

**ROMEO AND ELSIE HORAD HOUSE (M: 31-87):
AN AMENDMENT TO THE MASTER PLAN FOR HISTORIC
PRESERVATION**



Description

As part of the University Boulevard Corridor Plan, the Planning Board will conduct a work session to consider listing the Romeo and Elsie Horad House in the *Locational Atlas & Index of Historic Sites* and recommending that the County Council designate the property in the *Master Plan for Historic Preservation*.



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SUMMARY

- The Historic Resources chapter of the University Boulevard Corridor Plan Public Hearing Draft recommends the designation of the Romeo and Elsie Horad House in the *Master Plan for Historic Preservation*. Staff finds that the property satisfies three designation criteria (1.A, 1.C, and 1.D) listed in §24A-3 of the Montgomery County Code.
- The Romeo and Elsie Horad House reflects the efforts of the Webster, Sewell, and Horad families to improve conditions for African American residents of Montgomery County and the surrounding region. Romeo Horad, an African American lawyer and realtor, challenged racial restrictive covenants in the District of Columbia, lobbied for improved educational facilities and infrastructure for Black communities in Montgomery County, established a groundbreaking candidacy for Montgomery County Council, and helped coordinate voter registration of African Americans in Maryland.
- The Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) held a public hearing and work session in May 2024. The HPC unanimously voted to recommend that the Planning Board list the Romeo and Elsie Horad House in the *Locational Atlas & Index of Historic Sites* and that the County Council designate the property in the *Master Plan for Historic Preservation*.
- In May 2024, M-NCPPC highlighted the Romeo and Elsie Horad House as part of its “Remarkable Montgomery: Untold Stories,” an ongoing project to install historic markers around the county that shares underrepresented topics in local history.

MASTER PLAN INFORMATION

Draft

Public Hearing Draft Work Session

Date

May 15, 2025

Lead Planner

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Planning Board Information

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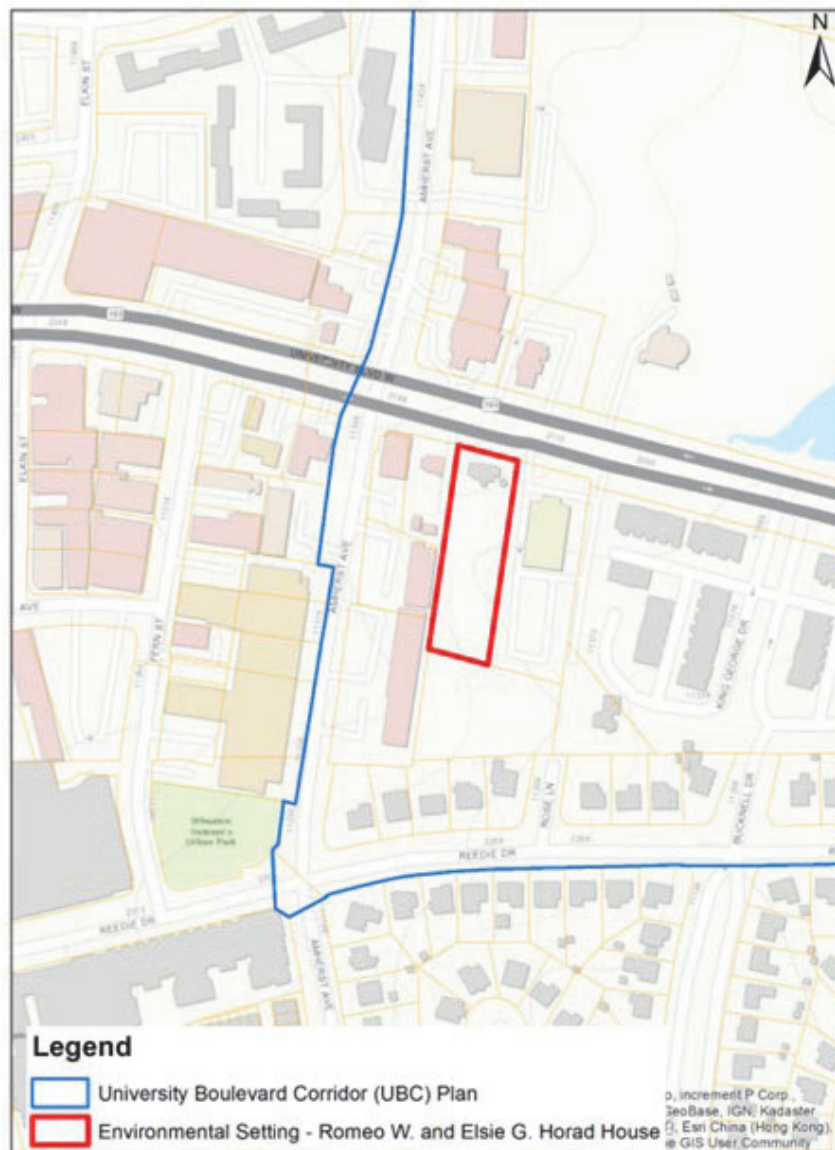


