



# Voices

The Newsletter of the Cleveland Park Historical Society

## My Cleveland Park: Q&A with Robert Jenkins

Last December, we celebrated the 10th anniversary of the Gingerbread House Decorating Festival. Each year, CPHS member Robert Jenkins has been genial host, master baker and leader of an enthusiastic team of volunteers. CPHS Executive Director Camilla Carpenter recently sat down virtually with Robert to talk about the festival, his background and his thoughts on Cleveland Park.

**Camilla: Congratulations on 10 years of the Gingerbread House Festival! It’s definitely the most popular event we have every year. Why do you think that is?**

**Robert:** I am so glad that the Gingerbread House Decorating Festival has become a tradition in the neighborhood. I think that a major part of its appeal is bringing so many neighbors together in a large room where families can kick off the holiday season in each other’s company and surrounded by the high energy that the kids bring to their creations. From a creative perspective, I think it’s fun to be given a constraint - in this situation the house itself - and then lots of creative options around how to decorate the house. For very young children the house is an easy place to start and they can feel accomplished by how they add to it. For older kids and adults - plenty of whom come as well - each starts with the same small cabin and then works to transform it into something completely different and magical, from castles to churches to elaborate homesteads complete with fences, ponds, and bonfires. It’s great fun to see how they turn out!



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# Preservation News

## Comprehensive Plan: Member Alert

This is a critical moment for historic Cleveland Park.

The DC Council in the next two weeks will vote on amendments to the Comprehensive Plan and Future Land Use Map (FLUM), as proposed by the Mayor's Office of Planning (OP), to guide future zoning and land use decisions. The amendments have the potential to forever change our historic district, because they will enable upzoning to allow buildings of 8 to 10 stories high.



As of this writing, the amendments are under review by the DC Council. On April 20, the Council's Committee of the Whole voted out the marked-up amendments. On May 4, the Council will consider the bill on the "first reading" with final vote on May 18.

The FLUM-up of Cleveland Park would be a radical departure from decades of District policy that zoning be consistent with the prevailing height and scale of historic districts. Shortly after the Cleveland Park Historic District was added to the National Register of Historic Places, the DC Zoning Board enacted an overlay zone on both sides of Connecticut Avenue between Macomb and Porter Streets. The overlay zone was created to prevent a conflict between greater height and density under then-allowable zoning and the prevailing height and mass of the contributing structures which gave the historic district its character.

These historic blocks on Connecticut Avenue are still characterized predominately by pedestrian-scale one- and two-story commercial buildings. There also are several mixed retail and apartment buildings up to five stories on the south end of the neighborhood commercial area, which Councilmember Mary Cheh has cited as illustrating the appropriate height limit for infill development. The National Register nomination for the Historic District highlights the Cleveland Park Historic District's unique character, as featuring an "aesthetically unified" and "unusually intact Art Deco commercial strip" which is "one of the best examples in the city". This area "maintains its integrity especially with regard to scale" and is "remarkably unified in appearance." The iconic Uptown Theater is the centerpiece of the Art Deco strip. The DC deputy preservation officer has stated that no other DC historic district has such a collection of low-scale commercial buildings like those that define Connecticut Avenue in Cleveland Park.

The FLUM-up would reverse this settled policy, which was restated only one year ago in the DC Historic Preservation Plan, and materially diminish the strip's historic integrity. Councilmember Mary Cheh has assured Cleveland Park residents that she favors infill development in the Historic District consisting of first floor retail and up to four floors of residential, and the existing zoning and FLUM designation would allow such development. Yet Councilmember Cheh recently hedged these assurances, while supporting a significant, discordant change in FLUM density that would allow infill buildings 80 feet up to 110 feet high (based on the resulting zone category that the Zoning Commission selects).

*(continued on next page)*

*(Comprehensive Plan, continued)*

Moreover, the historic Uptown Theater itself has never been at greater risk. If passed, the FLUM changes will make it more likely that Washington DC's iconic movie palace will never return as a theater and instead could be converted into another dense, mixed-use development. Our concern is real. The Uptown's owner, presumably hoping that the DC Council changes the FLUM, has delayed the Uptown's landmark nomination, thus endangering the Uptown further. At a recent meeting with Councilmember Cheh and CPHS leadership, her chief of staff and designated lead for the Comprehensive Plan dismissed the goal of preserving the Uptown Theater and stated that dense development at the Uptown site is "what we want there."

