

Starting Your Project on the Road to Success

Second installment in a series about historic preservation in our community and the work of the CAG Historic Preservation and Zoning Committee.

While you spend the coldest days bundled in blankets and sweaters this winter, you may find yourself thinking about how you can improve your home. You may want to let more precious winter light in, or the windows don't provide enough of a view of the lovely garden you have nurtured for years. Perhaps your bathroom could use modification, or you and your family could relax together if your kitchen were more open.

As you ponder these thoughts, you should know that The Old Georgetown Act regulates scale and design (appearance, volumes, details, color and the texture of materials). The Act requires Old Georgetown Board (OGB) review of all construction, alteration, reconstruction, and demolition at both the Concept (idea development plans) and Permit (dimensioned and detailed plans) stages. The OGB requires review of designs at the Concept (idea development plans) and Permit (dimensioned and detailed plans) stages. The review process begins when you file an application ([Click Here](#) to view the application).

The review process begins when an application is filed on the Commission of Fine Arts website. A hearing is then scheduled, where concerned parties, including CAG and the ANC, can voice their opinions.

Reviews are based on *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties with Guidelines for Preserving, Rehabilitating, Restoring and Reconstructing Historic Buildings*. In Georgetown, most projects are covered by the section on treatment standards and guidelines for Rehabilitation. These standards and guidelines acknowledge the need to repair, alter, or add to a historic property so as to ensure the structure's viability, while preserving the elements and features that convey each property's, and Georgetown's, historic character.

All the reviewing parties use The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties with Guidelines for Preserving, Rehabilitating, Restoring and Reconstructing Historic Buildings (codified in the Federal Register in 1995) to evaluate the proposed work. You

can familiarize yourself with the Standards and the Guidelines for each type of treatment, or approach to work, to understand how they may affect your plans ([Click Here](#) to view). Here in Georgetown most projects fall under the treatment standards and guidelines for Rehabilitation. These standards and guidelines acknowledge the need to repair, alter, or add to a historic property to make continuing use possible while preserving the elements and features that convey each property's, and Georgetown's, historic character.

Designs are evaluated for:

- 1) Compatibility. Is the proposed design harmonious with the existing appearance, coloration, scale, and material of the historic property and that of Georgetown?
- 2) Preservation of Historic Materials. Do the planned alterations retain as much historic architectural fabric as possible? Does replacement and repair work use the same historic material?
- 3) Scale. Is the scale of an addition appropriate to the house – and those of the neighbors?

Prior to the reviews, the Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs (DCRA) requires that a description of the work be prominently posted and plans be provided to the owners of immediately abutting and adjacent properties. It is always beneficial to share and discuss plans with neighbors who might be affected by the project. Their support can be very helpful in the review process.

Design reviews and approvals create a thicket that you need to navigate. An architect or preservation specialist (or both) experienced in historic properties can greatly facilitate this process. Engaging experts early will result in designs that are more likely to be approved in the first or second concept review, thus saving you time and money.

For more detailed guidance, and an in-depth discussion of the historic evolution of Georgetown architecture, please see CAG's HPZ informational brochure [HERE](#)

-Elsa Santoyo