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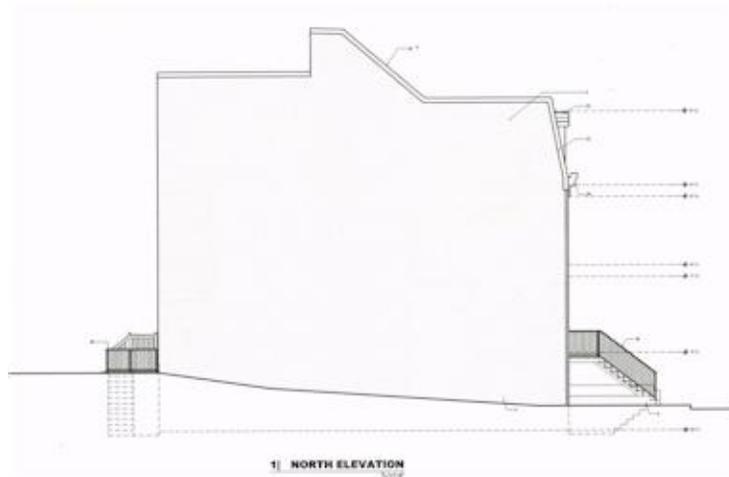
**HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD  
STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION**

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Property Address: <b>1235 4<sup>th</sup> Street NW</b>	<input 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"/> Permit review
Meeting Date: <b>May 23, 2013</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Revision
H.P.A. Number: <b>#12-317</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> New Construction
Staff Reviewer: <b>Brendan Meyer</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Demolition
	<input type="checkbox"/> Subdivision

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Owner, Sergei Mikhailov, seeks permit approval for a stair penthouse and roof deck revision to a previously approved new rowhouse in the Mount Vernon Square Historic District. Concept design plans were prepared by John Linam Jr., Architect, PLLC.



**Figure 1.** Proposed stair penthouse, 1213 4<sup>th</sup> Street NW

### **Proposal**

In December 2011, the Board approved a concept design for a new two-story rowhouse with a third floor mansard at the vacant lot at 1213 4<sup>th</sup> Street NW (HPA #12-038). The subsequent permit design included some minor alterations consistent with the approved concept and under delegated authority has been approved by HPO and forwarded to the Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs for further permit review.

However, the plans now include the addition of roof deck and stair penthouse that were not shown on the concept plans approved by the Board and delegated to HPO. After consultation between the applicant regarding possible alternatives, the owner has submitted a building permit application for the deck and stair penthouse which is the subject of this review.

1213 4<sup>th</sup> Street is to be attached to the end of a row of seven, two-story buildings at 1221-1233 4<sup>th</sup> Street. The north party wall on the side of 1213 will be unattached and unfenestrated and abut the large vacant rear yard of 1251-1253 4<sup>th</sup> Street NW. The proposed

permit design calls for a 9 foot tall stair penthouse engaged with the north party wall and setback from the front roof ridge 12 feet. The north wall of the house would end the row.

### **Evaluation**

The proposed location and size for the penthouse stair will result in a building profile uncharacteristic of the historic rowhouses of the Mount Vernon Square Historic District. It would be a comparatively large element on an otherwise modestly scaled rowhouse, purposefully designed in a traditional style to compatibly fit in with the existing streetscape. It would be clearly visible for a long distance from 4<sup>th</sup> Street, N Street, and likely Ridge Street. Development may occur in the vacant lot at 1251-1253 4<sup>th</sup> Street which might screen some of the penthouse stair, but when that development might occur and what shape it might take is uncertain.

The historic rowhouses of 4<sup>th</sup> Street which contribute to the character of the historic district are generally simple in ornament, size, massing and material. The original concept approval for 1235 4<sup>th</sup> Street included a mansard third floor unlike its historic neighbors, and in that the Board extended a fair amount of flexibility to the project because it is new construction rather than an existing historic rowhouse. The mansard form is common enough for the historic district to not be out of place or character on the street. However, adding a penthouse stair this large and starkly visible will alter the building profile into something else entirely that would be out of character anywhere on the row.

The applicant has submitted a series of photos of existing conditions in the historic district showing other types of roof compartments and alterations. While they are all located inside the historic district they are a mixed bag of conditions. Some were approved by the Board as compatible parts of new contemporary buildings, some are incompatible with the historic district but predate designation of the district; others are subjects of ongoing enforcement actions. Identifying incompatible elements in the historic district in order to set a new “equally incompatible” standard for alterations in the historic district is not consistent with how alterations can be judged under the preservation law. What lies at the end of that path cannot be known for sure, but it does not ensure compatible alterations to the historic district which is the primary charge of the Board.

As this new construction project has not yet broken ground, an opportunity remains to design a roof deck with access from the rear façade or elsewhere on the roof plate that would solve the issue by avoiding a visible stair penthouse and incompatible roofline for the structure.

### **Recommendation**

*The staff recommends that the Board advise the Mayor’s Agent that the proposed alteration for a substantially visible stair penthouse at 1235 4<sup>th</sup> Street NW is not consistent with the purposes of the preservation law, because it is not compatible with the character of the historic district.*