

Preliminary Consultation
MONTGOMERY COUNTY HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION
STAFF REPORT

Address:	23 Columbia Ave., Takoma Park	Meeting Date:	1/7/2026
Resource:	Contributing Resource Takoma Park Historic District	Report Date:	12/31/2025
Applicant:	Karl Pitt	Public Notice:	12/24/2025
Review:	Preliminary Consultation	Staff:	Dan Bruechert
Proposal:	Installation of Window Sill Capping		

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends the applicant make any revisions recommended by the HPC and returns for a HAWP.

PROPERTY DESCRIPTION

SIGNIFICANCE: Contributing Resource to the Takoma Park Historic District
STYLE: Dutch Colonial Revival
DATE: 1923

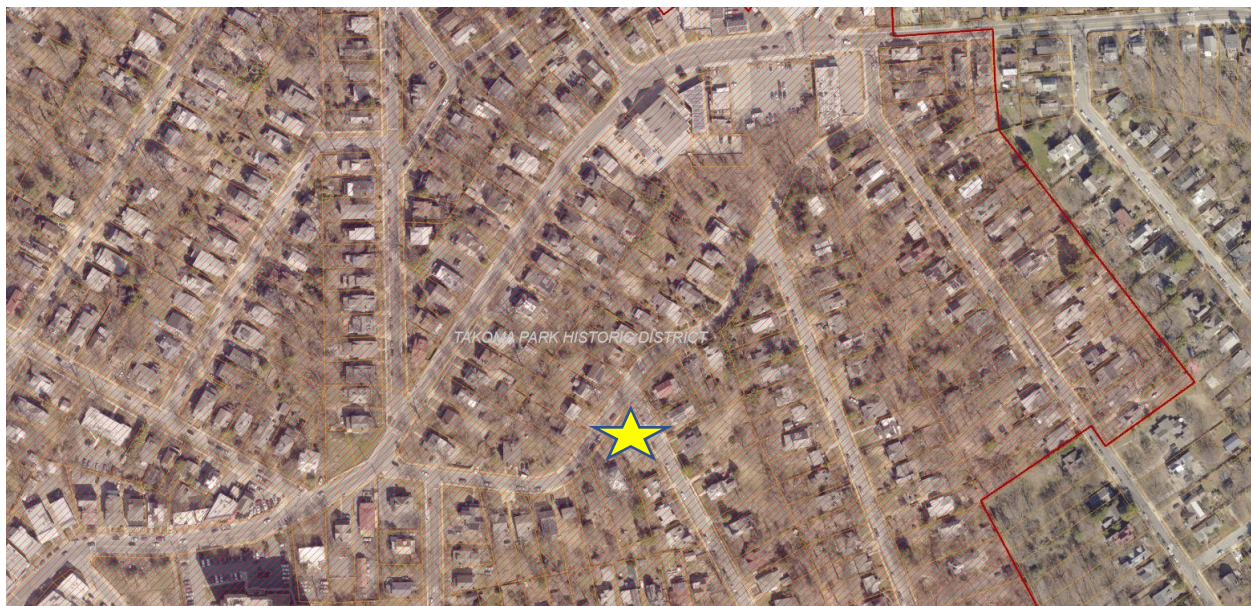


Figure 1: The subject property is at the intersection of Columbia Ave. and Hickory Ave.

PROPOSAL

The applicant proposes to wrap the window sills in aluminum flashing.

APPLICABLE GUIDELINES

The Historic Preservation Office and Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) consult several documents when reviewing alterations and new construction within the Takoma Park Historic District. These documents include the historic preservation review guidelines in the approved and adopted amendment for the *Takoma Park Historic District (Guidelines)*, *Montgomery County Code Chapter 24A (Chapter 24A)*, and the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation (Standards)*.

Takoma Park Historic District Guidelines

There are two broad planning and design concepts which apply to all categories. These are:

- The design review emphasis will be restricted to changes that are all visible from the public right-of-way, irrespective of landscaping or vegetation (it is expected that the majority of new additions will be reviewed for their impact on the overall district), and
- The importance of assuring that additions and other changes to existing structures act to reinforce and continue existing streetscape, landscape, and building patterns rather than to impair the character of the historic district.

A majority of the buildings in the Takoma Park Historic District have been assessed as being “Contributing Resources.” While these buildings may not have the same level of architectural or historical significance as Outstanding Resources or may have lost some degree of integrity, collectively, they are the basic building blocks of the Takoma Park district. They are important to the overall character of the district and the streetscape due to their size, scale, and architectural qualities, rather than for their particular architectural features.

Contributing Resources should receive a more lenient level of design review than those structures that have been classified as Outstanding. This design review should emphasize the importance of the resource to the overall streetscape and its compatibility with existing patterns rather than focusing on a close scrutiny of architectural detailing. In general, however, changes to Contributing Resources should respect the predominant architectural style of the resource.

