County Council Approves Potomac Overlook Historic District

Potomac Overlook is the first Mid-Century Modern historic district to be placed on the Montgomery County Master Plan for Historic Preservation, and the first historic district approved since 2011. County Council approval took place on April 19, with Planning Board adoption set for June 2, 2022.

The Potomac Overlook designation reflects the importance of site development and land planning in creating communities respectful of the natural surroundings, topography, and tree canopy. The contemporary-styled dwellings are recognized as outstanding examples of situated modernism. In addition, the contributions of several of the first homeowners in Potomac Overlook augment the historic significance of the district and reflect the multi-nationalism of the County.

Builder Edmund J. Bennett and the architecture firm of Keyes, Lethbridge, and Condon developed Potomac Overlook in the late 1950s. The partnership celebrated the aesthetic design, functional advantages, and untapped commercial potential for modern architecture in tract housing and recognized the importance of creating communities respectful of the existing natural surroundings, topography, and tree canopy. The American Institute of Architects (AIA) and the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) awarded them the “excellence of their cooperative efforts to create better homes and communities for Americans” award in 1961.

The new district is located between MacArthur Blvd. and Clara Barton Parkway just south of Glen Echo Park and consists of 19 houses.
Addressing Preservation Issues in the Downtown Silver Spring Master Plan

Mary Reardon

The draft of the Silver Spring Downtown and Adjacent Communities Plan, awaiting County Council approval, contains recommendations that could affect historic sites as well as established residential neighborhoods (the controversial “adjacent communities”). MPI has worked with the Silver Spring Historical Society, the Art Deco Society of Washington, and the arts community in challenging a number of recommendations in the Plan as well as welcoming a few.

The draft Downtown Silver Spring Master Plan:

- Endorses redeveloping the site of the iconic 1951 Fenton Building -- part of a Moderne style downtown historic district, as well the unique 1941 Art Deco style headquarters building of the Little Tavern business.

- Encourages density in the side streets of Silver Spring’s “Fenton Village”, which could result in transforming an area that is prized for its low-scale character and multiple independent businesses.

- Presents an opportunity to gain a statement of County support for full restoration of the historic Civil War-era house in Jesup Blair Park, which is in dire need of funding to rehabilitate it for community use.

- Recommends several mid-century modern properties for potential listing on the National Register of Historic Places, and a striking “Googie” style (see below) building for the County’s Master Plan of Historic resources.

- Proposes a Garden Apartment Historic District for National Register listing, but also recommends a zoning change that could facilitate redevelopment of Silver Spring’s architecturally significant 1930s-40s garden apartments.

MPI and its allies will be monitoring the Council’s final action on these recommendations.

Fun Fact

Googie architecture is a type of futurist architecture influenced by car culture, jets, the Space Age, and the Atomic Age. It originated in Southern California with the Streamline Moderne architecture of the 1930s, and was popular nationwide from roughly 1945 to the early 1970s. The name comes from a Hollywood coffee shop designed by John Lautner.
The Kensington Historical Society (KHS), founded in 1977, is celebrating its 45th anniversary and honoring founding members by hosting a Summer Picnic for the Town on Sunday July 17, noon – 4 p.m. at the Kensington Town Hall. More information on the Web site www.kensingtonhistory.org

In addition to picnic fare, music and libations (new brewery in Kensington to make its debut), we will have wonderful images of the history of KHS and Kensington in addition to the compilation of a number of oral histories provided by long-time members. KHS has worked to safeguard the heritage of the Community of Kensington, to promote the preservation, protection and restoration of elements of Kensington that are integral to the community. Efforts by the Society were instrumental in having Kensington listed on the National Register and designated as a Montgomery County Historic District.

**Historic Medley District**

Historic Medley District members have been watching curiously the goings on next door to the John Poole House in Poolesville where the new restaurant, Locals, has been taking shape in the historic 1844 Veirs/Stevens House. Though it has been open outside on weekends for breakfast baked goods and coffee since last summer, it is now open both outdoors and indoors with more substantial offerings plus local fresh vegetables and crafts Wednesdays through Saturdays 7am-3pm. Owner David Therriault has been careful to maintain the integrity of the historic structure, keeping the interior much the same, and transforming an enclosed side porch into the service area and adding an addition in the rear for the kitchen. These additions complement the house without being too modern.

On another note, HMD members have been working with the Montgomery County Lynching Memorial Project to help coordinate the ceremonies surrounding the placing of a memorial plaque recognizing the 1880 lynching of George Peck in Poolesville. The plaque will probably be placed on the John Poole House grounds in 2023. In October MCLMP will sponsor Community Conversations at the John Poole House to give people a chance to voice their thoughts about the meaning of lynching in our society.

*Medley District was one of the eight voting districts of Montgomery County in the 19th century. They were named for the taverns where the voting took place.*
MPI Awards

The annual awards program, sponsored by Montgomery Preservation, showcases the great work being done in the private, non-profit, and public sectors in Montgomery County. Since 1987, at MPI’s signature program, preservation advocates, elected officials, local historical groups, friends, and families have celebrated the accomplishments of dedicated property owners, creative non-profits, talented architects, and community activists. 2021 Award recipients will be announced in June 2022.

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Montgomery Preservation, Inc.
P.O. Box 4661
Rockville, MD 20849-4661

MPI encourages citizen participation in preservation activities. If you have a concern or would like to volunteer please contact us at: mpi@montgomerypreservation.org

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