Figure 1: Proposed environmental setting (red outline) for the Romeo and Elsie Horad House at 2118 University Boulevard West.

UNIVERSITY BOULEVARD CORRIDOR PLAN

WORK SESSION: AN AMENDMENT TO THE MASTER PLAN FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION

The *University Boulevard Corridor Plan* covers approximately 3.5 miles of University Boulevard East and West (MD 193) between the Capital Beltway (I-495) and Amherst Avenue. This Plan focuses on developing a multimodal corridor that supports safe, accessible, and healthy travel options and connects vibrant communities with a diverse range of housing options, supported by bus rapid transit (BRT). In addition, it also envisions a new range of residential housing typologies for existing detached residential properties and new infill development on larger institutional and commercial properties.

Recommendations are provided for land use, zoning, urban design, housing, transportation, parks trails, historic resources, public open space, community facilities, and the environment.

The *University Boulevard Corridor Plan* contains the text and supporting maps for a comprehensive amendment to the approved and adopted 1989 *Master Plan for the Communities of Kensington-Wheaton*, 1996 *Four Corners Master Plan*, 2001 *Kemp Mill Master Plan*, and 2012 *Wheaton Central Business District and Vicinity Sector Plan*. It also amends *Thrive Montgomery 2050*, as amended; the 2013 *Countywide Transit Corridors Functional Master Plan*, as amended; the 2018 *Master Plan of Highways and Transitways*, as amended; the 2018 *Bicycle Master Plan*, as amended; the 2023 *Pedestrian Master Plan*, as amended; and the 1979 *Master Plan for Historic Preservation*.

The Planning Board held their Public Hearing for the *University Boulevard Corridor Plan* on February 27, 2025, in the Montgomery County Planning Board auditorium at 2425 Reedy Drive in Wheaton. The public record remained open for written testimony through March 13, 2025. The Planning Board advertised the public hearing in the Washington Times on January 23, 2025.

This worksession will focus on the designation of the Romeo and Elsie Horad House to the *Locational Atlas & Index of Historic Sites* and the *Master Plan for Historic Preservation*. When considering amendments to the *Locational Atlas & Index of Historic Sites* and *Master Plan for Historic Preservation*, the Planning Board shall utilize the designation criteria in §24A-3 of the Montgomery County Code. The required site designation report and Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties Form (MIHP) were including in the Public Hearing Draft as Appendix D, and are included in this report at Attachment 1.

OVERVIEW

BACKGROUND

The Historic Preservation office is dedicated to uncovering and amplifying the narratives of underrepresented groups as integral to the county's rich history.

