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

Landmark/District:	Capitol Hill Historic District	<input type="checkbox"/> Agenda
Address:	626 Lexington Place, NE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Consent
		<input type="checkbox"/> Concept
Meeting Date:	February 24, 2011	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Alteration
Case Number:	11-144	<input type="checkbox"/> New Construction
Staff Reviewer:	Amanda Molson	<input type="checkbox"/> Demolition
		<input type="checkbox"/> Subdivision

Owner Timothy Chamberlain, with drawings prepared by designer Timothy J. Warren of Visionary Design, Inc., requests Board approval for the addition of a basement entrance to the front elevation of 626 Lexington Place, NE the Capitol Hill Historic District.

Property Description

Constructed in 1912, 626 Lexington Place, NE is a two-story plus raised basement brick house with a front porch extending two-thirds the width of the structure. Lexington Place, a one-way street extending one block in length, features numerous houses of a design similar to 626, some of which have received a variety of basement entrance treatments over the years. The most visually obtrusive solutions have placed the new basement entrance through the front wall of the porch foundation, while entrances through the side wall of the porch or via a simple lengthening of the existing basement window in the front wall of the house are much less prominent.

Proposal and Evaluation

This proposal is fully consistent with the Board's guidelines for adding new basement entrances, and this is the type of compatible alteration that will likely be delegated to staff review and approval once the guidelines are formally adopted by the Board this spring.

The applicant proposes to lengthen the basement window in the front wall of the house to accommodate a new entrance door. Maintaining the existing width and header location, the lengthened basement window will maintain its relationship with upper story windows and will remain a subordinate feature of the front elevation.

- *Basement windows and window wells should be compatible with the architectural character of the building and have minimal visual impact on the site. Alterations to basement window openings should be done in a manner that does not change the basic window pattern, apparent size, or relationship with upper story windows. Windows should remain smaller than and subordinate to upper story windows even if basement sills are lowered.*

- *Basement entrances should be discreet and visually subordinate to the main entrance, which generally requires that new basement doors are located below the primary entrance or in an otherwise inconspicuous location.*

Excavation in the front yard, which is public space, will be limited to the new basement steps and will preserve the raised berm on which the property is sited. A simple metal railing will extend along the new steps. The new basement steps will run parallel to the main entry steps to the front porch and will not extend past the existing staircase.

- *Basement entrances should respect existing topography and site characteristics. Basement entrances and areaways should be subordinate to and not dominate the setting of historic property unless significant alterations to the site or street have fundamentally changed the original condition.*
- *Lowering the front yard of historic property to provide an at-grade entrance is generally not appropriate. New entrances should be designed to minimize disruption of existing topography.*
- *Stairs to basement entrances should typically run parallel to and not project substantially further than the main entrance stair.*

A new concrete lead walk will extend from the main lead walk to the new basement stairs, retaining planting areas in front of and behind the new lead walk and allowing the main walkway to the front door to be the dominant entrance path.

- *Walkways to basement entrances should be shared with the walk serving the main entrance to retain the maximum amount of green space in the front yard. Separate walks for main and basement entrances are generally not appropriate.*

The proposal is consistent with the Board's guidelines for adding new basement entrances and is compatible with the character of the historic house and the historic district.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Board approve the proposal as consistent with the purposes of the preservation act.