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

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Landmark/District: **Georgetown Historic District** (x) Agenda  
Address: **3317 P Street NW**

Meeting Date: **February 2, 2017** (x) Addition  
Case Number: **17-015**

Staff Reviewer: **Tim Dennée**

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The applicant, Wendy Burger, agent and designer for property owners Jeremy Kirsch and Lindsay Smithen, requests the Board's review of a concept to construct a two-story brick addition at the rear of this two-story home, one of a row of six erected in 1905-1906.

Much of the addition would be a second story atop an existing one-story addition, but the new work would extend ten (10) feet rearward of its back wall. The addition would stretch from one side lot line to the other. It would be faced with brick, and it would have blank side elevations for fire separation from the adjacent properties.

Although the property stands in the Georgetown Historic District, the case has been referred to the Board because the addition would not be visible from a public thoroughfare and is, therefore, outside the jurisdiction of the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts (CFA).<sup>1</sup>

The height, width and materials of the addition are similar to and compatible with those of the historic house. There is also little demolition proposed. The most important question then is the addition's depth. As always, two considerations apply: how does the addition relate to the existing house, and how would it, and the completed house as a whole, relate to the pattern of development on the square?

The total depth of the original main block and rear ell is about 53 feet, not including the additional projection of the front bay. The proposed addition, combined with the present one-story one, would be about 25 feet deep. At less than half the depth of the original construction, it does not seem overwhelming or out of balance, especially as the original ell and its side court would be retained as a connector between the largest mass, the main block, and a subordinate addition. A context of attached buildings allows little opportunity to visually compare the front and rear structures.

The depth relative to other houses is a more complicated consideration. Because this square was not subdivided to include an east-west alley, the P Street lots are deeper than is typical of

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<sup>1</sup> "Visible" Georgetown projects are typically reviewed by the Commission and by the Historic Preservation Office staff, without undergoing an HPRB review, as the D.C. Official Code (§ 6-1104(b)) does not require a formal review by the HPRB in addition to that of the CFA. The aim is to avoid duplicative or even conflicting reviews.

Georgetown.<sup>2</sup> The present house is now nearly as deep as the deepest on its row, 3313 P, which has a similar one-story addition. Half of the row have not had enclosed additions yet. Many of the homes on 33<sup>rd</sup> and 34<sup>th</sup> Streets and Volta Place are shorter than these—not having had such deep lots—while others are at least as deep. P Street also has some very large detached homes that have larger-than-average rear outbuildings.

Although the completed project would make this the largest house on the row, its size relative to the others will not necessarily remain static. There is no end to addition proposals, even if the present owners of most houses have no immediate interest in one. In its stated purposes, the preservation law promotes and balances the preservation interest and the interest in adaptation. Implied in the question of how deep an addition should extend is the question, how deep should any or all go? Unless a particular addition is inarguably minimal, an evaluation ought to have in mind a rough limit that might apply to all, so that the treatment of each, especially on a row, may be reasonably consistent.

Deriving such a limit is more of an art than science. The proposed extent of the house appears to be less than the maximum envelope permissible under the zoning regulations, so we do not have that arbitrary limitation as a guide. The other obvious benchmarks are the larger, detached houses to the west of this row. A rough alignment with the back ends of those would still retain a considerable portion of the rear yards—and the considerable greenspace in the center of the square—as these row homes do not possess the sizeable accessory structures that those larger houses do. It was this comparison, in fact, that suggested to the applicant to reduce the size of the addition, lopping six feet off an earlier version in order to roughly match the depths of those larger homes.

A mitigating factor for the additional bulk is the fact that this project cannot be seen from a public street or alley. That is not to suggest that alterations to historic properties, *even if entirely invisible to others*, are insignificant or unworthy of concern, but simply that matters of a couple feet here or there have less of an impact on the historic character of the neighborhood the less prominent they are.

Details of the addition must be worked out further before a permit application is submitted. The rear elevation indicates that the addition's roof would shed to the rear, but the section drawing depicts no slope to the roof. A workable pitch would mean that the addition's rear wall would not be as tall as shown. The rear elevation also proposes arches over the second-story window, but segmental arches within a brick veneer would have to be worked out very carefully. The same sheet notes that the existing rear windows might be reused, but the drawings themselves indicate a different configuration and taller, door-like openings, guarded by railings that themselves must be detailed.

### **Recommendation**

*HPO recommends that the Board approve the concept as compatible with the character of the historic district, and therefore consistent with the purposes of the preservation law, and delegate further review to staff.*

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<sup>2</sup> An alley was created on the north half of the square in the 1880s, taking advantage of that depth to build alley dwellings.