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

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Landmark/District:	<b>Capitol Hill Historic District</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agenda
Address:	<b>224 7<sup>th</sup> Street, SE</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Consent
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Concept
Meeting Date:	<b>March 24, 2011</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Alteration
Case Number:	<b>11-186</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> New Construction
Staff Reviewer:	<b>Amanda Molson</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Demolition
		<input type="checkbox"/> Subdivision

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Building owner Stanton Development and restaurant owner Xavier Cervera, with drawings prepared by Orestes del Castillo, seek concept approval for a one-story rear addition and storefront modifications to 224 7<sup>th</sup> Street, SE in the Capitol Hill Historic District.

**Property Description**

Historic permit data is not available for 224 7<sup>th</sup> Street, SE, but the building does appear on maps by 1888. This three-story brick building, located across the street from Eastern Market, is abutted by a tavern to the left (north) and by a three-story office building of more recent construction to the right (south). The storefront of 224 7<sup>th</sup> has been modified from its original configuration, which appears to have featured two storefront bays flanking a single entry door, in order to provide a second door accessing office space on the upper floors. The rear elevation includes a two-story ell with a dogleg, followed by a large expanse of open rear yard. The property backs up to a service alley lined by commercial buildings to the west and houses to the east. The commercial side features a number of parking pads and trash areas along the alley.

The front elevation of the building features an ornate bracketed cornice, window headers, and arched window openings. The rear ell is utilitarian with simple brick arches headers. A portion of the dogleg has been infilled on the ground level windows and doors have been replaced, and a metal stair leads from the second story to the rear yard. The ell is flanked by two, longer buildings – the taller and deeper office building to the south, and a series of rear additions to the tavern to the north. As a result, visibility of the ell from the rear alley is limited from perspective views and generally obscured until one is directly behind the property.

**Proposal**

The applicants propose the removal of the existing, two-story rear ell in its entirety. In its place, a one-story rear addition would be constructed to cover most of the rear lot, stopping short of the alley by a few feet to accommodate a trash area at the rear. The addition would not replicate the dog-leg ell form of the existing wing, but would extend the full width of the lot. On the façade, the multi-light, square-topped windows will be replaced with appropriate arched, 2-over-2, double-hung windows, and a new storefront constructed that will be inspired by a historic photograph of the building's original storefront.

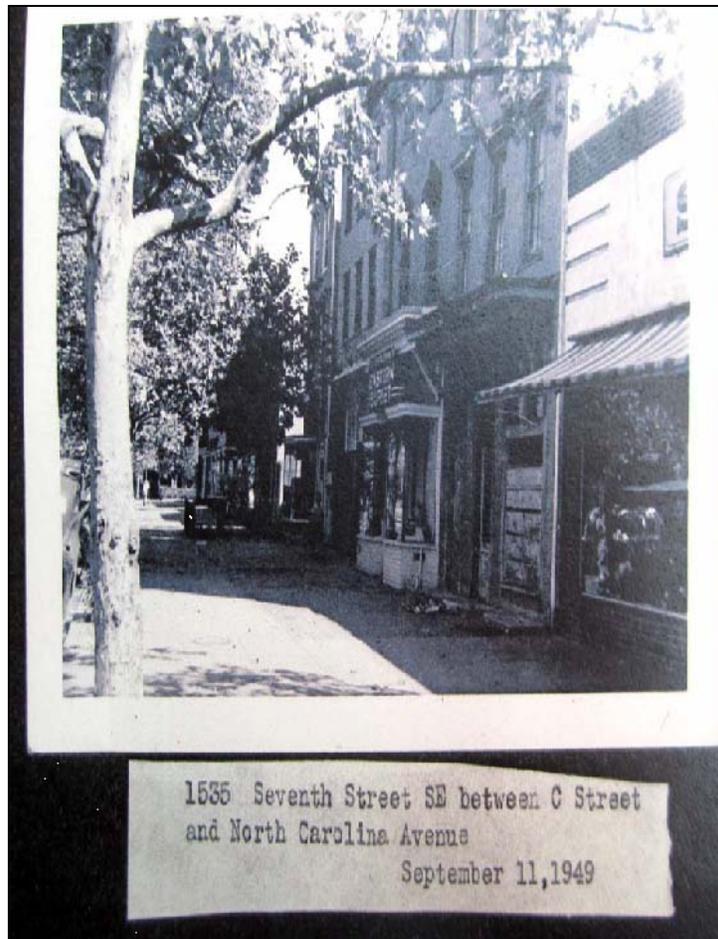
## **Evaluation**

Under the preservation regulations (DCMR 10-C, Section 305.1 (d)), one definition of demolition is “the removal or destruction of all or a substantial portion of an entire wing or appendage of the building, such as the rear ell, unless the wing lacks physical or historic integrity, or it is not a character-defining feature.” The regulations also state that: “In general, the determination whether a proposal involves destruction of a building ‘in significant part’ shall depend on the extent to which character-defining historic features, historic or structural integrity, historic materials, or ability to convey historic significance would be lost. This decision shall depend on all the facts and circumstances of the case.”

While the retention of rear ell wings is encouraged, the HPRB has often approved removal of utilitarian rear ell wings without referral to the Mayor’s Agent, typically as part of a building’s expansion to accommodate a larger, full-width addition. In most instances, the ell wings have not been determined to possess sufficient qualities to be defined as a “character-defining feature” of the building worthy of retention, and that removal would result in the property no longer having the “ability to convey its historic significance.”

In this instance, arguably the most significant characteristic of the building is the architectural craftsmanship of the main block of the building, which is a strong representation of high-style, Italianate commercial buildings of this era. The rear ell does not contribute to the streetscape presence of the building along 7<sup>th</sup> Street, and its limited visibility even from the alley arguably limits its value as a character-defining feature of the building. As a two-story appendage to a deeper, three-story main block, the rear ell comprises roughly one-third of the volume of the building.

It is also not inappropriate to consider the extent of removal in the context of the project, which will include restoration of the front elevation. The applicants have also worked closely with the HPO in their desire to modify the storefront, using a photograph taken in 1949 as inspiration. The existing configuration of two doors flanking a storefront window understandably needs to remain in order to provide access to upper floors. The applicants would, however, prefer to construct a projecting storefront bay to provide additional seating inside. A projecting cornice will be constructed over the storefront, mimicking the depth, dentil moulding, and open brackets shown in the historic photo. Although the storefront will project beyond the overhanging cornice, which is not the typical hierarchical relationship, restoring these details of the original cornice will reinstate important elements of the building’s original design. The new storefront design will also correct excessively tall transoms and squat doors, returning the vertical proportions typical to a building of this style and height.



Photograph by John Wymer (1949). 224 7<sup>th</sup> Street, SE is the third building from the right, distinguishable by the two storefront bays with painted kneewalls and a projecting cornice above.

Although the retention of the rear ell would be preferable from a preservation perspective, the limited views of the ell from the alley, the alley's compromised context, the simplicity of the ell's detailing in comparison to the more ornate main block, and the restoration of the front elevation ensure that the building will retain its important character-defining features and continue to convey its historic significance. Considering the facts and circumstances of this particular case, removal of the rear ell is a reasonable compromise to allow the building to be expanded for current use.

The design, size and footprint of the proposed addition are not inconsistent other historic buildings that have been expanded in the historic district. While the proposed addition is deep, covering a larger footprint than the historic building itself, its overall mass would remain substantially smaller than and subordinate to the three-story main block.

### **Recommendation**

The HPO recommends that the Board approve the concept as consistent with the purposes of the preservation act and delegate final approval to staff.