

**MONTGOMERY COUNTY HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION**  
**STAFF REPORT**

<b>Address:</b>	3920 Washington Street, Kensington	<b>Meeting Date:</b>	9/20/2023
<b>Resource:</b>	Primary Resource <b>Kensington Historic District</b>	<b>Report Date:</b>	9/13/2023
<b>Applicant:</b>	Armando Mendoza	<b>Public Notice:</b>	9/6/2023
<b>Review:</b>	HAWP	<b>Tax Credit:</b>	No
<b>Permit Number:</b>	Pending	<b>Staff:</b>	John Liebertz

**PROPOSAL:** After-the-fact front door replacement.

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**STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

Staff recommends that the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) **approve** the HAWP application.

**ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION**

**SIGNIFICANCE:** Primary Resource within the Kensington Historic District  
**STYLE:** Colonial Revival  
**DATE:** Ca. 1904-1911



*Figure 1: The subject property at 3920 Washington Avenue (noted by the yellow star) is located mid-block on the south side of Washington Street. The red line is the boundary of the Master Plan Historic District.*

## **PROPOSAL**

The applicant replaced the existing single-leaf, three-panel, eight-light, wood, front door with a single-leaf, two-panel, single-light, mahogany door. While this permit is being reviewed after the fact, the HPC is to review the work as if it had not been completed.

## **APPLICABLE GUIDELINES**

### ***Kensington Historic District Guidelines***

When reviewing alterations and new construction within the Kensington Historic District several documents are to be utilized as guidelines to assist the Commission in developing their decision. These documents include the *Approved & Adopted Amendment to the Master Plan for Historic Preservation: Kensington Historic District, Atlas #31/6 (Amendment)*, *Vision of Kensington: A Long-Range Preservation Plan (Vision)*, *Montgomery County Code Chapter 24A (Chapter 24A)*, and the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation (Standards)*. The pertinent information in these documents is outlined below.

### ***Approved & Adopted Amendment to the Master Plan for Historic Preservation: Kensington Historic District, Atlas #31/6***

The Amendment notes:

The district is architecturally significant as a collection of late 19th and early 20th Century houses exhibiting a variety of architectural styles popular during the Victorian period including Queen Anne, Shingle, Eastlake and Colonial Revival. The houses share a uniformity of scale, set backs and construction materials that contribute to the cohesiveness of the district's streetscapes. This uniformity, coupled with the dominant design inherent in Warner's original plan of subdivision, conveys a strong sense of both time and place, that of a Victorian garden suburb.

### ***Vision of Kensington: A Long-Range Preservation Plan***

The HPC formally adopted the planning study, *Vision of Kensington: A Long-Range Preservation Plan*, and is directed by the Executive Regulations, which were approved by the County Council, to use this plan when considering changes and alterations to the Kensington Historic District. The goal of this preservation plan "was to establish a sound database of information from, which to produce a document that would serve the HPC, M-NCPPC, their staff and the community in wrestling with the protection of historic districts amidst the pressures of life in the 21st century." (page 1). The plan provides a specific physical description of the district as it is; an analysis of character-defining features of the district; a discussion of the challenges facing the district; and a discussion of proposed strategies for maintaining the character of the district while allowing for appropriate growth and change.

### ***Montgomery County Code; Chapter 24A-8***

- (b) The commission shall instruct the director to issue a permit, or issue a permit subject to such conditions as are found to be necessary to ensure conformity with the purposes and requirements of this chapter, if it finds that:
  - (1) The proposal will not substantially alter the exterior features of an historic site or historic resource within an historic district; or

(2) The proposal is compatible in character and nature with the historical, archeological, architectural or cultural features of the historic site or the historic district in which an historic resource is located and would not be detrimental thereto or to the achievement of the purposes of this chapter; or

(d) In the case of an application for work on an historic resource located within an historic district, the commission shall be lenient in its judgment of plans for structures of little historical or design significance or for plans involving new construction, unless such plans would seriously impair the historic or architectural value of surrounding historic resources or would impair the character of the historic district. (Ord. No. 9-4, § 1; Ord. No. 11-59.)

***Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation:***

The Secretary of the Interior defines rehabilitation as “the act or process of making possible a compatible use for a property through repair, alterations, and additions while preserving those portions or features, which convey its historical, cultural, or architectural values.” The *Standards* are as follows:

2. The historic character of a property shall be retained and preserved. The removal of historic materials or alteration of features and spaces that characterize a property shall be avoided.
9. New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction shall not destroy historic materials that characterize the property. The new work shall be differentiated from the old and shall be compatible with the massing, size, scale, and architectural features to protect the historic integrity of the property and its environment.
10. New additions and adjacent or related new construction shall be undertaken in such a manner that if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment would be unimpaired.

**STAFF DISCUSSION**

The subject property is a Primary Resource in the Kensington Master Plan Historic District. The property features a Colonial Revival styled dwelling constructed in the late nineteenth century (1880-1904). The date of construction is based on previous staff reports and an analysis of available Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps. There are no relevant Historic Area Work Permits (HAWP) associated with the property.



*Figure 2: View of the façade of 3920 Washington Street, 2022 (left) and 2023 (right).  
Source: Google and Applicant.*

### *Replacement of the Front Door*

In the applicant's 2022 Historic Preservation Tax Credit application, historic preservation Staff determined that the front door replacement had been completed without a HAWP and directed the applicant to apply for the required permit.

Staff finds that the replacement of the original door meets the applicable guidelines and recommends approval. Staff found the following images of the original door from online real estate listings for the property in 2019 (*Figure 3*).



**Figure 3: View of the original (removed) door from the online real estate listing for 3920 Washington Street, 2019. Source: Redfin.**

The applicant does not have detailed photographs or estimates describing the condition of the door in 2022, but provided staff with the following written description:

It was an old wooden door. It developed a slit in one of the panels that was about two feet long. You could see daylight through the slit. The door itself wasn't in great shape and not very insulated. We decided it was best to update the door to a new wooden door that would be better with insulation.<sup>1</sup>

The type of deterioration described by the applicant is not uncommon, but it remains unknown whether the original door could have been repaired instead of replaced. For this reason, staff does not recommend the HPC approve any tax credits for the subject work.

While the new single-light, two-panel, wood (mahogany) door alters the original design, trade catalogues from the early twentieth century include variations of the replacement door for Colonial Revival-styled dwellings (*Figure 4*). Therefore, staff recommends approval of the new door as it is compatible with the historic house and the surrounding district, being a period-appropriate replacement door for a Colonial Revival-styled dwelling.

<sup>1</sup> Email from Armando Mendoza to John Liebertz, August 21, 2023.



**Figure 4: View of the after-the-fact door (left) and 1920 trade catalogue showing a similar front door (right). Source: Applicant and Curtis Companies.**

After full and fair consideration of the applicant's submission, staff finds the proposal, as modified by the condition, consistent with the Criteria for Issuance in Chapter 24A-8(b), (1), (2), and (d), having found the proposal is consistent with the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation #9 and #10*, and *Vision of Kensington*.

### **STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

Staff recommends that the Commission **approve** the HAWP application under the Criteria for Issuance in Chapter 24A-8(b), (1), (2), and (d), having found that the proposal, as modified by the condition, is consistent with the *Vision of Kensington*, and therefore will not substantially alter the exterior features of the historic resource and is compatible in character with the district and the purposes of Chapter 24A;

and with the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation #9 and #10*.

and with the general condition that the applicant shall present an electronic set of drawings, if applicable, to Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) staff for review and stamping prior to submission for the Montgomery County Department of Permitting Services (DPS) building permits;

and with the general condition that final project design details, not specifically delineated by the Commission, shall be approved by HPC staff or brought back to the Commission as a revised HAWP application at staff's discretion;

and with the general condition that the applicant shall notify the Historic Preservation Staff if they propose to make any alterations to the approved plans. Once the work is completed the applicant will contact the staff person assigned to this application at 301-563-3400 or [john.liebertz@montgomeryplanning.org](mailto:john.liebertz@montgomeryplanning.org) to schedule a follow-up site visit.