation



right-of-way. In general, when establishing an environmental setting boundary for a historic resource, the need for the ultimate transportation facility is also acknowledged, and the environmental setting includes the entire parcel minus the approved and adopted master planned right-of-way. In certain specific cases, however, the master planned right-of-way directly affects an important contributing element to the historic resource. In such cases, the amendment addresses the specific conflicts existing at the site and suggests alternatives to assist in balancing preservation with the implementation of other equally important community needs.

In addition to protecting designated resources from unsympathetic alteration and insensitive redevelopment, the County's Historic Preservation Ordinance also empowers the County's Department of Permitting Services and the HPC to prevent the demolition of historic buildings through neglect.

Montgomery County provides a tax credit against County real property taxes to encourage the restoration and preservation of privately-owned historic resources located in the County. The credit applies to all properties designated in the *Master Plan for Historic Preservation* (Chapter 52, Art. VI). The HPC maintains current information on the status of preservation incentives including tax credits, tax benefits possible through the granting of easements, outright grants and low-interest loans. In 2001, the County Council passed legislation requiring an owner of a resource on the *Master Plan for Historic Preservation* or the *Locational Atlas and Index of*

*Historic Sites in Montgomery County* to disclose the property's historic status to each prospective buyer before signing a sales contract (§40-12A).

## The Amendment

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 to the resource outside of a state or federal-funded project.

This amendment presents the result of the Montgomery County Planning Board's evaluation of the *Mihran Mesrobian House* (35/99-1), 7410 Connecticut Avenue, Chevy Chase. In July 2020, the Planning Board listed the resource in the *Locational Atlas and Index of Historic Sites* and recommended designation in the *Master Plan for Historic Preservation*. The listing of the property in the *Locational Atlas and Index of Historic Sites* protects the resource from demolition or substantial alteration under §24A-10, the Moratorium on Demolitions and Substantial Alterations, until review of the amendment by the County Council. If designated in the *Master Plan of Historic Preservation* by the County Council, the resource would be protected by the Historic Preservation Ordinance, Chapter 24A of the Montgomery County Code.

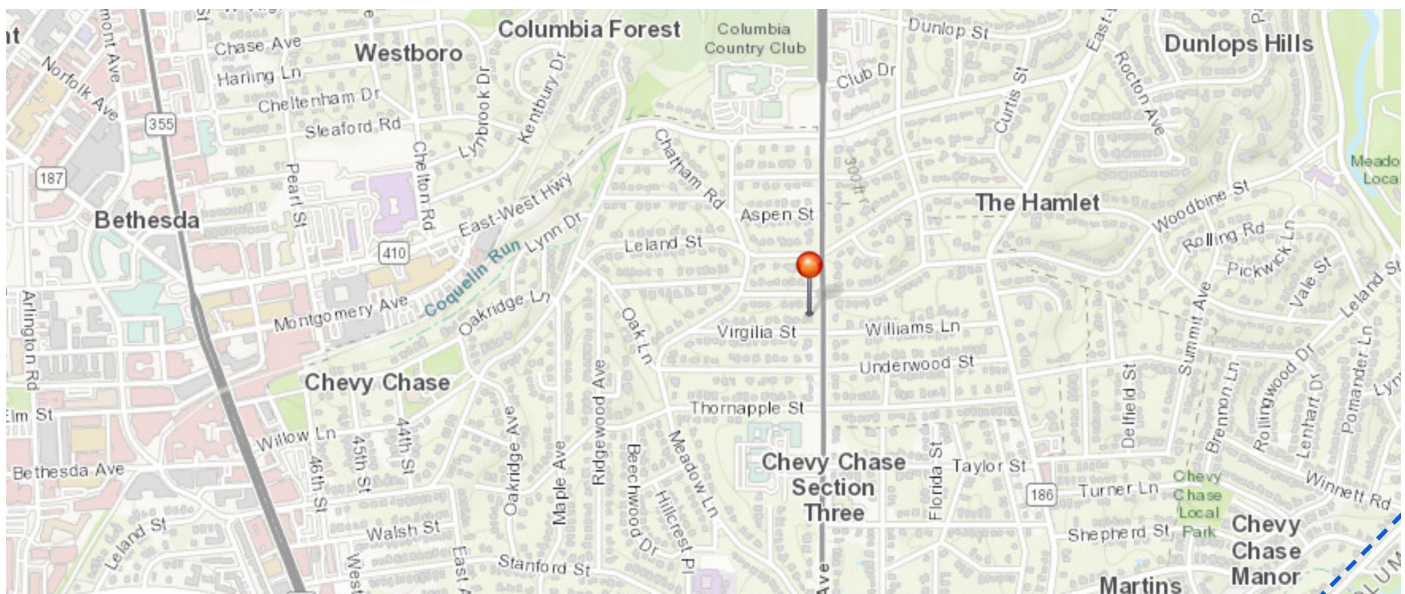


Figure 1: The Mihran Mesrobian House is located in Chevy Chase Village, to the east of downtown Bethesda.  
Source: Montgomery Planning GIS.



