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

Landmark/District: **Shaw Historic District**
Address: **937 M Street, NW**

Meeting Date: **December 16, 2010**
Case Number: **11-029**
Staff Reviewer: **Eldra D. Walker**

Agenda
 Consent
 Concept
 Alteration
 New Construction
 Demolition
 Subdivision

Property owner Barbara Schauer seeks conceptual review for modifications to the roof of 937 M Street, NW in order to create third floor living space. The two-story plus basement property was constructed in 1887. Its Victorian features include decorative pressed brick and a prominent full-height projecting bay; the house is crowned by a substantial mansard roof terminating with a decorative ridge and punctuated by a tower and distinctive dormers. A vacant lot abuts the property to the west.

Proposal

The project calls for retaining the front mansard roof and tower, and removing and raising the slope of the roof on the main block of the house. The roof and a portion of the rear elevation would also be demolished and a floor added on top. New second and third story rear decks will replace an existing storage area. The side wall, which is exposed facing the vacant lot, will be extended and clad in stucco.

Evaluation and Recommendation

The Board has generally allowed minor alterations to roof slopes for the conversion of attics to living spaces on two conditions: that the changes were imperceptible from street view and that they did not alter existing character-defining roof elements, such as the proportions of the front roof, or ridge caps, dormer windows, or the height of parapet walls. This proposal raises concerns regarding both of these criteria. The altered roof form would be visible from the street through the adjacent vacant lot, so long as the lot remains unimproved. If the lot was improved at some point, the visibility issue may be rendered moot by adjacent new construction but would remain visible until then.

Another issue is with the relatively unsuccessful executions of joining new and historic roofs. In the HPO's experience, connecting a raised roof to the historic decorative roof can present problems, such as when the new roof framing is set on top of, rather than behind, the existing framing, which leaves the junction of the roofs exposed. Even if this is engineered and constructed to prevent this, there is no way to join a new roof to the existing roof with covering the existing decorative ridge cap with new flashing to ensure that the upper roof drains properly without water entering into the building. Finally, altering the roof at the front of the building has resulted in several situations where the fire code has required the extension of the side fire walls 18-30 inches above the new roof line, which dramatically increases the height of the addition and visibility from the street.

For these reasons, the HPO recommends a more conservative approach which is to leave the front portion of the roof alone, and allow any expansion of the attic space/roof profile to take place only on the rear portion of the main roof set back from the front elevation. A 15 foot setback is recommended as the minimum necessary to establish a clear separation of the expanded roof from the front elevation. Side elevations should be provided upon resubmission.

The HPO recommends that the Board direct the applicant to restudy the design as outlined above and resubmit plans when ready.