The following guidance which pertains to this project are as follows:

All exterior alterations, including those to architectural features and details, should be generally consistent with the predominant architectural style and period of the resource and should preserve the predominant architectural features of the resource; exact replication of existing details and features is, however, not required

Minor alterations to areas that do not directly front on a public right-of-way such as vents, metal stovepipes, air conditioners, fences, skylights, etc. – should be allowed as a matter of course; alterations to areas that do not directly front on a public way-of-way which involve the replacement of or damaged to original ornamental or architectural features are discouraged, but may be considered and approved on a case-by-case basis

Major additions should, where feasible, be placed to the rear of existing structures so that they are less visible from the public right-of-way; additions and alterations to the first floor at the front of a structure are discouraged, but not automatically prohibited

While additions should be compatible, they are not required to be replicative of earlier architectural styles

Original size and shape of window and door openings should be maintained, where feasible

Some non-original building materials may be acceptable on a case-by-case basis; artificial siding on areas visible to the public right-of-way is discouraged where such materials would replace or damage original building materials that are in good condition

Alterations to features that are not visible from the public right-of-way should be allowed as a matter of course

All changes and additions should respect existing environmental settings, landscaping, and patterns of open space.

Montgomery County Code, Chapter 24A-8

The following guidance which pertains to this project are as follows:

- (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;
 - (3) The proposal would enhance or aid in the protection, preservation and public or private utilization of the historic site or historic resource located within an historic district in a manner compatible with the historical, archeological, architectural or cultural value of the historic site or historic district in which an historic resource is located
- (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 applicable *Standards* are as follows:

- 2. The historic character of a property will be retained and preserved. The removal of distinctive materials or alteration of features, spaces and spatial relationships that characterize a property will 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 two-story Dutch Colonial house with a c.1940 addition covered in aluminum siding. The rear c.1940 addition has three exposed floors and includes access to a separate ADU. When the aluminum siding was installed, the majority of the original window trim, including the sills, was removed. This has led to a situation where water appears to be infiltrating the existing flashing and running down the cavity between the aluminum and the original siding and causing water pooling in other locations. To address this issue, the applicant proposes to install a flashing piece below the storm window frames and above the remaining window sill to the front of the aluminum siding to create a drip edge and prevent water from entering the wall cavity. In addition to evaluating the proposal, Staff requests any alternative solutions that may be more compatible in resolving the existing issue.



Figure 2: Detail of the existing sill on the north elevation.

Staff brings this Preliminary Consultation forward because the proposal is a novel one. The preferred

solution to this water infiltration issue is to remove the aluminum siding and restore the window sills. Admittedly, that would be a very large project and is not what the applicant is proposing at this time. Staff would be remiss to fail to mention that removing the siding, restoring the historic siding, and restoring the sills is work that would qualify for both the state and County historic preservation tax credits.¹ The applicant is preparing to repair the existing storm windows and replace the damaged ones. This makes it an opportune time for them to complete the project, as the proposed flashing will be installed under the storm frame.



Figure 3: Detail of a gap between the truncated sill and aluminum siding.

As Staff noted, this proposal presents a novel case for the HPC. In its analysis, Staff finds that the benefits of the proposal likely outweigh the negatives. First, Staff finds the proposal is likely to resolve the issue. By installing the flashing underneath the storm frame, there should be no water infiltration, and the house will be protected until the aluminum siding is removed at some future date. Staff finds this is consistent with 24A-8(b)(3). There may be some difficulty in installing the flashing in locations where there are ganged windows, because the flashing will need to extend to cover a portion of the mullion. Discussing the treatment at the mullions during the hearing should help to refine this aspect of the installation. Because of the change in grade for most of these windows, even extending the flashing up the side of the mullion should only be minimally visible.

Second, Staff finds the proposal will not substantially alter the appearance of the house. The aluminum siding has a treatment at the edges of the window openings where it was cut to fit (see Fig. 4, below). The flashing would appear to be a piece of the edge treatment for most of the windows and is not likely to draw visual attention away from the house's architecture, per 24A-9(b)(2).

Third, Staff finds the proposed work will be reversible without damaging the historic fabric, which is consistent with *Standard #10*. When the time comes to finally remove the existing aluminum siding, the

flashing can come off with it. Staff finds the damage to the window sills was done when the aluminum siding was installed in the first place, and the sills will require restoration at that time.



Figure 4: Ganged window in the east elevation of the sun porch.

Staff's reluctance to fully endorse this solution is because the proposal will result in more incompatible siding being installed on this contributing resource. Staff finds the aluminum flashing is a material that is incompatible with the character of the house under 24A-8(b)(1) and (2) and *Standard #2*.

The primary question for this Preliminary Consultation is: Do the benefits of this proposal outweigh the installation of the incompatible material? For the reasons outlined above, Staff does find the benefits outweigh the adverse impacts, but is seeking the HPC's guidance.

In addition to the HPC's general finding on the appropriateness of the proposed solution, Staff request feedback on:

- Recommendations for the treatment of the flashing at the mullions;
- Any concerns with the proposed solution; and
- Other solutions to consider.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the applicant make any revisions recommended by the HPC and returns for a HAWP.

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:



