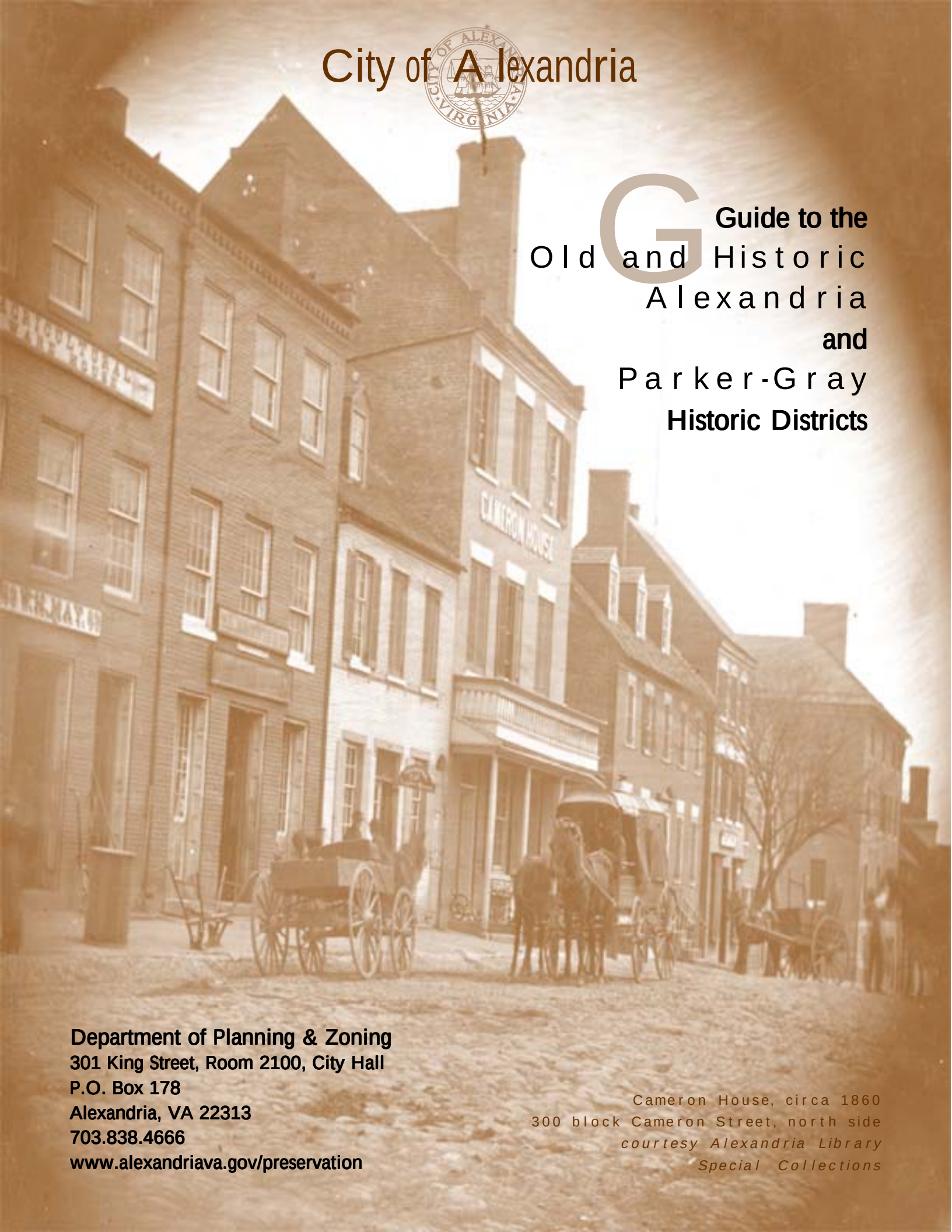
City of Alexandria

Guide to the Old and Historic Alexandria and Parker-Gray Historic Districts



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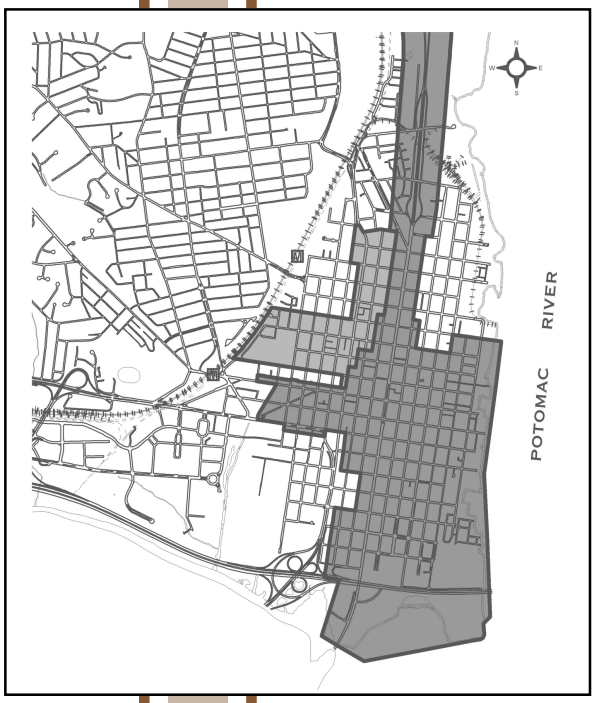
Cameron House, circa 1860
300 block Cameron Street, north side
courtesy Alexandria Library Special Collections

Homeowners, retailers, restauranteurs, non-profit organizations, institutions, and corporations in the City of Alexandria all reap the benefits of location in a city with several historic districts. The **Old and Historic Alexandria District** and the **Parker-Gray District** are both nationally recognized, locally designated, and municipally regulated historic districts, established to preserve the historical and architectural features of Alexandria for generations to come.

