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

Property Address:	301 Massachusetts Ave NE	() Agenda
Landmark/District:	Capitol Hill Historic District	() Consent Calendar
ANC:	6C	() Denial Calendar
		(x) Concept Review
Meeting Date:	April 28, 2010	(x) Alteration
H.P.A. Number:	11-191	() New Construction
Staff Reviewer:	Brendan Meyer	() Demolition
		() Subdivision

Owner, PMJ Partnership, represented by agent Rich Markus, seeks concept review for three areas of sidewalk café seating in public space, and assorted building alterations at 301 Massachusetts Avenue NE in the Capitol Hill Historic District. Plans were prepared by Rich Markus Architects.

Property Description and Context

The subject property is at the southeast corner of Massachusetts Avenue and 3rd Street NE. It was built in 1889 in conjunction with 8 adjoining addresses (303-313 Massachusetts Avenue and 313-315 3rd Street). As such, the group of buildings shares a palette of simple Victorian brickwork and stringcourses. The rear section of 301 Massachusetts appears to date from a later period of construction judging from its different brick work and lack of fenestration or ornamentation.

This part of the Capitol Hill Historic District is where Massachusetts Avenue transitions from medium and small sized office buildings to the ubiquitous small scale rowhouses and corner commercial buildings of the historic district. Many rowhouses on this block of Massachusetts have converted to restaurant use and take advantage of the very wide amount of public space on either side of the right-of-way for use as uncovered sidewalk dining. The current condition of the public space at the subject property is almost entirely paved on both Massachusetts Avenue and 3rd Street. While the public space on 3rd Street is mostly unimproved and unenclosed, the Massachusetts Avenue side is enclosed by a non-historic low wood picket fence and is partially covered by a low wood deck to accommodate uncovered sidewalk dining.

Project Description

The main focus of the project is the construction of three dining areas (one enclosed, two unenclosed in conjunction with a collection of alterations to the public space paving and fencing and alterations to the walls and fenestration of the front and sides of the main building.

On the front façade on Massachusetts Avenue a 14 foot deep by 20 foot wide enclosure is proposed for installation between the corner entrance and the shall projecting bay. It will not include side walls and the pre-fabricated unit includes a retractable awning. To fit the structure a utilitarian shed will be removed and a wide expanse of plate glass will be

replaced with a new brick wall and a pair of double doors. The public space in this area will be refurbished with a 3 foot border of landscaping around the public space, removal of a low wood deck, and replacement of a white picket fence with a hoop style metal picket fence.

On the side façade on 3rd Street, two dining areas are proposed: an unenclosed canopy would shelter an area 11 feet deep and 23 feet wide. The existing bullnose canopy that wraps around the corner will be removed in order to accommodate the new shed-roofed canopy. Another large expanse of plate glass will be replaced with a brick wall and two pairs of double doors. The public space around the canopy will be filled in with new landscaping. Another dining area is proposed on the other side of a historic 2-story projection, this one to be fully enclosed by glass walls and covered by a standing-seam metal roof. It will be 34 feet wide and 11 feet deep filling the entire width of the façade from the projection to the rear of the building. To accommodate the new enclosure the existing shallow storefront projection would be removed. The blank wall above would be punched with 3 pairs of new wood double hung windows. The strip of public space across the front of the dining area would be landscaped as well.

Various alterations are proposed for the main building. Non-original multi-light windows would be replaced with new wood 1-over-1 double-hung sash windows, signs would be replaced with new signs above the corner entrance, the side entrance in the projection would lose its round canopy and the doors would be replaced, and a 5 foot wood fence would be installed on the rear roof to help screen existing rooftop mechanical equipment.

Community Recommendations

This design was heard by ANC 6C but support was not granted or denied due to a split vote of 3:3:1. As a result, the ANC requested that this hearing be postponed a month. However, this case has already been postponed one month at the request of the ANC, which is the limit of allowable postponements. HPO advised the agent for the project to voluntarily postpone for one month in order to refine the design, but the owner desires to proceed. A collection of letters from the Single Member District commissioner and a number of constituents is attached to this report in order to outline the issues weighed by the ANC and neighbor concerns over noise, parking, and compatibility.

The Capitol Hill Restoration Society also submitted mixed comments (also attached) which held that 3rd Street is less problematic than Massachusetts Avenue, and that the enclosures should not be “stock” components, but rather individually designed and tailored to this specific building and site.