The Romeo and Elsie Horad House is located within the boundary of the *University Boulevard Corridor (UBC) Plan*. On May 8, 2024, the HPC held a public hearing and worksession on the historic designation of the Romeo and Elsie Horad House. The HPC: 1) found that the property satisfied the designation criteria as listed in §24A-3 of the County Code; 2) recommended that the Planning Board list the property in the *Locational Atlas & Index of Historic Sites*; and 3) recommended that the County Council designate the property in the *Master Plan for Historic Preservation*.

DESIGNATION CRITERIA

The Romeo and Elsie Horad House meets three designation criteria (1.A, 1.C, and 1.D) listed in §24A-3 of the Montgomery County Code. The Plan recommends the designation of the subject property as a Master Plan Historic Site while supporting the adaptive reuse of the house should the property be redeveloped.

1.A Historical and cultural significance. The historic resource has character, interest or value as part of the development, heritage or cultural characteristics of the county, state or nation.

The Romeo and Elsie Horad House is representative of the development of the African American community in Wheaton. Black residents Henry Gaither, Jerry Gaither, and Henry Walker first acquired a single acre at present-day 11005 Dayton Street to establish the Allen Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church in 1873. The church held the first segregated Black elementary school before the Board of Education acquired a one-acre parcel for a new school at the turn of the twentieth century. The burgeoning community (including a densely populated block known as Chestnut Ridge on Wheaton Lane) expanded as residents acquired property. This included purchase of part of the subject property by Charles and Jane Webster—the grandparents of Elsie Horad—in 1894. By the mid-twentieth century, the African American community in Wheaton consisted of at least 21 owners, 11 renters, and a population of 147 persons. Romeo and Elsie Horad constructed the subject Colonial Revival house on property owned by Elsie's family in 1938. Most of the resources associated with the Wheaton African American community including Chestnut Ridge, the segregated Black elementary school, and Allen Chapel AME Church are no longer extant or are highly altered. Therefore, the Horad House is a singular and critical resource that represents the lost African American heritage in this section of the county.

1.C Historic and cultural significance. Is identified with a person or group of persons who influenced society.

The Romeo and Elsie Horad House is significant for its connection to the Webster-Sewell family and, more importantly, its association with the life of the Horads. The Horad House represents the cumulative efforts of three generations of the family to improve the lives of African Americans in Montgomery County and the surrounding region.

Charles Webster, the grandfather of Elsie Horad, was a leader of the African American community in Wheaton and Montgomery County in the early 1900s. He participated in the local Republican conventions and lobbied support for candidates who supported the improvement of conditions for Black residents. In addition, Webster strove to improve school conditions for Black students as trustee of the segregated Black Wheaton elementary school. Elsie Horad's brother, Webster Sewell, M.D., played a critical role in the health and welfare of the African American community in Wheaton and Montgomery County. After graduating from Howard University's School of Medicine in 1930, he returned to Wheaton where he practiced medicine before opening a clinic in Norbeck. The Montgomery County Medical Society named the "Access to Care Award" in his name which recognizes organizations committed to increasing access to health care for people in the National Capital Region. While the Webster House (formerly adjacent to this property) is no longer standing, the Horad House aptly reflects the legacy and influence of the family.

The Horad House represents the political and social significance of the African American couple at the local, state, and national levels in the mid-twentieth century. The Horads played a significant role advocating for the rights and well-being of Black Americans. Born and raised in Montgomery County, Elsie Horad participated with the local political organizations and served as an educator in the District of Columbia school system for 37 years before joining the family's real estate business. Romeo Horad, a World War I veteran, graduated from Howard University School of Law in 1925. He then joined the District of Columbia's Office of the Recorder of Deeds where he revolutionized the land record system. Local and national papers recognized the achievements of the new system with headlines such as "New Recording System Far Cry from Slave Deals" in the *Afro-American* and "Negro Clerical Workers Install Indexing System" in the *Northwest Enterprise*.

