

---

**HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD  
STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION**

---

Property Address:	<b>1232, 1234, 1236 4<sup>th</sup> Street NW</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agenda
Landmark/District:	<b>Mount Vernon Square Historic District</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Consent Calendar
ANC:	<b>6C</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Denial Calendar
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Concept Review
Meeting Date:	<b>June 30, 2011</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Alteration
H.P.A. Number:	<b>#11-268</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> New Construction
Staff Reviewer:	<b>Brendan Meyer</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Demolition
		<input type="checkbox"/> Subdivision

---

The Third Street Church of God seeks concept approval to remove large portions of three 1860s rowhouses at 1232, 1234, and 1236 New Jersey Avenue NW in the Mount Vernon Square Historic District, and retain and stabilize front facades and portions of party walls. The original application was to raze the structures completely, but after consultation with Historic Preservation Office, the church has agreed to revise the application to include partial retention of the buildings.

**Property Description and Context**

The three rowhouses were originally part of a row of four, flat-front brick rowhouses built 1866-1867. The early construction date qualifies this group as some of the oldest structures surviving in the historic district and they are representative of the speculative housing built on the outskirts of the city in the boom years immediately following the Civil War.

The house originally on the south end of the row was documented in a 1983 survey but was demolished prior to designation of the historic district in 1999. The three rowhouses that stand today vary from each other in only minor detail. All are two stories tall and two bays wide with covered and enclosed passageways along the property lines. Front facades and passageway walls are solid masonry construction. All are two rooms deep with a masonry ell at the rear. Ornament is modest, but original, and includes a wood cornice with modillions and brackets, metal window hoods and timber window lintels.

The disposition of the row was most recently discussed by the Board in July and September 2009 when the church submitted a concept application for an addition to another church-owned property at 1208 3<sup>rd</sup> Street NW. During that review, the church submitted a preservation plan that outlined intent to stabilize 1232-1236 New Jersey Avenue and pursue a mixed-use development project for the site. Subsequently, as a condition of approving the concept plan for addition at 1208 3<sup>rd</sup> Street, the Board requested that the church submit a condition report from a structural engineer for 1232-1236 New Jersey Avenue.

In January 2010, the church submitted to Historic Preservation Office Staff a structural condition report from Carson K.C. Mok Consulting Engineer, P.A. The report brought to light significant interior and structural deterioration, but was based on limited accessibility to the structure of the rowhouses and lacked a thorough evaluation of any options other than complete demolition. Upon further consideration, the engineer submitted in June 2010 an outline of a technical plan of structural reinforcement and bracing that would allow for retention of the front façades and brick party walls.

### **Revised Proposal**

After recent consultation with the HPO, the church has agreed to revise the raze application and now wish to pursue a concept approval that would allow them to demolish only portions of the buildings not visible from New Jersey Avenue. The cleared land at the rear of the lots would be incorporated into the existing parking lot used for Church functions. The church is especially interested in utilizing the cleared land for parking because of the loss of parking that will result from the planned addition at 1208 3<sup>rd</sup> Street. The current lot is an unlined, gravel lot that encroaches into public space and has a capacity of approximately 32 parking spaces. Construction of the addition at 1208 will result in a smaller parking lot with only 17 spaces; seven spaces lost because of the addition, and eight spaces lost because of the requirement to pull the parking lot back from encroaching onto public space. If the rowhouses are completely demolished and their land incorporated into the parking lot, capacity would increase from 17 spaces to 22-24 spaces, depending on aisle and curb-cut configuration. If only the rear portions of the rowhouses are demolished then a parking lot capacity of 20-22 spaces could likely still be achieved.

### **Evaluation**

As outlined by the engineer's structural report and observed during numerous HPO inspections, there is no dispute that large portions of the three rowhouses are in extremely dilapidated condition. However the worst of the conditions are at the rear of the houses and involve building parts that in no significant way contribute to the character of the historic district. This is not only because they cannot be seen from New Jersey Avenue, but because they have lost structural and historic integrity due to their poor condition. Specifically the rear masonry walls and one-story eaves are compromised structurally by numerous trees that have taken root in the walls causing displacement of large sections of masonry. Several holes in the rear of the roof and open window openings have allowed the rear interiors to be open to the weather for several years and have resulted not only in nearly total loss of interior finishes, but also loss of structural integrity in the wood floor and partition framing. The ground floor is approximately 2 feet above a dirt crawlspace which has been very conducive to termites and mold which have added to the deterioration of framing members. These conditions have advanced past the eaves and into the back room of each rowhouse.

These conditions do not appear to have advanced into the most character defining features of the properties: the front facades and front rooms. The front rooms still have their finishes mostly intact (plaster walls and heartwood pine floors). The relatively good condition of these rooms means the wood framing in these sections is not exposed to the extremely wet conditions like the rear of the properties. An additional positive condition is that the party walls of the rowhouses are solid masonry construction. In fact, there are two brick walls at each party line that enclose passageways all the way through the building from front wall to rear yard. These brick party walls are plumb and because they have remained dry and ventilated have suffered little mortar degradation. The front facades also maintain their structural integrity showing only typical wear for 150 year old masonry. There are some natural settlement and displacement cracks, but no large areas of bowed or displaced masonry. The wood cornices show no signs of advanced or problematic rot. Metal ornaments show some minor displacement but no corrosion.

The proposed compromise is to stabilize the surviving structure that would preserve the remaining character defining features of the property which still exhibit structural and historic integrity. That includes both stories of the front facades and party walls to the approximate depth of the front rooms (approximately 14 feet). The church's engineer provided an outline of how stabilization might proceed. Masonry party walls appear structurally sound enough to be kept and used as cross walls to support the front face brick masonry wall. Temporary 12" deep continuous structural steel channel beams could be bolted on both sides of the front façade at the second floor lintel level and roof lintel level. Diagonal bracing of steel I-beams, 6 feet on center, from each level of horizontal channel beam could further brace the front facades. The framing of the front rooms (first and second floors could be exposed, evaluated and replaced were necessary in order to support lateral loads between party walls.

Rear ells, rear facades and the framing, partitions and finishes of the second rooms (behind the preserved front rooms) would be demolished. A temporary framed wall would be necessary to close up the surviving structure and prevent entry. The existing roof would require repair or replacement over the retained front rooms.

Given the deterioration of the properties, the HPO supports the compromise proposal as the best preservation solution for the site. The church will still be able to make use of the rear of the lots while the most important and stable character defining features of the properties will be stabilized and preserved. The solution leaves open the possibility that the current or a future owner may be able to incorporate the historic structures into a future development.

### **Recommendation**

The HPO recommends that the Review Board approve the conceptual plan to preserve the character defining features of 1232, 1234 and 1236 New Jersey Avenue and delegate final approval to staff on the following conditions:

1. Removal will include the rear ell, rear facades and second rooms (first and second stories),
2. The front facades, the party walls to a depth of approximately 14 feet, and intact wood framing of the front rooms (first and second floors) will be stabilized and preserved,
3. The retained portions of the buildings will be sufficiently braced with steel members before demolition begins,
4. The retained portions of the buildings will be secured with a temporary roof and frame rear walls.