## Description

The Mihran Mesrobian House at 7410 Connecticut Avenue is located in the Town of Chevy Chase, a residential subdivision that was developed in the early 20th century by the Chevy Chase Land Company. The single-family dwelling stands on the southwest corner of Woodbine Street and Connecticut Avenue, the latter being the major north-south transportation artery that bisects Chevy Chase. The property is zoned R-60 for moderate density residential uses with a predominance of detached houses.

Mihran Mesrobian (1889- 1975), a well-regarded Washington-based architect, designed the house in 1941 as the family's personal residence. The Art Moderne-styled, wood-framed dwelling with whitewashed brick veneer consists of two stories and a full basement. The house is capped with a shallow, slate-shingle, hipped roof. Signature elements of the Art Moderne-style include asymmetrical massing, whitewashed brick to resemble concrete, glass block at the front entrance, steel casement windows, and a 2nd-floor sun porch. Narrow brick stringcourses and inset geometric panels further define the elevations. The interior contains an entrance hall from which the common areas are accessed. The first-floor plan is multilevel, with the formal living room, dining room, and den accessed by low rises of stairs. The second floor contains the private areas, with three bedrooms, two baths, and a sitting room that overlooks Connecticut Avenue.

The property, like the neighboring houses on the west side of Connecticut Avenue, is elevated approximately 3-½ feet from the avenue. The red brick and concrete block retaining wall, features piers capped with classical urns. The wall reflects Georgian Revival architecture rather than the Art Moderne style of the house. As a result, the wall facilitates a visual transition with the house and the neighboring traditional houses that line the avenue.

See Appendix One: Master Plan Historic Site Designation Form for a detailed site and architectural description.



Figure 2: View of the front (east) elevation from the center of Connecticut Avenue, 2020.  
Source: Historic Preservation Program.



Figure 3: View of the front (east) elevation from the entrance gate, 2020.  
Source: Historic Preservation Program.

## Statement of Significance

Master architect Mihran Mesrobian designed the Art Moderne-styled house at 7410 Connecticut Avenue for himself and his wife, Zabelle, in 1941. Although Mesrobian was better known for his classically inspired designs of the 1920s and Art Deco buildings of the 1930s, both he and Zabelle wanted a modernist residence. It was the only house he designed for himself and served as his residence until his death in 1975. The house is a highly visible example of a Washington-area residence designed by an architect for his own use due to its location on an arterial road. The modernist house is a striking anomaly among the traditional, revival-style residences that line Connecticut Avenue and side streets of Chevy Chase, MD. Concessions to the Chevy



Chase Land Company's conservative design covenants resulted in a modified design that retains certain modernist elements such as glass block and flat or shallow roofs, while incorporating traditional building elements such as denticulated brick, double stringcourses, incised geometrics and a hipped roof. It is a creative example of the Art Moderne style, reflecting an informed blending of elements of modernism and classicism.

See Appendix One: Master Plan Historic Site Designation Form for a detailed historic context, including the acquisition of the property and construction of the dwelling and information on the Modern Movement and the International and Art Moderne styles.

### Master Architect Mihran Mesrobian

Mesrobian (1889-1975) was born in Afyon Karahisar, Turkey. He graduated from the Imperial Academy of Fine Arts in Istanbul in 1908 and began a promising career as a municipal architect in Izmir in the office of the palace architect in Istanbul. The extraordinary circumstances under which he trained and practiced architecture in Turkey during the final years of the Ottoman Empire profoundly altered his career trajectory. His graduation from the Imperial School of Fine



Figure 4: Portrait of Mihran Mesrobian.

Source: Mihran Mesrobian Archive, Private Collection, Washington, D.C.

Arts occurred as the Young Turks, political dissidents, seized power from the sultan, resulting in political and social reforms that would culminate in the founding of the Republic of Turkey. During World War I, Mesrobian served as an army corps engineer in the Turkish army. After the war, he returned to Istanbul and took a position as chief designer in the office of the prominent engineer Ismail Hakki.

