MONTGOMERY COUNTY HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION STAFF REPORT

Address: 7209 MacArthur Blvd., Bethesda Meeting Date: 3/26/2025

Resource: Contributing Resource **Report Date:** 3/19/2025

Potomac Overlook Historic District

Review: HAWP **Public Notice:** 3/12/2025

Permit No.: Pending Staff: Dan Bruechert

Proposal: RETROACTIVE - Painting Unpainted Masonry **Tax Credit:** No

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends the HPC <u>approve with one (1) condition</u> the HAWP application with final approval authority delegated to Staff:

1. The applicant must paint the painted brick exterior a color that is consistent with the bricks found throughout the Potomac Overlook Historic District. Painting must be completed within 60 days of the approval of this HAWP.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

SIGNIFICANCE: Contributing Resource to the Potomac Overlook Historic District

STYLE: 1958

DATE: Mid-Century (Highview Model)



Figure 1: The subject property is adjacent to Macarthur Blvd., but not visible from the street.

BACKGROUND

On September 4, 2024, the HPC heard a HAWP to consider the retroactive painting of the foundation at the subject property.¹ The Staff recommended the HPC approve the work with the added condition that any future foundation repainting not be considered in-kind work that did not require a HAWP. The HPC denied the HAWP finding that the work was inconsistent with the *Design Guidelines* and recommended the applicant work with Staff to find methods of paint removal that would not destroy the underlying brick.

PROPOSAL

The applicant proposes to paint the brick masonry foundation of the subject property.

Though this work is complete, the HPC is charged to review it as if the work has not been undertaken.

APPLICABLE GUIDELINES

When reviewing alterations and new construction within the Potomac Overlook Historic District several documents are to be utilized as guidelines to assist the Commission in developing their decision. These documents include the *Potomac Overlook Guidelines* (*Guidelines*), *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.

Potomac Overlook Design Guidelines

Changes to houses in the Potomac Overlook Historic District are guided by three overall objectives:

- 1. Preserve historical architectural features and details;
- 2. Deteriorated architectural details should be repaired rather than replaced; and
- 3. Replace historic features in-kind when restoration is not an option.

Siding – The dwelling's brick veneer on the first story and redwood siding (either tongue-and-groove or board-and-batten) on the second story are character defining material in Potomac Overlook. These materials add textural qualities, visual continuity, and character to the overall streetscape and shall be preserved.

Design Objectives:

- 1. Retain and preserve original textured brick veneer walls and redwood siding.
- 2. Use the gentlest means possible to clean the building. Many procedures, such as sandblasting and pressure washing, can result in accelerated deterioration or damage.
- 3. Match the original mortar joint and masonry size, tooling, and bond patterns when making repairs to brick walls.
- 4. Do not paint previously unpainted masonry surfaces.
- 5. Do not cover or obscure original wall and siding materials.
- 6. If deteriorated beyond repair, replace original wood siding or brick veneer in-kind with materials of matching design, color, and texture.
- 7. Avoid the use of non-historic materials on the original building.
- 8. Cementitious fiberboard will be permitted only as a replacement for the original T1-11

¹ The hearing for the September 4, 2024 HAWP hearing is available here: https://mncppc.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?publish_id=f3f34561-6b97-11ef-9b71-005056a89546.

siding (possible on the Highview models), existing synthetic siding and on new additions.

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
 - (6) In balancing the interests of the public in preserving the historic site or historic resource located within an historic district, with the interests of the public from the use and benefit of the alternative proposal, the general public welfare is better served by granting the permit.
- (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

- 1. 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.
- 7. Chemical or physical treatments, if appropriate, will be undertaken using the gentlest means possible. Treatments that cause damage to historic materials will not be used.
- 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 Highview model house designated as a Contributing Resource to the Potomac Overlook Historic District. Appendix A (attached) identifies all of the alterations made to the house, including a small side gable addition, a rear bay bump-out (the rear bump-out was demolished and reconstructed as part of the approved 2022 HAWP), and a replacement or substantially altered carport. A site visit revealed that the foundation had been painted without a HAWP to match the newly painted house siding. In cases seeking retroactive approval, the HPC is to consider the proposal as if the work has not been completed. This HAWP includes an additional challenge, because the HPC determined that the work was incompatible with the character of the house and surrounding district and denied the HAWP. While the description of the work proposed for this HAWP is retroactive foundation painting, the true objective is to attempt to determine the proper mitigation under the requisite guidance. The applicant painted the brick foundation with Sherwin Williams A-100 Exterior Acrylic Latex paint in a satin finish.

