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

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Property Address:	<b>1869 3<sup>rd</sup> Street NW</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agenda
Landmark/District:	<b>LeDroit Park Historic District</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Consent Calendar
		<input type="checkbox"/> Denial Calendar
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Concept Review
Meeting Date:	<b>September 27, 2012</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Alteration
H.P.A. Number:	<b>12-572</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> New Construction
Staff Reviewer:	<b>Brendan Meyer</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Demolition
		<input type="checkbox"/> Subdivision

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The applicant, Ronnie McGhee on behalf of owner Mehari Sequar, seeks concept review for a new three-story, two-flat rowhouse type building at 1869 3<sup>rd</sup> Street NW in the LeDroit Park Historic District. Plans were prepared by R. McGhee & Associates.

### **Property Description and Context**

The subject lot is a new lot created by a subdivision process approved by the Board in 2009. Formerly the land was part of the property associated with the house to the north which is a detached two-story brick “villa” residence constructed in 1889-1890. The adjacent villa is representative of the first phase of development in LeDroit Park. These first residences were large detached cottages and villas on large lots. After the initial phase of building by the original developers, LeDroit Park opened to development by other builders and so began a phase of rowhouse construction around 1900. How the villa and rowhouse phases overlap, and how blocks of rowhouses adjoin and intermingle with villas on spacious yards with setbacks, is a fundamental character defining feature of the LeDroit Park streetscape.

The row of 5 two-story houses to the south of 1869 3<sup>rd</sup> Street was built in 1909 and is typical of the period. These early 20<sup>th</sup> century rowhouses abandoned the tall, skinny, projecting bays of the Victorian period. Instead, front porches became the primary feature, either full-width or two-thirds width. Horizontal elements were emphasized by the wide porch, three-bay composition, and low slate mansard or pent roof with dormers. Across the street from 1869 are more front porch rowhouses from 1913 and five rowhouses (1898-1899) that are best described as hybrids of the two rowhouse periods in that they have both a projection and a porch.

At the time of the subdivision in 2009, that applicant (different than the current applicant) included a design for a three-story plus mansard rowhouse on the new lot. The rowhouse design by itself was not submitted for review by the Board as a real project, but was instead simply an exhibit to show that the newly created lot could be practically developed.

### **Proposal**

The proposed building would be a two-flat residence within a contemporary rowhouse form. With three stories close to sidewalk grade its height will approximately align with the adjacent rowhouses. Walls will be of red brick on both front and the north side wall, with a rusticated stone base at the front of the ground level. A one-bay wide projection running all three floors will also have a rusticated stone base, but clad in metal panels above the ground level. A small flat roof over the front door ties into the projecting bay by extending the profile of the porch cornice across the face of the projection as a stringcourse. Window openings are traditionally proportioned, punched masonry

openings with brick soldier lintels and precast sills, while the windows themselves are configured as asymmetrical casement and fixed sashes.

The existing grade at the front will be replaced by an arrangement of retaining walls, paving and stairs, both for the ground floor entrance two feet below the sidewalk and the second floor entrance eight feet above the sidewalk. Plans call for the open stair to be constructed out of metal and glass panel railings.

On top of the building, with parapets at the front and side, a roof deck will occupy the front half of the roof. A nine foot tall stair enclosure will be near the mid-point of the roof plate along the south party wall. The back half of the roof not covered by decking will be the location for the building's mechanical equipment.

### **Evaluation**

As explained in the HPRB guideline, *New Construction in Historic Districts*, the best way to think of compatible new construction in a historic district is that it should be a good neighbor; it should respect the existing context without being an exact clone. For LeDroit Park which has two distinct and intermingled layers of historic buildings, one must also ask *which* context. This site is simultaneously next to an original villa, but it's also part of a historic row of contributing buildings. The dimensions of the lot clearly call for a rowhouse form that should have a harmonious relationship with the adjacent row. The lot is simply not laid out to accommodate anything but a rowhouse. As such the role of the new design isn't so much to interact or address the neighboring villa, but to blend into the adjacent rowhouses. It need not be a carbon copy, but it should recognize and reuse some of the keynotes of the row's design. In several important ways, this design falls short in being a good neighbor to its row.

It is true that many of the forms, materials and tropes in the new design can be found scattered throughout all parts of the historic district, but to mix and match them together does not necessarily result in a composition compatible with its neighbors. The 20<sup>th</sup> century row is a solid example of historic forms with their pattern of open porches and horizontal emphasis. Additionally, how the buildings sit on the land, on a raised berm that intermediates between the sidewalk and front façade, is important to the rhythm of lines, setbacks and spaces on this row.

Rather than seeing itself as the end of a row and taking cues from the porch and raised front yards of its neighbors, this design sees itself as a corner property and takes liberty to borrow the projecting bay form from across the street. This interpretation does not fit the historic pattern of development in LeDroit Park. Builders did not address adjacent villas or invest in ornate corner elements; they simply ended their rows with practical blank walls which anticipated later rowhouse construction. That is not to say a projection cannot be done on this site, but it is certainly the more challenging route than playing off of the adjacent porches. As this projection goes, its proportions are tall and narrow compared to those across the street. This stems from the three stories of height it tries to carry—instead of two like across the street—and its narrow face. Since both this site and the row across the street are set back from the front property line, the projection widths are not limited by public space regulations. The projection at 1869 3<sup>rd</sup> could be improved if widened to two bays instead of its current one, and by cladding the bay in brick to match the rest of the wall. While metal is often found as a material in one-story oriels, it is rarely found as a material for a full height projection.

Another problem stemming from the buildings three-stories is how it reshapes the grade of the lot. In an attempt to provide access for both a ground floor and second floor unit and complicated arrangement of stairs and large paved areaway take up much of the space in front of the building. The complexity of the arrangement does not match the simple arrangement of transition spaces on the adjacent row: steps up to a raised front yard, steps up to a porch, then a porch floor of significant depth. A more efficient arrangement at 1869 would reduce the amount of paving under the stairs, use a raised grade to break up the long stairs into two sections or remove the turn in the stairs. The stairs down to the ground floor unit could then be brought adjacent and parallel to this run. The space thus gained could go towards expanding the landscaped portion of yard adjacent to the villa. The complexity and visibility of the stairs could also be improved by substituting cable or metal railings for the glass panels.

The stair enclosure at the roof will have some visibility from 3<sup>rd</sup> Street because of the setback condition of the villa and the apartment building at the circle. The site lines included in the concept plans seem to use as arbitrary point to take the view from. As such efforts should be taken to further reduce the visibility of the stair enclosure, hopefully by locating the deck to the rear of the roof plate and moving the mechanicals to the front but still out of view behind the parapets.

### **Recommendation**

*The HPO recommends that the concept design return to the Board after further development along the points recommended above, in particular*

- *Refine the front projection/porch composition*
- *Simplify the front steps and grade height*
- *Reduce the visibility of the roof top stair enclosure*