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

Property Address:	1819 10th Street NW	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agenda
Landmark/District:	U Street Historic District	<input type="checkbox"/> Consent Calendar
ANC:	1B	<input type="checkbox"/> Concept Review
Meeting Date:	December 15, 2011	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Permit application
H.P.A. Number:	#12-047	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Alteration
Staff Reviewer:	Brendan Meyer	<input type="checkbox"/> New Construction
		<input type="checkbox"/> Demolition
		<input type="checkbox"/> Subdivision

The applicant, owner Naser Nusraty, seeks permit review to alter the basement windows of a contributing rowhouse at 1819 10th Street NW in the U Street Historic District.

Property Description and Context

1819 10th Street is located at the northeast corner of 10th and Westminster streets in the U Street Historic District. Westminster Street is a one block street developed in a single period of development by two architects from 1900-1901. As a result, the materials, forms and massing of the rowhouses show a high degree of uniformity and detail typical of late Victorian rowhouse architecture. 1819 10th is literally a cornerstone of the block. It's prominent round corner bay is mirrored across the street by the house at 1817 10th Street, creating a symmetrical entry to Westminster that is also mirrored at the 9th Street entrance to Westminster by two other rowhouses with corner bays. Due to a flat topography and a first floor raised only slightly above grade, the basement windows in the round corner bay are small and set on a two foot concrete apron where the building meets the ground. This building-grade condition is shared by the other corner bays at the ends of Westminster and frequently throughout the block.

1819 10th Street is currently undergoing a comprehensive renovation after an extended period as an underused and vacant structure.

Proposal

The plans call for excavating new egress window wells at each of the three basement windows on the corner projection and to lower the basement window sills to increase the size of the windows. Their width will not change but the increased height will allow a new double-hung window to be installed under the existing windows such that the latter will become transoms to the new windows.

Evaluation and Recommendation

The Board has adopted design and preservation guidelines for basement entrances and windows that outline the important principles for compatibly achieving these types of alterations. As a general principal, the guideline states that visibility or prominence to the historic district should be a primary concern, "Changes to historic property that are visible to the public are more likely to affect a property's character. As a general rule, changes that are prominent or visible from a street should be more carefully considered, while greater flexibility should be given for changes that are minimally visible or not

visible from the street.” Under this principle, HPO has already approved, under delegated authority from the Board, two new window wells at the subject property – one under the stairs facing Westminster, and another in front of a pair of windows on a square bay at the north end of the west elevation.

However, the HPO explained to the applicant prior to construction starting that areaways in the corner turret were problematic because of their prominence on the house and as seen from Westminster Street and 10th Street. Due to the short distance from the basement windows to the street, the flatness of the terrain (which in some cases elevates the building/grade intersection such that window wells are invisible to the public) window wells of any dimension in this most prominent of building features will be a distinct and prominent alteration to how the building meets the ground, and create a different relationship than that which it currently shares with its twin across the street which establishes a formal and composed entry to Westminster Street. Any attempt to screen new window wells would also screen and obscure the relationship that 1819 and 1817 10th Street establish as a uniform gateway to the street.

The proposal is not consistent with the HPRB’s guideline (4.1), which states that “lowering the sills of existing basement windows can be achieved when it has minimal visual impact on the building’s façade and does not result in a perceptible increase in a window’s dimensions as seen from the street.” The existing conditions at 1819 10th Street are original and located on a very prominent part of the house. While there are historic examples of window wells and areaways around corner projections of Victorian-era rowhouses, the relationship of this house to its site and to its context of other buildings on this block of Westminster Street is distinct and uniform. Altering that relationship is not compatible with the character of this particular house and its row.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Board recommend denial of the building permit application for new window wells and enlarged basement windows in the round corner projection at 1819 10th Street NW as inconsistent with the purposes of the preservation Act.