The condition of the subject house before any work had been carried out was included in the Master Plan

Historic District Designation Form, prepared in May 2021. Those photographs show the exposed mottled brick foundation (see *Figures 2*, below).



Figure 2: The south elevation of the subject house from May 2021. The red arrow and green box are from the Design Guidelines showing alterations prior to the establishment of the District.

The house siding and brick were painted sometime during the house rehabilitation. Staff notes, painting the siding does not require a HAWP, as the vertical siding was previously painted.



Figure 3: Photo taken by Staff at an early 2024 site visit.

As Staff noted in the previous Staff Report retaining the unpainted finish of the brick foundations of houses throughout the Potomac Overlook Historic District is one of the design objectives identified in the *Design Guidelines* for the district. These foundations and first floors are character-defining features of the houses and should be retained. Additionally, Staff finds painting unpainted masonry is generally a disfavored historic preservation practice, because it changes the visual character of the material and because it can cause damage to the underlying material by trapping moisture and limiting its ability to breathe.

There can be instances when unpainted brick or masonry should be painted, however, those limited instances are when the underlying historic masonry is degrading and paint or limewash can provide additional protection to the historic material. This is not one of those instances.

In the time since the HPC denial, the applicant has worked with Staff to identify a chemical paint remover. The applicant purchased a paint removal test kit from Dumond.² This kit includes samples of three different paint remover, each is formulated to work on different types of paints. The applicant tested samples of the three products on the western wall of the foundation. After applying the paint removers and covering them with the provided laminated paper, with Staff present, the applicant attempted to scrape the paint off using the kit-provided plastic scraper. The removal results were largely unsuccessful. Very little paint came off the wall and the majority of what did was removed from the mortar. Additional photographs of the paint removal were included in the submitted application materials.

² More details about the specific paint removal test kit are available here: https://dumondglobal.com/products/testkit-paint.



Figure 2: Staff photograph from the attempted paint removal at the subject property.

One of the three products included in the test kit, the Smart Strip Advanced Paint Remover, is recommended by the paint manufacture to remove the paint used in this application. Based on the results of the paint removal, Staff does not find additional applications are likely to be an effective solution. Staff can only speculate as to why the paint remover was unsuccessful.

While Staff does not recommend additional attempts at chemical paint stripping, Staff has identified three potential methods to mitigate the painted foundation:

- 1. Physical removal (i.e., sandblasting or soda blasting);
- 2. Painting the brick a color more consistent with the brick color; or
- 3. Take no action, but explicitly state that repainting the foundation may not be re-painted. Staff finds painting the brick a color consistent with the brick to be the best solution.

Staff finds that methods of physically removing the paint are inconsistent with *Standard #7*. Sandblasting, soda blasting, or dry ice blasting all have a high likelihood of damaging the surface of the surface of the brick. Physical treatments often damage the exterior face of the brick and allow a freer flow of water through the masonry material, increasing the chance of brick spawling, and substantially decreasing the lifespan of the material.³ While some have suggested this concern is compounded by the fact that the bricks used at Potomac Overlook were reclaimed from late 19th-century construction

³ See Preservation Briefs 6: Dangers of Abrasive Cleaning to Historic Buildings: https://www.nps.gov/orgs/1739/upload/preservation-brief-06-abrasive-cleaning.pdf.

demolished as part of the urban renewal construction of Southwest Washington D.C., Staff found no evidence of this and believes the story is likely apocryphal. Regardless, Staff finds that these physical methods could permanently damage the historic material and does not recommend this course of action.