The City of Alexandria's two regulated districts comprise its finest historical resources, and deserve special protection because they enhance our shared quality of life.

Property holders in these districts enjoy the advantage of increased economic value as well as protection from unwanted or threatening development. As stewards of such important buildings and neighborhoods, property owners share the City's responsibility to help maintain the distinctive qualities that make these historic districts unique.



Bird's-eye view of Alexandria, circa 1863
Courtesy Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division

Old and Historic Alexandria District

500 block
Franklin Street

500 block Duke Street

When the **Old and Historic Alexandria District** was established in 1946, it became only the third historic district designated in the United States. Just as originally intended, the designation has controlled development along the George Washington Memorial Parkway where it passes through the City, and has preserved the City's colonial heritage.

In addition to its remarkable concentration of buildings from the late 18th and early 19th centuries, the Old and Historic Alexandria District includes representative examples of virtually every popular architectural style on the east coast in the last 200 years. The boundaries of the historic district have expanded since its inception, as appreciation has grown for the City's rich architectural resources.

In 1984, the historically African-American community known as Uptown received historic designation as the **Parker-Gray District.** As with Old and Historic Alexandria, Parker-Gray was established as a preventative measure, to ensure that its small-scale residential character was not threatened by development projects associated with the Metrorail system.

The Parker-Gray District is mostly residential, with commercial development concentrated primarily along North Patrick and North Henry streets. Among a significant number of buildings from the late 19th and early 20th centuries are several structures built in the early 19th century. Most of the structures are small-scale and vernacular, but the district has considerable architectural diversity overall, with variation from block to block and often within a block.

Parker-Gray District

400 block
N. West Street

1300 block Queen Street

How many historic districts are in the City?

Alexandria has seven historic districts: Fairlington, Old and Historic Alexandria, George Washington Memorial Parkway, Parker-Gray, Parkfairfax, Rosemont, and Town of Potomac. Only Old and Historic Alexandria and Parker-Gray are regulated; no approval from a City architectural review board is needed for changes to structures in the other historic districts. There are also a number of historic or architecturally important structures throughout the City which have been designated 100-year-old buildings. These buildings are subject to regulation, and are governed by the Old and Historic Alexandria Board of Architectural Review.

How can I find out if my property is within an historic district?

Please call 703.838.4666 and speak with the Staff of the Boards of Architectural Review (BAR) within the City's Department of Planning & Zoning. Or consult the map and list of addresses on the Historic Preservation page of the City web site, www.alexandriava.gov/preservation.

What are the Boards of Architectural Review?

The BARs are seven-member committees appointed by the City Council and empowered to regulate changes that affect exteriors of structures in the historic districts. Old and Historic Alexandria and Parker-Gray are governed by separate Boards.

What are the standards for Board review?

A Board considers each application individually to determine what types of changes are appropriate, following the standards outlined in Section X of the Alexandria Zoning Ordinance. To assist applicants, the Boards have adopted and published Design Guidelines, which provide information and guidance on generally accepted design approaches.

Do I need a Certificate of Appropriateness?

A Certificate of Appropriateness is required for all new construction and exterior alterations that are within an historic district and are visible from a public right of way, including those visible from public streets and alleys, waterways, and parks. A Permit to Demolish is required for all demolition or encapsulation over 25 square feet, regardless of visibility.

How do I obtain a Certificate of Appropriateness?

Certificate applications are available at the Department of Planning & Zoning and on the Historic Preservation web page. Completed applications and supporting materials should be submitted to BAR Staff. The Boards hold regular public hearings to review applications and determine appropriateness. Hearing schedules, deadlines, and filing fees for applications can be obtained from our web page or by calling the Planning & Zoning office.

Are there financial benefits to owning property in an historic district?

The federal and state goverments offer tax credits for the rehabilitation of historic properties. The state of Virginia offers an income tax credit on 25 percent of eligible expenses for the rehabilitation of owner-occupied properties. The federal program provides a 20 percent tax credit for the rehabilitation of income-producing properties. Additional financial incentives are available through the donation of preservation easements. For more information, contact the Virginia Department of Historic Resources at 804.367.2323 or visit www.dhr.virginia.gov.

How are homeowner associations involved in the review process?

There are a number of properties in the historic districts which belong to homeowner associations. Typically, the Boards of Architectural Review will only review an application for a project after it has received approval from the homeowner association.

Do I need approval to repaint my building?

Previously unpainted masonry surfaces require Board review before painting. But the Boards have long considered exterior paint colors to be a matter of personal choice. Owners are simply encouraged to draw from a traditional palette of colors, avoiding tones which might detract from the architectural character of the building.

Where can I find more information?

Please contact the BAR Staff in the Department of Planning & Zoning at 703.838.4666, or visit our web page: www.alexandriava.gov/preservation.