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

Landmark/District:	Mount Pleasant Historic District	(x) Agenda
Address:	3109 18th Street NW	() Consent
Meeting Date:	February 2, 2016	(x) Addition
Case Number:	16-527	(x) Alteration
Staff Reviewer:	Tim Dennée	(x) Concept

The applicant, property owner Jon Cooper, requests (with Shinberg-Levinas architects) the Board's further review of a concept to construct a roof addition atop a 1914-1915 end-unit rowhouse.

The Board first reviewed the project at the beginning of August, when the proposal called for a full story covering the footprint of the building. Acknowledging the historic preservation design guidelines for roofs and for roof additions¹ and that almost any addition atop this building could be seen from farther north on 18th Street (see photograph below), the Board unanimously

found the addition to detract from rather than enhance the subject property, that it is incompatible with the character of the historic district and therefore inconsistent with the purposes of the preservation act. Specifically, the Board considered the presented options for a third story to be either incongruous or lending a false history to the building and row, adversely affecting its massing and the exposed character-defining secondary elevation and the pent-roof form typical of such rows. The Board also recommended against the installation of skylights in the front roof. The Board recommended that the applicant explore options to add behind the attic in a manner that would not be conspicuous from 18th Street....

Thus, the Board denied the initial concepts, but left open the possibility of an expansion of the attic that might be somewhat visible from 18th Street. The staff had recommended against the initial concepts, but informally recommended consideration of a dormer-like extension off the rear of the attic, to provide additional headroom, light and egress, plus space rearward of it for an exterior deck. But the applicant desires a space that would accommodate a full apartment, and therefore, the addition would extend to the present rear wall of the house, although it would set

¹ "Adding vertically to a historic building is generally discouraged as such additions typically alter significant features, such as its roof line, height, relationship with surrounding buildings, and overall form and mass. Additions on top of a building can sometimes be achieved when they are not visible from street views, do not result in the removal or alteration of important character-defining features of the building or streetscape, and are compatible with their context."

"Altering roof shapes, materials, elements and details will affect their design. Thus, any alterations must be undertaken with extreme care to ensure that the character of the roof is retained.... 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."

back from the north side wall. The gap between the addition and the side wall would be filled with a deck, which would need a railing that would also be perceptible above the height of the wall, something that the Board has also generally discouraged.²



A Google Streetview image of the side of the building in April 2014.

On the present project, the HPO simply requests the Board’s direction on the proposal. The staff had recommended less expansion of the attic than is presently proposed, and roof additions on rows are generally held forward of the existing rear wall plane so that the roofline along the rear of the row still reads continuously. There is also the question of the visibility of a deck rail. HPO is concerned about the generalizability of any solution, i.e., whether it can be applied consistently to similarly situated properties in accordance with the principles expressed in the regulations and guidelines. Exposed end units of rows, like detached houses, are inherently challenging when it comes to upward addition.

In short, does the Board find the proposal to be along the lines of what it was suggesting in August—is it sufficiently inconspicuous?

The staff visited the property to examine the “stick test” that is illustrated in some of the attached photographs and took away the impression that the structure would be a bit taller than the height indicated by the flagging tape shown.

Recommendation

HPO requests the Board’s determination as to whether the proposed roof addition and deck are compatible with the character of the historic district.

² Solar panels that had previously been installed too conspicuously, contrary to a building permit issued for them, have since been reinstalled mounted flush to the roof. In the present proposal, they would again be reinstalled flush-mounted, now atop the addition.