

Community Acceptance Is Required for Historic Designation

By HD Committee

There is a misperception on the listserv that the BCA bylaws permit the Board to obtain HD (historic designation) status for Burleith without consulting the community. The fact is, there is no way that HD status could be obtained without substantial community input, no matter what the bylaws say.

Historic Preservation Office (HPO) staff has emphasized that significant public outreach and input are necessary before submitting an application for HD. Each homeowner should be informed by mail that HD is under consideration, and there must be public notice of meetings. (That is why grant funds were needed from the outset—to send mailings to each homeowner, at a cost of about \$900 per mailing/meeting.) Meetings held, topics, and numbers in attendance should be documented, as well as other forms of outreach such as flyers, website, etc. And applicants need to show how “will of the community” was determined. For Burleith, a vote is planned.

Should Burleith vote to apply for HD, then the process of research and documentation needed for completing the application would begin in earnest, along with community fundraising for research and application expenses. This usually takes a year. It is only after gauging community support for pursuing HD and completion of the research that an application is submitted to the HPO.

Once an application is filed, the HPO is required to give notice by mail to every property owner and to the ANC. The application is then posted online.

Finally, a hearing before the Historic Preservation Review Board is scheduled. At least 45 days before the hearing, HPO again contacts property owners and the ANC to notify them of the hearing date and provide information on how a property owner may object in writing. In addition, the hearing is public, and owners may give testimony supporting or opposing the designation.

The whole process can take 2-3 years. There is nothing that can be written in the BCA bylaws that could allow any of these steps or requirements to be skipped. It is impossible for the Board or any other organization to make the neighborhood a historic district without substantial public input and acceptance.

— November 2016