

HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION

Landmark/District:	Mount Vernon Triangle Historic District	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agenda
Address:	444-446 K Street NW	<input type="checkbox"/> Consent
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Concept
Meeting Date:	September 29, 2016	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Alteration
Case Number:	16-607	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> New Construction
Staff Reviewer:	Kim Elliott	<input type="checkbox"/> Demolition
		<input type="checkbox"/> Subdivision

Studio Crowley Hall working with owner Han Jan, seeks conceptual design review of a 5-story addition at the rear of two 2-story rowhouses built in the late 1800s.

Property Description

This pair of 2-story Italianate rowhouses was built in 1874 and now operates as a commercial business. Both buildings have short rear dogleg additions —the one at 446 is significantly altered and also does not extend as far back as 444. The façades of both buildings were once identical, but 444 K's façade at the first floor (and interior) has been altered by removal of the front steps, relocation of the raised entry to street level, and reorganization of the structural floors inside. According to the applicants, the buildings have also suffered structural damage from the recent surrounding construction. That construction has resulted in a significant change in context for the historic buildings, which are now surrounded on three sides by 12 story residential buildings.

Proposal

In June 2015 the applicant presented a general massing study for a 10 story rear addition that extended over top the historic rowhouses. The Board found that a visible vertical addition could be compatible but should not overlap the existing historic buildings.

The project has been revised and includes the renovation of the historic houses with a 5-story rear addition built behind them and set back 15' from the rear property line. The proposed design also fills in the 5' side yard with a 2-story glass entrance connecting the street entrance to the rear building. The façades would be restored, however the 444 K Street entry level which has been severely altered would be modified to become a projecting bay storefront at grade. The design also calls for introducing 8 new windows on the alley elevation. On the interior, much of the structure of 446 would be demolished to lower the first floor structure to be at grade, and with the rear wall and party wall removed at the 2nd floor. The party wall would remain at the first floor with punched openings and the north exterior wall would need to be rebuilt due to its lack of structural integrity. The rear doglegs would be removed and a new 5-story addition clad in a screen structure and terra cotta panels would be built behind the historic rowhouses. Roof decks would be located at the third floor on the roof of the historic buildings, set back from the front and sides, and at the roof of the new construction.

Evaluation

The Mount Vernon Triangle Historic District is small and has a limited collection of historic buildings—many of which are sitting on sites zoned for much larger buildings—as is dramatically illustrated in this immediate context. The south corners of 5th and K Streets are the heart of the historic district, with the greatest concentration of early buildings. Retaining this collection relatively intact is essential to retaining the character of the district and modulating the scale of an area that is receiving much larger

buildings. However, this pair of historic rowhouses clearly illustrates the dilemma in this small historic district—boxed in on all 3 sides by 12 story buildings that dwarf the existing property.

While there have been many alterations and also structural damage to 444 and 446 K over the years, the proposal calls for a significant amount of demolition. Some rebuilding may be required due to the current condition of the property, however the proposal to lower the floor at 446 K and also to remove the entire party wall at the second floor are not consistent with the Board's regulations governing demolition (DCMR 10-C, Section 305). With these changes along with the other demolition and rebuilding, very little of the original structural fabric would remain. The project would be more compatible with the regulations if it kept the current floor levels and retained more of the existing structure—party wall, north wall, and rear wall as possible.

The overall massing of the new 5-story building provides a compatible transition between the 2-story historic rowhouses and the 10-story neighboring buildings. The architecture is a modern box with the majority covered in a metal or wood screen system and the remaining area clad in terra cotta panels. The idea of a screen or scrim, although not needed for sun control on the north and alley elevations, could be successful in creating a lighter, elegant addition behind the historic houses, but this design could benefit from a layout or organization that relates in some way (scale, division, rhythm, alignment etc.) to the architecture of the buildings to which it is being connected. In the same way, the terracotta panel cladding running up the right side of the elevation could be more integrated if it was the same width as the double-height glass slot entry way. The double-height glass entry way is set back and the height has been somewhat reduced to increase one's visibility of the historic wall of 446 K, which is an important view to maintain in order to retain the original form of the house.

The addition of the projecting storefront at 444 K Street is a compatible treatment to this house and historic district and helps resolve the incompatible alterations that were done many years ago when this floor was lowered and the original windows were removed. Likewise, new windows added to the alley elevation are compatible, designed to match the historic windows at the façade.

The roof deck at the third floor should be sufficiently set back from the front and the alley side so that railings and any plantings are not visible from the street. Continued refinement of the penthouse elements—more consistent heights, design, and details for the roof deck at the top of the new construction – would help simplify and improve the design of this level.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Board find the concept generally compatible and consistent with the purposes of the preservation act with the following recommendations:

- 1. The existing floor level of 446 should be maintained, with the floor height difference accommodated through transitions on the interior;*
- 2. The party wall for the full two floors should be maintained and connections provided through minimized openings;*
- 3. The elevations of the addition should continue to be developed; detailing the screen idea, focusing on the material, and re-organizing the layout to relate to the rhythm and alignment of the historic houses should be studied;*
- 4. The roof deck element should be designed to maintain a generous setback from the facades and sunk into the mass of the buildings so that they are not visible from street view;*
- 5. A structural engineer's report should be provided which illustrates current structural conditions and provides justification for any substantial demolition.*