In 1921, Mesrobian immigrated to the United States with his wife, Zabelle, and their two young sons. Shortly after relocating to Washington, DC, he entered the architectural office of Harry Wardman. At that time, Wardman was the preeminent real estate developer in the nation's capital. Mesrobian's quick rise to the position of chief architect came during the developer's most ambitious building period that ended only with Wardman's death in 1938. His premier hotels for Wardman include hallmarks of Beaux-Arts classicism such as the Hay-Adams (1927, overlooking Lafayette Park and the



Figure 5: Mesrobian designed the Beaux-Arts styled Hay-Adams Hotel (Washington, D.C.) in 1928. The hotel is listed in the Lafayette Square National Register Historic District.

Source: Library of Congress.





Figure 6: Mesrobian designed the DuPont Circle Building (Washington, D.C.) in the Art Deco-style in 1931. The building is listed in the DuPont Circle National Register Historic District. Source: Library of Congress.

White House), the Carlton/ St. Regis (1926, 16th Street at K Street) and the English revival-style Wardman Tower (1928, 2660 Connecticut Ave NW).

During the 1930s and 1940s, Mesrobian's commissions for apartments, office buildings and shopping centers showed an evolving interest in modernist design, particularly the Art Deco. This new movement stimulated remarkable creativity in Mesrobian's work, especially in his use of architectural ornamentation. His predilection for Near-Eastern motifs reflected his Ottoman heritage and earlier practice of

architecture in Turkey. Notable examples of his innovative schemes of the 1930s are 1350 Connecticut Avenue (Dupont Circle between Connecticut Avenue and 19th Street), the Nejib Hekimian Oriental rug store (18th Street at Connecticut Avenue), and Sedgwick Gardens (Connecticut Avenue at Sedgwick Street). During World War II, Mesrobian designed large-scale, Federal Housing Authority-insured garden apartment complexes in northern Virginia that helped accommodate the influx of government workers to the metropolitan area. In comparison to other garden apartment





Figure 7: Mesrobian designed Sedgwick Gardens (Washington, D.C.) in the Art Deco style for developer Max Gorin in 1931. The apartment building is listed in the National Register of Historic Places.



Figure 8: Mesrobian designed Wakefield Manor Garden Apartments (Arlington, Virginia) in 1943. Here he designed a brick retaining wall similar to the one at his residence. Source: Arlington County Historic Preservation Program.

complexes, Mesrobian's buildings reflected a higher standard of design during a period of material shortages.

Mesrobian also single-handedly maintained a prolific private practice, producing well-designed buildings for a variety of clients and budgets, skillfully adapting historicist design to modern building typologies, and embracing new stylistic movements with originality. In the past 20 years, the National Park Service listed several of Mesrobian's projects on the National Register of Historic Places.

### Designation Criteria

The Mihran Mesrobian House meets two Designation Criteria of the Historic Preservation Ordinance as listed in §24A-3 of the Montgomery County Code.

### 2.A Architectural and Design: Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction

The Mesrobian House is a premier example of an Art Moderne-styled dwelling with restrained traditional building elements that respond 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.

The brick-and-concrete block wall with classically inspired cast-stone decoration defines the perimeter of the property. The wall provides a visual transition from the Art Moderne-styled house and the neighboring traditional houses. Mesrobian designed similar walls at other notable projects such as Wakefield Manor, a garden apartment complex in Arlington, VA. He incorporated this landscape feature in the design of his own home.

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.



Figure 9: View of the front (east) elevation from the entrance gate, 2020.  
Source: Historic Preservation Program.