READ THE CPHS TESTIMONY HERE

Historic preservation should not be dismissed and cast aside in pursuit of other objectives, including regulatory windfalls for special interests. But there is still time to contact the DC Council and ask them to reject FLUM Amendment No. 2123 and keep the current FLUM designation for the historic Uptown and the 3300-3500 blocks of Connecticut Avenue in the Cleveland Park Historic District. Please act now. Before May 4, email the DC Council at [cow@DCcouncil.us](mailto:cow@DCcouncil.us) and call the offices of Councilmember Cheh and the at-large members of the Council.

Mary Cheh, Ward 3 - (202)-724-8062

Phil Mendelson, Council Chair - (202) 724-8032

Anita Bonds, At Large - (202) 724-8064

Elissa Silverman, At Large - (202)-724-7772

Robert White, At Large - (202)-724-8174

Christina Henderson, At Large - (202) 724-8105

### **Planning work on your home in the Cleveland Park Historic District?**

Owners of homes and other buildings in the Cleveland Park Historic District share responsibility for helping preserve the historic fabric of the neighborhood, the properties themselves and their relationship to the whole streetscape and natural environment.

For guidance on design review in Cleveland Park, and the permitting process in DC, go to this [link](#) on our website.

CPHS is seeking legal professional(s) to work on short-term pro-bono projects (e.g., filing FOIA requests) in the area of historic preservation. If interested, please email us at [staff@clevelandparkhistoricalsociety.org](mailto:staff@clevelandparkhistoricalsociety.org)

## In the Neighborhood

### John Eaton Elementary School

#### EATON ART COMMISSIONS!

As the renovation and expansion of the school progresses, so do plans for the creation and installation of ten new art commissions for Eaton.

Under the city's "[Call 2 Artists](#)" program, over 600 artists submitted applications to win site-specific commissions for the Eaton art projects. The program is part of DC's "[Percent for Art](#)" wherein 1% of large city construction budgets are used to fund original public art.

At Eaton, projects will be both inside the building and in the outdoor spaces. A selection panel is currently at work winnowing down the many submissions into a short list of finalists. This panel is made up of DCPS administrators, Eaton parents and faculty, and interested neighborhood residents.



DC Department of General Services

*An example of a bike rack, provided to artists by the city to artists for inspiration.*

Inside the school, commissions will include a mosaic wall in the cafeteria, 2-story murals located in open stairwells, and mixed media work illustrating the school's history and information about its namesake, General John Eaton.

Outdoors, commissions include a bike rack and a sculptural piece that children can sit and play upon. Stay tuned for the final creations!

**CONSTRUCTION UPDATE:** The John Eaton Elementary School construction project continues. According to the Department of General Services, the project will be "substantially complete" by June/July 2021. For more details, go to this [link](#).

#### Cleveland Park Garden Tour Postponed to 2022

Due to the impending arrival of Brood X cicadas, as well as caution about the ongoing Covid situation, the Garden Tour committee has decided to postpone until next year. If you would like to volunteer for the committee, or include your garden on the tour, please contact Barbara Zadina at [bzadina@msn.com](mailto:bzadina@msn.com).

# Origins of Cleveland Park’s Distinctive Stonework

There are many homes in Cleveland Park built using granite and other quarried stone, often as part of the foundations and chimneys. The stone was brought from nearby quarries, including one at the site upon which the Uptown Theater stands today. This quarry was owned by Frank Geneschi, and provided granite for the construction of the Cleveland Park Congregational Church (1917), the Fort Reno Water Tower (1929), as well as the National United Methodist Church at the corner of Nebraska and Newark Streets (1930). All of the stonework on these buildings share similarities in the varied tones of the stone.

Geneschi’s quarry closed when the five lots were purchased in the early 1930s to make way for the construction of the Uptown Theater, which opened in 1936.



Closeup of facade of Cleveland Park Congregational Church (built 1917)



An example of “Rock Creek Granite” and beaded mortar

The most commonly used stone in Cleveland Park residences came from nearby Rock Creek quarries, and is known as Kensington Tonalite, or “[Rock Creek Granite](#)”, characterized by its salt and pepper appearance. This stone is found in foundations, chimneys and stone walls throughout Northwest DC. Barely a century ago, there were at least 17 quarries in DC, most of them along Rock Creek, providing this type of granite to builders in the area. Very often the mortar has been applied in the beaded joint style.