Evaluation

Public space is an important character-defining feature of the Capitol Hill Historic District and the L’Enfant Plan. This is most apparent along the diagonal avenues and less so on the orthogonal streets because the avenues are significantly wider than the streets. The solid/void relationship formed by buildings aligned along a common setback and the open spaces formed by these public rights-of-way is a fundamental three-dimensional characteristic of the L’Enfant Plan, and has been a basic, historic organizing principle in

the development of Washington. Later, with the 1870s origin of the public space concept, it was formalized that the edges of rights-of-ways should function as continuous strips of landscaped green space in order to achieve a park-like quality. For these reasons, enclosures that extend forward of the building restriction line into the public space are not often appropriate and generally have not been approved by the Board, as they disrupt the continuous open character and vistas through these rights-of-way. However, Public Space regulations allow for, and the Public Space Committee frequently approves, canopied and enclosed sidewalk cafes that meet certain parameters regarding materials, dimensions, sidewalk clearances and can be dismantled seasonally.

The Board has made limited exceptions on public space matters based on particular circumstances and conditions. These exceptions have included the improvement of existing enclosures that were approved by the city prior to the designation of historic districts (1647 R Street NW), a new enclosure that didn't interrupt a viewshed or L'Enfant open space (2325 Calvert Street NW, 24th Street enclosure), or where the enclosure facilitated a project that dramatically improved incompatible public space conditions by making it more consistent with the surrounding historic district (1225 19th Street NW). The latter condition applies to the rear wing of 301 Massachusetts. Here, the public space is entirely paved and disused as a trash can area. The proposed dining area for this space includes a new planted greenspace 5 feet deep and 34 feet long that would make it consistent with the public space south along 3rd Street. However, at 34 feet, the enclosure would be nearly the entire width of this part of the building and butt against the historic projection. HPO recommends that the width of the dining area be reduced to align with the new windows proposed for the second floor. This should result in a dining area about 27 feet wide that is centered on the rear wing and affords relief from the historic projection. Reducing the size of the dining area would also clearly subordinate it to the main building which is a general characteristic of a compatible storefront projection or sidewalk café.

Similarly, the second dining area proposed for 3rd Street, north of the historic projection would also improve incompatible public space and building conditions. It would include another new green space, 5 x 23 feet, and make the public space consistent with the rest of 3rd Street. It would also replace another incompatible condition—a long expanse of plate glass—with reconstruction of a new brick wall with two pairs of double doors. Like the other dining area on 3rd Street, the width of this one should also be reduced in order to provide some relief from the historic projection and also the corner entrance. HPO recommends that a width of 18 feet should achieve this.

Considering both dining areas together, HPO has no firm recommendation on the proposal to enclose the southern dining area. Generally the Board has not approved enclosed dining areas because they obscure historic architecture and obstruct views along public space that should remain open. As stated above, this section of the building is not historically significant and the current public space condition would be improved by the proposal. Another consideration is that an enclosed dining area could act as a definitive terminus to the commercial character of Massachusetts Avenue which currently bleeds south along 3rd Street without clear definition. However, looking at both dining areas and

how they balance across the projecting bay there would be a worthwhile advantage to both dining areas being unenclosed as a matter of visual consistency. If both areas are to be unenclosed their roof coverings should be matching canvas shed-style roofs.

The proposed enclosure on the Massachusetts Avenue side would be located in a more prominent and significant section of public space and is an incompatible intrusion into this important viewshed. The few existing covered dining areas in the 200 and 300 blocks of Massachusetts Avenue are decades old and predate the Board's regular review of such features. For the last several years, the Board has regularly declined to approve enclosures that obscure historic architecture or interrupt public space vistas. The exceptions listed above, that apply to 3rd Street, do not apply to the Massachusetts Avenue location. The space is already used as seating and the introduction of a structure would not dramatically improve the condition of the public space. The proposed enclosure, a factory built assembly, because of its thick structural members and mass production details cannot relate to the architecture of the main structure. Staff has recommended to the agent that perhaps a small metal and glazed storefront projection, 4 feet deep and 8 to 12 feet wide, could be compatible in this location since that is a historic form found throughout our historic districts, but this recommendation was not taken up.

The various smaller alterations to the building and public space are compatible and are typically approved by staff under delegated authority from the Board. The most noteworthy alterations are the replacement of non-original multi-divided lights with wood 1/1 double hung windows, replacement of the non-original white picket fence with a metal hoop-style picket fence, and removal of the long barrel vaulted awning. The one exception is the 5 foot tall privacy fence proposed to screen existing rooftop equipment on the rear of the building. While screening the equipment will be beneficial, the screen should take the form of a false mansard, also about 5 feet tall, and consisting of a steep pitched roof assembly.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Board approve the concept design for sidewalk eating areas, public space improvements and architectural alterations inclusive of the following conditions and that final approval be delegated to staff:

- 1. Delete the Massachusetts Avenue enclosure from the concept design,*
- 2. Adjust the width dimensions of the two 3rd Street enclosures so as to not encroach on the historic projection or the ends of the side façade, and*
- 3. Replace the proposed rooftop wood fence with a mansard roof assembly*

No portion of this staff recommendation shall be construed as approval or support for any portion of this project which requires zoning relief or review by the Public Space Committee.