



DESIGN GUIDELINES FOR CLEVELAND PARK’S HISTORIC COMMERCIAL CORRIDOR

JULY 2023

1. INTRODUCTION

Cleveland Park developed as one of Washington’s “streetcar suburbs” in the 1890s and contains a remarkable variety of architecture, as well as designed and natural landscapes from the 18th to the 20th centuries. Cleveland Park was designated an historic district in 1987 and is listed in the National Register of Historic Places and on the DC Inventory of Historic Sites.

These guidelines have been developed to apply the principles and practices of DC historic preservation law in preserving, adding to, or altering buildings in Cleveland Park’s historic commercial corridor. While the focus here is on maintaining the character and physical features that are most fundamental to the corridor’s character, these guidelines also seek to provide flexibility in the application of design principles in a manner that remains appropriate to the corridor and its history.

2. CLEVELAND PARK’S HISTORIC COMMERCIAL CORRIDOR

One of the most notable features of the Cleveland Park historic district is its commercial corridor that sprang up along the streetcar line on Connecticut Avenue NW in early part of the 20th century. It is an unusually intact example of a 1920s and 1930s low-scale, linear neighborhood retail commercial/apartment development. Most of the commercial buildings fronting Connecticut Avenue on the east and west sides between Macomb and Porter Streets are important contributing resources to the Cleveland Park Historic District.

The 1916 Georgian Revival firehouse at 3522 Connecticut Avenue—the oldest building in the Cleveland Park commercial strip—established the low scale of the commercial area along Connecticut Avenue. Soon to complement the firehouse were small shops and apartment buildings.

The first shop in Cleveland Park, the Monterey Pharmacy, opened in 1923 in the Monterey apartment building at the corner of Connecticut Avenue and Porter Street. Within three years, the 3300 block of Connecticut Avenue was home to several grocery stores, two gas stations, a hairdresser, and a confectionery store. The 3300 block on the east side of Connecticut Avenue still exemplifies the typical 1920s low-scale and linear design of the commercial strip with its small, individual, and varied shops.

In 1930, architect Arthur B. Heaton introduced a new and innovative commercial complex to Cleveland Park and the city with the “Park and Shop” at 3529 Connecticut Avenue. Designed to include shops, parking, a gas station, and an “automobile laundry” (carwash), the Park and Shop recognized the importance of the automobile and the need to provide conveniences to the modern shopper.

Most of the buildings in the 3500 block of Connecticut Avenue, including the Park and Shop, reflect the traditional Colonial Revival-style aesthetic of the early twentieth century inspired by the 1916 firehouse. However, the 3400 block represents a different stylistic trend. There, a significant collection of Art Deco buildings is bookended by Mihran Mesrobian’s 1939 Macklin apartment building on the south and the 1936 National Register listed Uptown Theater on the north.

3. BUILDING TYPES OF CLEVELAND PARK’S COMMERCIAL CORRIDOR

The buildings of Cleveland Park’s commercial corridor generally fall into four categories: commercial buildings, multi-use corner buildings, purpose-built buildings, and apartment buildings.

3.1 COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS

One of the most distinctive and defining features of Cleveland Park’s commercial corridor is its mostly one- and sometimes two-story storefront buildings dating from the early twentieth century. These are also found in many neighborhoods and central business district (“main street”) corridors throughout the country.

Character-defining features of these buildings include:

- Low scale in height, mostly one- but sometimes two-stories, narrow in width and deep in length.
- Facades clad in brick or limestone, or in stucco with half-timber decoration.
- Stone and wood trim, including urns on rooflines, to define the rhythm of stores, accentuate their human scale, and provide texture to storefronts.
- Stone piers with classically detailed boundaries framing shops, thus making each a visually discrete entity and enhancing the rhythm along the street.
- Modillions under eaves emphasizing horizontal lines and defining the upper limit of the architectural form of buildings.
- Decorative pent roofs or roofs capped with stepped or shaped parapet walls.
- Art Deco motifs, including stainless steel decorative panels (at 3415 and 3417 Connecticut Avenue), glass brick (at 3433), and decorative carving in stone or concrete facade (at the Uptown Theatre and the stores at 3400 to 3408).
- Projecting and flat storefront windows made up of large plate glass panels atop polished stone or masonry bases.
- Tile and slate roofs, when visible from the street.

3.2 CORNER BUILDINGS

Mixed-use, multi-floor buildings that include ground-level stores, with apartments or offices above, provide anchors at major intersections such as Connecticut Avenue and Porter Streets. These include the 1922 Monterey Apartment building at 3530 Connecticut Avenue that once housed the Uptown Pharmacy on the street level, as well as the Ofty building at 3433–35 Connecticut Avenue, designed in 1936 to include a variety of occupants, including a restaurant.

3.3 PURPOSE-BUILT BUILDINGS

Several buildings along the commercial corridor on Connecticut Avenue were designed and built for a particular use. These include: the firehouse (Engine Company #28) at 3522 Connecticut Avenue), the Park and Shop at 3529 Connecticut Avenue, the Uptown Theater at 3426 Connecticut Avenue, and the post office at 3430 Connecticut Avenue.

3.4 APARTMENT BUILDINGS

- The first apartment building in Cleveland Park was a four-story, tan brick building with Georgian revival details. Built by Harry Wardman in 1919 at 3520 Connecticut Avenue, it followed the low-rise precedent established by the neighboring firehouse.
- Wardman's second project in 1921, 3500–3518 Connecticut Avenue and 2815–19 Ordway, took a decidedly different approach. The three-story red brick building was conceived of as a long, low block based on Colonial Georgian precedents and designed to appear as a series of individual rowhouses.
- The Macklin Apartment Building and Shopping Complex was designed by Mihran Mesrobian and completed in 1939. This Art Deco-style three-story building at 2911 Newark Street was built combining residential units on Newark Street with a one-story commercial strip along 3400 to 3408 Connecticut Avenue.