The Fort Reno Water Tower, built 1929



We urge homeowners in Cleveland Park to avoid painting granite exteriors – painting can cause permeability (breathability) issues, negatively impacts the historic look of the houses, lacks the visual interest of unpainted granite, and is difficult to remove.

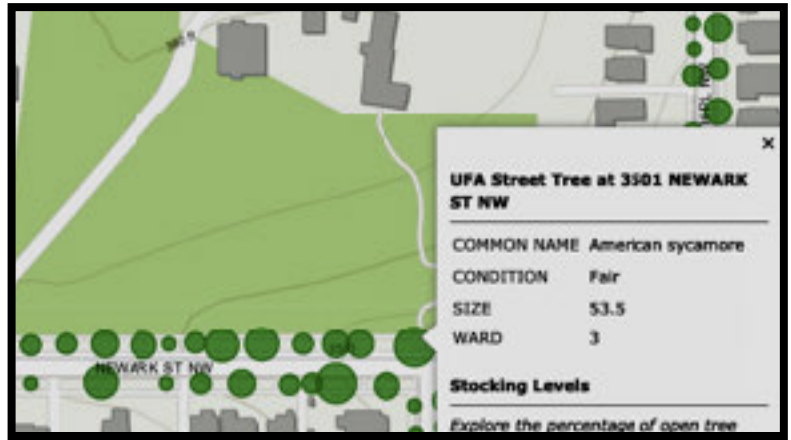
(Sources: HPRB Application for Historic Landmark for Uptown Theater [pending], 2020; Motion Picture Exhibition in Washington DC by Robert K. Headley, 1999)

## Streetscapes



### Question: What is the largest tree in Cleveland Park?

According to the city's Urban Tree Canopy (UTC) [Map](#), the largest street tree in Cleveland Park, circumference-wise, is the American Sycamore located in front of Rosedale, at Newark and 35th Streets. It measures over 53 inches (utilizing standard circumference measure of 4.5 feet from ground). The DC UTC [Map](#) is a great resource for learning more about DC street trees.



Source: DC Urban Tree Canopy [Map](#)

## Historic Markers for Your Historic Home

The CPHS Historic Marker program was created to raise awareness about the age of the Cleveland Park Historic District's homes. Historic markers remind us of the families living in these houses before us and what was happening in the world when the first residents moved in. They also help us appreciate the architectural styles, sturdy construction, and historical resonance that only old houses can inspire.

CPHS offers historic house markers for contributing buildings in the Cleveland Park Historic District —those built before 1941 — and those individually landmarked. To order a marker, [email us](#) and we will confirm the date of your house, send you an application, or you may download it [here](#).

Our high-quality plaques are forged to order by the family-owned Erie Landmark Company. We provide these to members at cost (\$175) as well as to non-members (\$225, the difference is the price of a one-year household membership).



Q&A with Robert Jenkins, continued

**CC: How did you come up with a Covid-safe Gingerbread House Festival last December?**

**RJ:** In partnership with you, we decided that people needed the festival and would enjoy it as much or more given the circumstances. It wasn't too hard to work out the details, because we had watched a lot of restaurants and other community organizations figure out how to keep going in the midst of the pandemic. The idea that we would do a "take-out" or "grab & go" Gingerbread Festival seemed the obvious step. The creative challenge for the people who decorated this year was that they had a little bit of everything [bagged up in advance for them] but not a lot of any one thing.



*Robert Jenkins (right) and Camilla Carpenter at last December's "Grab & Go" Gingerbread House Festival.*



**CC: Is it true that you bake all of the houses? When do you have to start baking?**

**RJ:** Yes! I've learned that I need to start baking about a week before Thanksgiving. I bake a few each night, often catching up on all the Netflix I've missed during the year. The baking fills the house with the smell of gingerbread and the repetition of the molds and assembly can be fairly meditative. My husband John commits to the day of the festival, helping to transport everything and making about 20 batches of frosting.