Staff's second identified method of mitigation is to paint the foundation to a color that is more consistent with the color of the original brick foundation. This treatment could be coupled with an additional condition for approval of this HAWP that repainting the brick foundation is not considered an in-kind treatment and that all future foundation finishes require a HAWP. While Staff acknowledges that painting the foundation runs counter to the Design Guidelines, it does not appear the paint can be removed without damaging the historic fabric. This solution would at least return the foundation closer to its original appearance even if the brick surface is obscured. Staff does not recommend the applicant attempt to match the mottled appearance of the original brick and instead paint it a uniform color. Because repainting would not be considered an in-kind treatment, the HPC would have the opportunity to evaluate the condition of the paint at a future date. When the paint begins to fail, it may be possible to remove a significant portion of it using a wire brush. Over time, the paint would degrade and return the brick to its unfinished appearance. The only potential drawback to this course of action is that it would add an additional layer of paint on top of the existing paint, which could create an additional layer of protection and extend the life of the paint. Staff is willing to take that chance and recommends the HPC approve the HAWP with the condition that the foundation exterior be painted a color that more closely resembles the original brick, with final approval authority to confirm the color is consistent with the brick delegated to Staff. With the recommended condition, Staff finds the proposal is generally consistent with 24A-8(b)(6), and (d).

Staff's third identified option is to approve the paint as-is and add a condition that any future foundation finish requires a HAWP and that painting is not to be considered an in-kind treatment. As discussed above, this would allow the paint to degrade and evaluate potential treatments at a future date. The primary drawback to this solution is that the house would retain its current appearance, which plainly runs counter to the *Design Guidelines*, and could signal to other residents in the Potomac Overlook Historic District that painting unfinished masonry is acceptable. However, this solution would not run afoul of *Standard #7* and has the greatest chance of returning the building to its original appearance. Staff finds this is the second preferred outcome and its approval could be justified under 24A-8(b)(6) and (d).

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Commission <u>approve with one (1) condition</u> with final approval authority delegated to Staff:

1. The applicant must paint the painted brick exterior a color that is consistent with the bricks found throughout the Potomac Overlook Historic District. Painting must be completed within 60 days of the approval of this HAWP;

under the Criteria for Issuance in Chapter 24A-8(b)(6) and (d) and the purposes of Chapter 24A;

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 <u>contact the staff person</u> assigned to this application at 301-563-3400 or <u>dan.bruechert@montgomeryplanning.org</u> to schedule a follow-up site visit.

HAWP APPLICATION: MAILING ADDRESSES FOR NOTIFING [Owner, Owner's Agent, Adjacent and Confronting Property Owners] Owner's mailing address Owner's Agent's mailing address Adjacent and confronting Property Owners mailing addresses

Description of Property: Please describe the building and surrounding environment. Include information on significant structures landscape features, or other significant features of the property:
Description of Work Proposed: Please give an overview of the work to be undertaken:

Work Item 1:	
Description of Current Condition:	Proposed Work:
Work Item 2:	
Description of Current Condition:	Proposed Work:
Work Item 3:	
Description of Current Condition:	Proposed Work:

HISTORIC AREA WORK PERMIT CHECKLIST OF APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

	Required Attachments						
Proposed Work	I. Written Description	2. Site Plan	3. Plans/ Elevations	4. Material Specifications	5. Photographs	6. Tree Survey	7. Property Owner Addresses
New Construction	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Additions/ Alterations	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Demolition	*	*	*		*		*
Deck/Porch	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Fence/Wall	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Driveway/ Parking Area	*	*		*	*	*	*
Grading/Exc avation/Land scaing	*	*		*	*	*	*
Tree Removal	*	*		*	*	*	*
Siding/ Roof Changes	*	*	*	*	*		*
Window/ Door Changes	*	*	*	*	*		*
Masonry Repair/ Repoint	*	*	*	*	*		*
Signs	*	*	*	*	*		*













