

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

Property Address:	1508 Caroline Street NW	X	Agenda
Landmark/District:	U Street Historic District		Consent Calendar
Meeting Date:	November 20, 2014	X	Concept Review
H.P.A. Number:	15-058	X	Alteration
Staff Reviewer:	Anne Brockett		New Construction

Owner Gerald West seeks concept approval for a third floor addition to a two-story paired house in the U Street Historic District. The proposal also includes a rear three-story addition, an expansion of the existing side bump-out, and a side basement entry. The roof addition would match the mansard that was constructed in the 19th century on the abutting building.

Property Description and Context

The house is one of 24 brick duplexes (12 buildings) built on both sides of Caroline Street in 1879-80 by developer Diller Groff. The duplexes were identical when constructed, featuring a two story height and three bays each. On each side of the street, the two center duplexes feature flat fronts while the two end duplexes have a recessed outer bay, where the front door is located. Between each building is a narrow side yard. Groff's overall plan was carefully and symmetrically arranged.

The National Register nomination form for the U Street Historic District specifically calls out the 1500 block of Caroline Street as distinctive. It states that Groff's "paired duplex design on Caroline Street...is unique in the area. Located on the outer fringes of the neighborhood when constructed, these duplexes with side yards separating the houses are similar to suburban houses in LeDroit Park and other areas on the fringes of the city limits developed during the 1870s." The 1500 block of Caroline Street is "unusual for the neighborhood, as it was developed with two-story, detached brick duplexes with narrow side yards." As with the neighborhood's other one-block thoroughfares, including Wallach, Riggs, and Corcoran, "these streets illustrate the still experimental nature of rowhouse design in the late 1870s, and the creative responses by builders to the narrow streets cut through some of the blocks."¹

The houses on Caroline continue to be characterized by their uniformity of height, rhythm, massing, and ornamentation. That these were intended as working and middle class homes is evidenced visually by their simple construction and historically through analysis of census data, which shows that most occupants were skilled laborers and government clerks, often living with extended family members. In fact, during their first 50 years, more renters than homeowners lived in the Caroline Street residences.²

¹ National Register of Historic Places Registration – Greater U Street Historic District, 1998.

² Busch, Rick and Gamber, Dan. *Caroline Street, NW Washington, District of Columbia: The First 135 Years*, 1993.

Changes to Caroline Street

Along with some additions to the rears, there are only three exceptions to the otherwise consistent buildings on the street. In 1888, 1506 Caroline, adjacent to the subject property, received a third story with a mansard roof. The following year, a front bay was added to 1505, followed by a covered porch, additional roof height, and a side addition. In more recent times, a third floor rear “pop-up” was added at 1519 Caroline. None of these alterations received HPRB review.

Previous Reviews

The issue of compatibility of adding a mansard roof is one that the Board has grappled with many times – always with a thorough examination of the individual contexts and a thoughtful weighing of the preservation concerns specific to that context. In determining the appropriateness of any roof addition, consideration must be given not only to the Historic Preservation Regulations, the Board’s guideline *Roofs on Historic Buildings*, and the guideline *Additions to Historic Buildings*, but also to similar cases that have been review by HPRB.

The roof guideline states that “Rarely is it appropriate to change the shape of an existing roof. To do so almost always drastically alters the character of a historic building. If, for compelling functional or economic reasons, the shape of the roof must be changed, it should be done in such a manner as to retain the historic character of the building.”

The Board’s published “Roof Decks and Roof Additions: Design Considerations and Submission Requirements” further discourages, but does not outright prohibit, visible roof additions: “Under most circumstances, roof additions that are visible from a public street are not appropriate, as they would alter an historic building’s height, mass, design composition, cornice line, roof, and its relationship to surrounding buildings and streetscape – all of which are important character-defining features that are protected for historic landmarks and in historic districts. In rare cases, a visible roof top addition may be acceptable if it does not fundamentally alter the character of the building and is sufficiently designed to be compatible with the building.”

The guideline *Additions to Historic Buildings* elaborates: “Any roof-top addition should be located far enough behind the existing cornice so that it is hidden from view by pedestrians on the street. If this is not possible, the design of the addition or its screening should be compatible with the character of the building.”

The Board has approved several mansard roof additions, but almost always where extenuating circumstances allowed it. For instance, a mansard at 1316 10th Street NW was approved because the underlying house had an elaborate Italianate design. At 1422 S Street NW, the rooflines of the row varied and had been altered over time. At 901 U Street NW a mansard floor was approved in consideration of the overall project, which removed formstone and rehabilitated an extremely deteriorated building. At 1316 8th Street NW, exceptional circumstances included the fragmented context of block and the fact that the front of the house was an addition to an earlier building.

In other situations, rooftop additions taking traditional forms have not been approved, either because they weren't compatible with the particular building or context, or because of concern about setting precedent. For instance, mansard additions were denied at 506 4th Street SE and 1017 U Street NW as stylistically inappropriate for the underlying buildings and incompatible with the existing two-story contexts. Also denied due to historically inappropriate design were mansards at 1123 11th Street NW, 1518 Kingman Place NW, 1461 S Street NW, and 1328 10th Street NW.

The 2010 staff report for 1461 S Street, summarizes previous Board reviews: "In the limited instances when the Board has approved visible roof additions, it has been for buildings of nominal architectural and historical character, where the immediate context contained a diversity of height, or where the subject building was between buildings of greater height. Conversely, a principle that the Board has consistently cited is that roof additions on houses that were part of a continuous row of related or similar houses of the same height -- as is the case with the subject property -- is not an appropriate context for a visible roof addition that will break the row's unified roof line."

Evaluation

What the Board must now determine is whether there are "compelling functional or economic reasons" for the addition, and, if so, ensure that the design "does not fundamentally alter the character of the building" and is compatible with the building and the streetscape. The Board must answer the question of whether or not the previous changes to this row – and specifically the house at 1506 Caroline – outweigh the need to preserve what is left and retain the two story character of the street. The Board must determine if the proposed design is found to be compatible whether approval of additional stories is appropriate for the other houses on the street.

An argument can certainly be made that the addition would cover up the unappealing side wall of the existing addition and that the design is aesthetically pleasing, as demonstrated by the existing addition at 1506. However, it is equally important, regardless of previous changes to buildings, to respect and preserve all building types. The houses that define the special character of Caroline Street are significant for what they are – two-story, working-class duplexes. Creating a grander edifice and thus a false sense of history is not an appropriate way to expand this home (or others on Caroline Street) or to address the previous addition on 1506.

The concept for a rear addition of two stories with a roof terrace and the extension of the existing one-story side entrance are compatible alterations. The staff takes no issue with the basement entry, which appears to meet the Board's guidelines for this type of alteration.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Board find the concept for a third floor addition to be incompatible with the historic district; to find a two-story rear addition, one-story side addition, and basement entrance compatible; and to delegate further review to staff. The Board's approval shall not be construed as approval for or endorsement of any necessary zoning relief.