After transitioning from government employment to the private real estate industry, the Horads moved their family to 2118 University Boulevard West in Wheaton. As a realtor, Romeo Horad employed a variety of approaches to combat racial restrictive covenants, spanning from persuasive oratory to directly confronting existing laws. He testified before congressional committees regarding the harmful impact of racial covenants and housing discrimination in the Washington metropolitan region on the African American community. Furthermore, he lamented and criticized the complete closure of Montgomery County and the surrounding suburbs to potential African Americans owners and renters. In the capital, he partnered with Italian American real estate brokers Raphael and Joseph Urciolo—and later Charles Houston Hamilton—to purchase white-owned houses with racial restrictive covenants and resell those properties to African Americans. Although Horad was not directly involved

as a named party in the Supreme Court case *Hurd v. Hodge* that declared racial covenants unenforceable in Washington, D.C., his persistent efforts to circumvent these housing restrictions significantly contributed to the success of the civil rights movement.

Horad's political and social efforts aimed to enhance the lives of African American residents in Montgomery County. He led the Citizen's Council for Mutual Improvement and lobbied local representatives for new school facilities, transportation improvements, installation of sewage and water lines, removal of segregated facilities at the Rockville Court House, and appointment of Black police officers. Alongside other activists and organizations, Horad's efforts to improve public education directly led to the construction of four equalization schools. His civil rights activism culminated in candidacies for political office. In 1948, Horad entered the race for the Montgomery County Council. His unprecedented entry, platform of equity, and backing of African American organizations led to public profiles in local and national newspapers. Horad's actions occurred in an era of racial tensions and threats of violence against African Americans who championed civil rights. While he lost the race, his candidacy paved the way for African Americans to engage in local politics.

Romeo Horad labored on behalf of other political candidates and organizations on the local and state level. He lobbied (albeit unsuccessfully) Governor William Preston, Jr. to appoint Bessie Beaman—an African American seamstress from Takoma Park—to the Board of Education. Horad then served in a position of leadership in the state-wide State Allied Republican Club where he moved to register 100,000 African Americans voters prior to the state's primary elections. He continued to advocate for African American rights and lived at the subject house until his death in 1968.

1.D Historic and cultural significance. Exemplifies the cultural, economic, social, political or historical heritage of the county and its communities.

The Romeo and Elsie Horad House serves as a reminder of segregated life in the twentieth in Montgomery County. Romeo and Elsie Horad, like other prospective African American purchasers or renters, relied on the subdivision of ancestral land in Montgomery County due to the pervasive and widespread discriminatory housing practices against people of color. The Horad family championed the importance of home ownership and deemed it critical that their new house reflect the boundless abilities of African Americans when provided opportunities. Therefore, the couple built a traditional, brick-clad, Colonial (Georgian) Revival style house to demonstrate outwardly their professional, economic, and social prominence. The Horad House has character, interest, and value representing the life, endeavors, and achievements of the African American community in Montgomery County. Activists, such as Charles Webster, Romeo Horad, and Elsie Horad, tirelessly worked to improve the lives of African Americans who lived in Montgomery County. The Romeo and Elsie Horad House stands as a reminder of the African American community in Wheaton. Many resources have been lost due to the due to the demolition of late nineteenth and early twentieth century buildings. This includes numerous houses at Chestnut Ridge (near Wheaton Lane), the one-room segregated elementary school, and the former Allen Chapel AME Church substantially altered by a fire. The loss of these community pillars and the uniqueness of the subject property's history elevates the significance of the

Horad House. Preservation would recognize a cultural asset that reflects generations of African American life and activism and offers a story of a family's resilience and advancement in Montgomery County.

CONCLUSION

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Planning Board:

1. Find that the subject property satisfies the designation criteria listed in §24A-3 of the County Code;
2. List the Romeo and Elsie Horad House with the associated environmental setting as recommended by the HPC in the *Locational Atlas & Index of Historic Sites*; and
3. Recommend that the County Council designates the property with the associated environmental setting as recommended by the HPC in the *Master Plan for Historic Preservation*.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: *Master Plan Historic Site Designation Form: Romeo and Elsie Horad House*