

ADVISORY NEIGHBORHOOD COMMISSION 3/4G Racial and Social Equity Standing Committee

April 10, 2024

Commissioners - ANC 3/4G
5601 Connecticut Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20015

Dear Commissioners:

The ANC Standing Committee on Racial and Social Equity (RASE) is delighted to see that the Historic Preservation Office (HPO) is embarking on an equity analysis of historic resources across the District to inform its evaluation of future historic district proposals. As you will see in our letter below, this effort will address one of the key deficiencies that RASE found in the current historic district application. Additionally, while HPO is not proceeding in its review of the application for a historic district in Chevy Chase, DC (CCDC), RASE is sharing its review of the application with the ANC 3/4G to add to the community dialogue that was encouraged by HPO.

While there is much to appreciate in the history of CCDC, the history in its entirety must be more meaningfully acknowledged. The neighborhood's "small town feel", viewed by many historic district proponents as a positive attribute, must not be viewed in isolation from the history that has led to this outcome and the harms which are still with us today.

This letter will spell out the reasons to oppose the creation of a historic district in CCDC, which include, but are not limited to:

- CCDC's racist origins
- Historic districts as the 21st century version of redlining
- Failure of the application to promote awareness of this history or to take steps to address it, while locking in its results
- Timing of application coinciding with the Civic Core discussion, sending a clear message that affordable housing and its residents are not welcome in CCDC
- The DC Historic Preservation Review Board (HPRB) does not take racial and social equity issues into account.

CCDC's racist origins

How much does the racial history of Chevy Chase matter in designation of a historic district? The 2008 draft application for a historic district did not mention the racist and exclusive measures that were part of the original development of the neighborhood. The current application at least recognizes these facts. However, in the January 30 and February 21 meetings held by Chevy Chase DC Conservancy, the HRPB staff indicated that documenting this history in a historic district application is sufficient.

Moreover, the consultant hired by Chevy Chase DC Conservancy to do the historical review commented that since racism was prevalent at the time of CCDC's beginnings, it should not be considered as helping or hurting the historic district application. The RASE Committee disagrees and maintains that the racist results of planning do not deserve to be protected by HPRBA. A case in point is the racial progress that has been made with the renaming of Jackson-Reed High School and Lafayette-Pointer Park, as well as educational efforts about the land that became the park. CCDC should not gain recognition as a historic district, as much of its development was and is today inseparable from the results of racist intent.

Historic Districts as the 21st century version of redlining

Historic districts have been shown to exacerbate the racial inequity of historical designated neighborhoods. As Bob Ward [documented in 2023](#), the historic districts of LeDroit Park and Bloomingdale, which were majority Black for the 2010 Census, were majority white by the 2020 Census. Even Cleveland Park's racial makeup became more white between the first census after its historic designation (1990) and the most recent census. A historic district designation for CCDC would not only lock in its current racial inequity, it would likely worsen it for the foreseeable future.

Failure of the application to promote awareness of this history or take steps to address and solve it, while preserving its results

Why celebrate the racist past of Chevy Chase, DC? The historic district designation is not an attempt to correct past wrongs, but, whether intentionally or not, it solidifies them into the future. While the historic district application acknowledges the history of racism, a historic district designation would not require any steps to help rectify this history. Exclusionary and often explicitly racist covenants and practices have allowed CCDC to avoid the kind of growth patterns that other similar neighborhoods have experienced. To use historic district designation as a tool to preserve the results of those practices is not the intent of the historic district law.

Timing of application coinciding with the Civic Core discussion, sending a clear message that affordable housing and its residents are not welcome in CCDC

The application has been submitted coinciding with discussions about the Civic Core and by people with known views against creating opportunities for increased density for housing, including affordable housing, at the Civic Core. Whether the underlying intent is racist or not is irrelevant. The message is that residents of affordable housing are unwelcome in this neighborhood. It is known that in DC, reductions in availability of affordable housing options disproportionately impact the Black community. CCDC should be actively encouraging and welcoming increased economic, social, and racial diversity.

If HPRB were to override this reality and experience, and proclaim CCDC a historic district all the same, it would represent to many DC residents yet another example of non-respect and white privilege. This racial and divisive message of maintaining the status quo would be a serious blow to the identity of this neighborhood moving forward.

The DC Historic Preservation Review Board does not take racial and social equity issues into account

On January 30 and February 21, 2024, the Chevy Chase DC Conservancy held public Zoom meetings to inform the community of the benefits of their historic district application for CCDC. Proponents of the application claim that they have sufficiently documented CCDC's racist origins and history. HRPB staff indicated that summarizing this unfortunate history in the application is sufficient for its purposes. In fact, in the February 21 meeting, Kim Williams of HRPB stated that racial and social equity issues were not under their remit. However, the April 8 announcement from HPO indicates that this may well change in the future, after further analysis of the equity effects is undertaken.

In sum, RASE recommends that the ANC 3/4G oppose the creation of a historic district in Chevy Chase, DC because of the message it would send regarding racial segregation, as well as the practical effect it could have of limiting opportunities for affordable housing in the neighborhood. While the historic district application seeks to preserve the character of the community, it does nothing to educate the community proactively. This omission is especially problematic considering the decades of redlining, segregation, and exclusion that have shaped the neighborhood into what it has become today. There are already historic designation opportunities available to preserve specific structures, such as those exemplified by the Chevy Chase Arcade and PNC Bank building, which are more appropriate than a blanket designation for an arbitrary section of the neighborhood. The origins of Chevy Chase, DC and its results do not need a historic designation.

Thank you for your consideration,

Sincerely,

The ANC 3/4G Standing Committee on Racial and Social Equity