

Reconciling Historic Preservation and Environmental Considerations

By Richard Israel, Alderman, Ward One

One of the unique attractions of Annapolis is the collection of buildings from different eras. For almost thirty years the exterior of these buildings has had the protection of the Historic District Ordinance. Earlier this year the Council enacted a "Green Building Ordinance". This law, which will take effect in 2009, requires that new construction and major modifications of some commercial and residential buildings comply with certain environmental standards. This law applies to all public buildings over which the City has jurisdiction. Within the Historic District the challenge is to reconcile historic preservation considerations and environmental considerations. The renovation of City Hall gives the City government the opportunity to lead by Example.

The original structure was built in the 1760s from proceeds of a lottery and was known as the Assembly Rooms. It was a place for the entertainment of the social elite. Completion of the large and fashionable Assembly Rooms delighted the social and cultural elite who lived in Annapolis as well as those who visited during sessions of the General Assembly, or enjoyed the horse races held annually in the fall. One Annapolis visitor who enjoyed the festivities at the Assembly Rooms was the Virginian, George Washington. An avid horseman, Washington traveled to Annapolis several times to attend the fall races sponsored by the Annapolis Jockey Club. Following a fire during the Civil War and a major renovation, the building has served as the seat of the City government since 1867. In addition to serving as a meeting place for the Council, City Hall has been a place for the performance of a broad range of municipal functions, including a municipal courtroom, lock-up and library. It is imperative that the exterior of City Hall be preserved in accordance with the Historic District Ordinance which the Council enacted while meeting in this building. However, the interior must be renovated in such a way that it will serve its public purpose to be consistent with environmental considerations.