**CC: How did you come to live in Cleveland Park?**

**RJ:** I grew up just over the border in Maryland. I first got to know Cleveland Park because my mother loved the National Cathedral and we would come down occasionally for services, usually around Easter. As we drove through Cleveland Park to the Cathedral, I always admired the houses and loved that there were stores and restaurants mixed into the neighborhood. When John and I were ready to look for a house, he wanted a yard and we both wanted dogs and I didn't want to get any further from downtown DC than I had to. I think I always knew that I would like to be in Cleveland Park. John didn't grow up in Washington, so he wasn't aware of Cleveland Park until we started taking walks around the area, and he fell in love with it too.



**CC: When you're not baking gingerbread houses, how do you spend your time?**

**RJ:** My work is consulting in low-income health and long-term care issues, generally helping states, providers, and advocates implement and spread innovations. I'm on several working boards which keeps me busy as well. Outside of work, I love to travel, get together with family and friends, be out on the water, engage on any type of building project, and spend time clearing the ever encroaching brush at our place in Maine.

**CC: Why is Cleveland Park special to you?**

**RJ:** The obvious pleasure of Cleveland Park is the physical character of the neighborhood - a charming, walkable, urban neighborhood with beautiful trees and green spaces. The real pleasure, however, is the people and the sense of community.

## Online Resources

Here are just a few online resources about DC history, historic preservation and architectural history - there are many more!

- [HistoryQuestDC](#) - interactive map of DC buildings, including date, architect, and other info
- [DC Historic Preservation Office](#)
- [Washingtoniana Collection](#) at the DC Public Library
- [Historical Society of Washington](#) - search the Collection
- [Archipedia \(Society Of Architectural Historians\)](#) with a section about [Cleveland Park](#)
- [Free online courses about architecture from top universities](#)
- [Additional resources](#) on our website

### Virtual Tours

- [National Trust for Historic Preservation](#) tours
- [John Eaton Elementary School Modernization](#)
- [DC Preservation League Tours of DC](#)
- [Mount Vernon](#) tour

### Podcasts

- [Podcasts for fans of historic preservation](#) (National Trust for Historic Preservation)