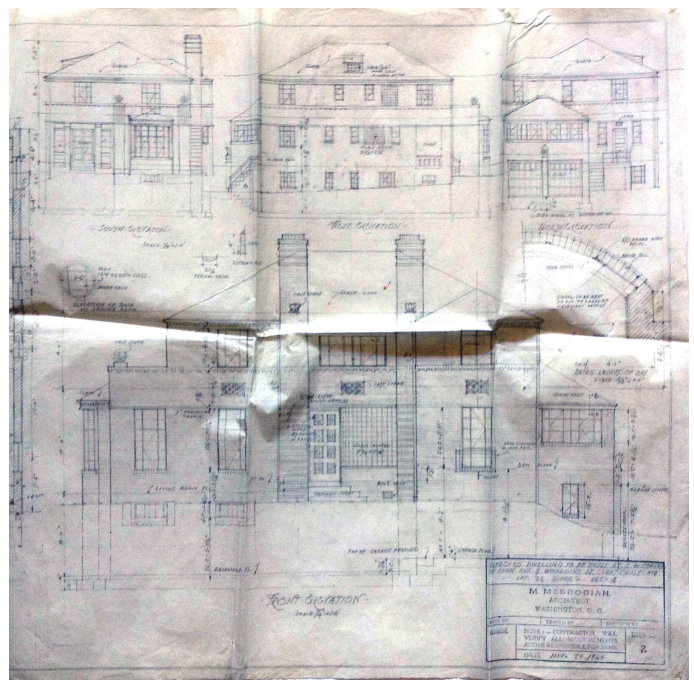


Figure 10: Mesrobian's architectural elevations of the house, 1940.  
Source: Mihran Mesrobian Archive, Private Collection, Washington, D.C.



Figure 11: View of the front (east) elevation, 2020. The façade features a sweeping curved glass block wall that leads to the recessed main door.  
Source: Historic Preservation Program.



Figure 12: Detailed view of the brick and concrete block retaining wall.  
Source: Historic Preservation Program.



## 2.B Architectural and Design: Represents the work of a master

Mihran Mesrobian is recognized as a master architect in the Washington, DC, 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

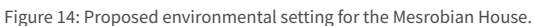
for his Beaux-Arts, classically inspired designs, and Art Deco buildings, the subject Art Moderne-styled building is a showcase of his design skill and individuality. He had a preference towards forward-looking designs, forms, and materials and implemented these elements on his own dwelling.



Figure 13: Mihran Mesrobian at his home office, 7410 Connecticut Avenue, 1954.  
Source: Mihran Mesrobian Archive, Private Collection, Washington, D.C.



The Mihran Mesrobian House is located at 7410 Connecticut Avenue, Chevy Chase, Montgomery County, MD. The proposed environmental setting to be listed in the *Master Plan for Historic Preservation* consists of the building and its associated 10,800 square-foot lot identified as Account Number 00464605, District 07, as shown on the accompanying map.



## Purpose of the Design Guidelines

The guidelines utilize the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation listed below.

- Planning Board Draft Plan for the Mesrobian House. | 11



## Historic Area Work Permits

In approaching possible alterations to a historic home, it is beneficial to review the Preservation Briefs from the National Park Service. The National Park Service has prepared more than 40 Preservation Briefs since 1975, and they cover numerous topics such as roofing, energy efficiency, window replacements and paint. These booklets provide easy-to-read guidance on preserving, rehabilitating and restoring historic buildings that help homeowners, preservation professionals, organizations and government agencies. Preservation Briefs may be viewed online or ordered via the National Park Service website.

A Historic Area Works Permit (HAWP) is required to change the exterior features of a historic site or a building located in a historic district. Per §24A-6 of the Historic Preservation Ordinance, Historic Area Works Permits (HAWPS) **must be issued** for any work on public or private properties containing a historic resource before the following actions:

1. Constructing, reconstructing, moving, relocating, demolishing or in any manner modifying, changing, or altering the exterior features of any historic site or any historic resource located within any historic district.
2. Performing any grading, excavating, construction or substantially modifying, changing or altering the environmental setting of an historic site or an historic resource located within an historic district.

Examples of projects that require a HAWP include but are not limited to:

- New construction or additions
- Demolition of any exterior elements
- Alteration, addition, or removal of architectural features, including the size, shape, and placement of windows
- Replacement of windows
- Installation of siding or other changes to exterior materials
- Installation of or alteration to site features including walkways and retaining walls
- Grading and removing live trees greater than six inches in diameter
- Painting unpainted surfaces or removing paint from masonry
- Alteration to the hand-painted motif on the soffit between the two chimneys.

Examples of projects that do not require a HAWP include:

1. Ordinary maintenance and repair of exterior features
  - This includes painting non-masonry surfaces, painting already painted masonry surfaces, roof repairs, gutters, trim, lights, etc. with materials and design matching what is already in place.
2. Interior alterations to the resources that does not affect the exterior
3. Typical gardening and landscaping
4. In-kind replacement or repairs to the walkways or driveway with matching materials

An overview of the review and approval process is described in §24A-6 to §24A-8 of the Historic Preservation Ordinance and on the Historic Preservation program's website: <https://montgomeryplanning.org/planning/historic/historic-area-work-permits/>









# Montgomery Planning

THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission

Online at: [https://montgomeryplanning.org/planning/historic/research-and-designation/mihran\\_mesrobian\\_house/](https://montgomeryplanning.org/planning/historic/research-and-designation/mihran_mesrobian_house/)