4. PRESERVATION PRINCIPLES AND GOALS

The following principles and goals seek to recognize and preserve the important aspects of Cleveland Park's historic commercial corridor and its history:

- Preserve the variety of building types and character along the commercial corridor. Design for new construction, alterations, and additions to any of the historic buildings should be sensitive to the scale and character of the buildings and their historic streetscape context.
- Ensure the distinction between historic buildings and new construction to maintain a visual understanding of the evolution of the corridor from a mostly commercial area to a more mixed-use area.
- Maintain the historic low and horizontal sense of scale of the commercial corridor by ensuring that new construction respects the historic architectural context established by its

landmarks and contributing buildings.

- Preserve and restore storefront details where they remain, replacing missing details, and exposing original features when possible.

5. DESIGN GUIDELINES

Design and preservation guidelines for the historic resources in the Cleveland Park commercial district generally fall under three categories: new construction, additions and alterations, and historic storefront façade preservation. The first two categories are fluid and can overlap substantially. Because there is not much opportunity for new or infill construction in the commercial corridor, most opportunities for construction are to add additional stories to the corridor's historic one-story storefront buildings. Such additions do not represent the standard side or rear additions to existing buildings that are addressed in DC historic preservation law and guidelines. As a result, they should be considered new construction, and therefore subject to many of the same principles and guidelines that apply to new construction.

5.1 NEW CONSTRUCTION

Appropriate design for new construction, whether it is a new building, an addition to an existing building, or alteration, is critical to preserving the character of the commercial corridor and should respect its architectural traditions while also relating to the present.

General parameters for new construction in Cleveland Park's commercial corridor include:

5.1.1 New construction should be contextual and compatible with the existing architectural environment without exactly duplicating existing buildings.

5.1.2 Scale and form should be compatible with the height and depth of abutting and surrounding buildings.

5.1.3 New construction should respect the massing of surrounding buildings, including the proportion of solid surfaces (walls) to voids (window and door openings).

5.1.4 New construction should respect the orientation, rhythm, and setback of neighboring buildings.

5.1.5 While new construction does not have to be the same height as existing buildings, it should be designed to be compatible with the height of its neighbors.

5.1.6 The base height of a building's front wall at the street line should match those of neighboring/abutting buildings. Step backs should be used immediately above the established base height.

5.1.7 Rooflines should be compatible in height with those found on surrounding buildings.

5.2 ADDITIONS AND ALTERATIONS TO HISTORIC BUILDINGS

The size, scale, massing, and materials of a new addition pertain to the addition's overall volume and three-dimensional qualities. These are critical elements for ensuring that a new addition is subordinate to the historic host building, thus preserving its historic character.

General parameters for alterations and additions in the Cleveland Park commercial corridor include:

5.2.1 Retain historic character-defining features when planning additions or alterations to an historic building.

5.2.2 Design additions to be compatible with the existing historic building's massing, height, form, and scale.

5.2.3 Place additions on secondary elevations whenever possible.

5.2.4 While an addition does not necessarily need to be the same height as the existing building, it should be designed to be compatible with the height of the existing building and its neighbors. Compatible height also depends, in part, on the location and visibility of the addition.

5.2.5 Additions should not be flush with any part of the original street-facing façade of a historic building.

5.2.6 Roof-top additions should be designed so that their footprint is significantly smaller than the original building to avoid creating the appearance that the original building is simply an ornamental base or plinth for the floors above.

5.2.7 Roof-top additions on top of one-story storefront buildings should have a set back immediately above the cornice line.

5.2.8 A roof-top addition should be stepped back enough behind the existing wall plane and cornice so that it does not alter the historic character of the building and is as inconspicuous as possible from the street. Depending on the number of floors proposed, multiple step backs may be required.

5.2.9 Rear additions should not project substantially beyond the extent of adjacent buildings of similar type.

5.2.10 An addition or alteration must strike a careful balance between differentiating new construction from old and achieving a degree of compatibility to maintain the original building's historic character and identity. It may be contemporary in design or replicate the historic character of the main building. Where it replicates the historic character of the main building, subtle architectural differences should be employed to clearly distinguish it as a later structure.

5.2.11 Avoid incompatible architectural features in new additions, such as bay windows and balconies, when they are inconsistent with the character of the historic building.

6. COMMERCIAL BUILDING FACADES

6.1 The storefronts of the commercial buildings are also character-defining features. Thus, the configurations and materials of the elements comprising them, including ornamental surrounds, transoms, entrances, display windows, mullions, transom bars, and ornamental details, should be retained. Should any of these features be replaced, they should be replicated in kind to the greatest extent practical.

6.2 Signage for storefronts was historically small and often united with surrounding shops. Many buildings have an area on the façade that was designed to hold signs. In remodeling, the sign should be kept within the building's architectural framework, maintaining the integrity, intended scale, and balance of the whole ensemble. Over-scaled signage can destroy the building's scale and the street rhythm. Large plaque signs cover up architectural detail, thereby damaging the building's integrity.

6.3 Canopies and awnings that can provide shelter from the sun and rain and space for smaller-scale advertising for the business within should be designed in scale with the building and to avoid obscuring such architectural details as transom windows.

6.4 Though not a historical feature, sidewalk cafes can enhance street life when their design is compatible and in scale with the adjacent building and does not obscure its view from the street or sidewalk.

For more information on specific design aspects regarding historic storefront details, see the DC Historic Preservation Office's [Design Guidelines for Historic Commercial Buildings](https://planning.dc.gov/node/594302) (available at <https://planning.dc.gov/node/594302>).