### CPHS LINKS

**CPHS Website:** [clevelandparkhistoricalsociety.org](http://clevelandparkhistoricalsociety.org)

**Staff Email:** [staff@clevelandparkhistoricalsociety.org](mailto:staff@clevelandparkhistoricalsociety.org)

**Membership:** <https://www.clevelandparkhistoricalsociety.org/membership/>

**Voices Archive:** <https://www.clevelandparkhistoricalsociety.org/about-cphs/voices/>

**Historic Preservation:** <https://www.clevelandparkhistoricalsociety.org/historic-district/>

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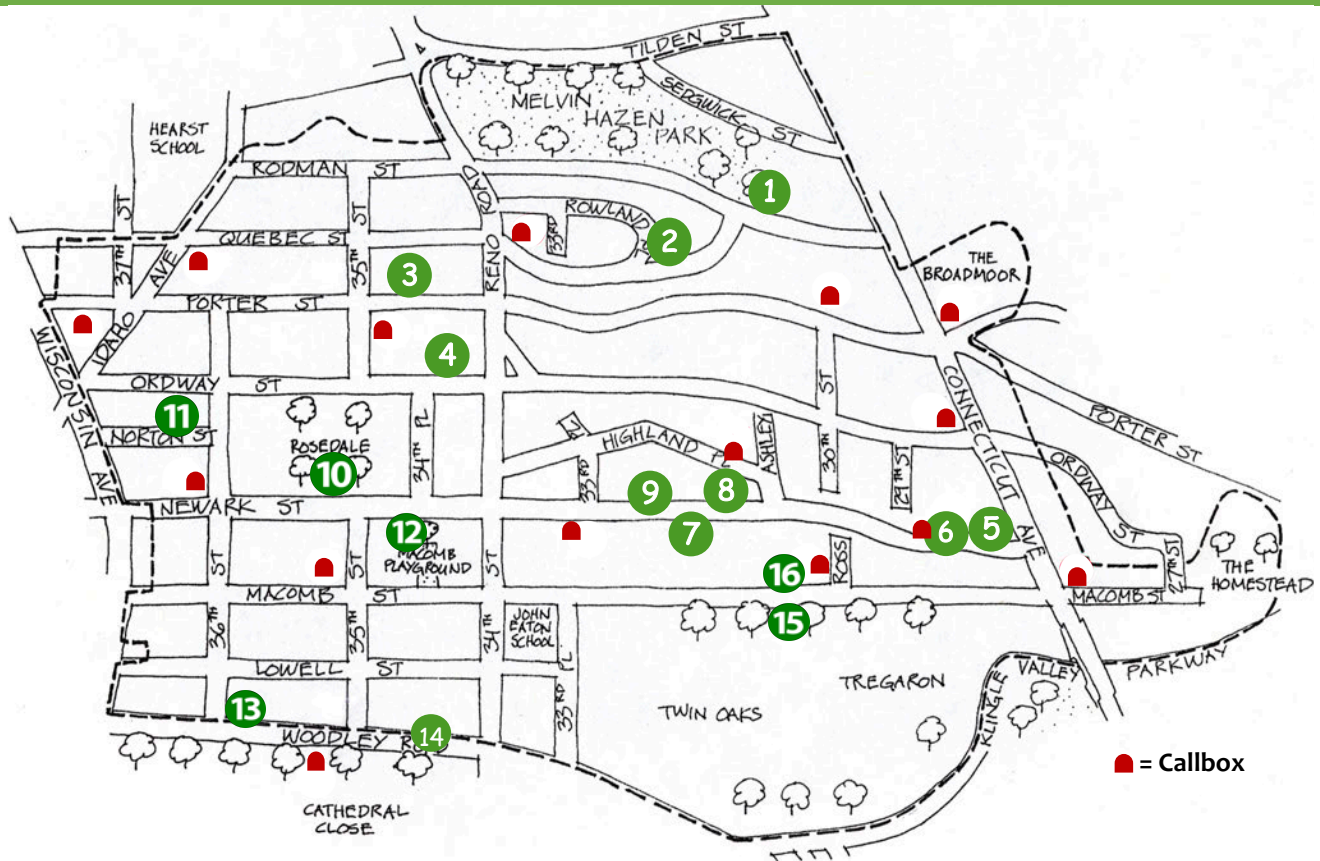
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# The Cleveland Park Historical Society Self-Guided History Walk






## Examples of Architectural Styles (there are many to see in CP)

- 1. **Bungalow** (3035 Rodman; Sears, 1921)
- 2. **Classic Modern** (3201 Rowland Place; Lescaze, 1940)
- 3. **Four-square** (3431 Porter; Simmons, 1913)
- 4. **Romantic Modern** (3411 Ordway, I.M. Pei, 1960)
- 5. **Art Deco:** Uptown Theater, Zink '36 & Macklin, Mesrobian, 1939
- 6. **Queen Anne** (2941 Newark; Head, 1898)
- 7. **Shingle** (3100 Newark; Waddy Wood, 1897)
- 8. **Japanese-Influenced** (3138-40 Highland; Head, 1901, rooflines)
- 9. **Old English Cottage** (3145 Newark, Miller, 1922)
- 10. **Farmhouse** (Rosedale, begun 1740s)
- 11. **Tudor Revival** (3605 Norton; Pyle, 1913)
- 12. **Mission** (3432 Newark, Waddy Wood, 1897)
- 13. **Colonial Georgian Revival** (3105 36 St; Meyers, 1916)
- 14. **Dutch Colonial** (3409 Woodley; Norton, 1922)
- 15. **Sears Cottage** (3024 Macomb; Sears 1929)
- 16. **Sherman Cottage** (3023 Macomb; Ella Sherman, 1905)

### Can you find?

Window styles:

- Palladian 
- Oculus 
- Eyebrow 

Columns:

- Doric (all over)
- Ionic (#13)
- Undulating (3035 Newark)

Decorative:

- Rope & plaster (#16)
- Swags & garlands (all over)
- Baroque cartouche (#8)

### Also of Note:

**Grover Cleveland's House** – stood near 3542 Newark (razed in 1920s)

**Oldest "Streetcar Suburb" House** – 3607 Newark, 1894; note tower and fretwork

**Comdr. Robert Peary's House** - 2940 Newark – note "porthole" window

**Faulkner Houses:** 3415 and 3419 36<sup>th</sup> Street (Waldron F.) and 3407 36<sup>th</sup> St (Winthrop F.)

**John Eaton ES** – The two original buildings were built in 1910 and 1923

**Tregaron** – Historic landmark (1912) with gardens designed by Ellen Biddle Shipman