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

Property Address:	1251 4th Street NW	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agenda
Landmark/District:	Mount Vernon Square Historic District	<input type="checkbox"/> Consent Calendar
ANC:	6E	<input type="checkbox"/> Denial Calendar
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Concept Review
Meeting Date:	January 26, 2017	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Alteration
H.P.A. Number:	#17-075	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> New Construction
Staff Reviewer:	Brendan Meyer	<input type="checkbox"/> Demolition
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Subdivision

Owner, Abbas Fahti, seeks concept approval to subdivide an existing lot at 1251 4th Street NW, a contributing property in the Mount Vernon Square Historic District, into three lots and to build two new multi-unit residential buildings on 4th Street NW. Plans were prepared by Running Dog Architects which is part of the development team contracted to purchase the site.

Property Description and Context

1251 4th Street is at the corner of 4th and N Street and built as a grocery and flats building in 1885. The building's commercial history is evident in its projecting storefronts, corner entrance, arched cornice and stepped parapets. The storefronts are not original, but their dimensions are consistent with historic forms. The three story brick main block of the building steps down to a two-story brick wing along 4th Street.

This block of 4th Street features an eclectic variety of wood frame and brick rowhouses from 1850 through 1900, with several instances of modern construction built since the designation of the historic district in 1990.¹ Heights, materials, and styles vary accordingly. The tallest historic building on the block is a three-story flat front brick rowhouse with wood cornice at 1215 4th Street. The largest group of houses consists of two-story mid-19th century brick houses from 1233-1225 4th Street. As a whole, the block displays a variety of rowhouse sizes, styles and forms, with no single type predominating.

Proposal

The applicant proposes to subdivide the lot to create two new buildable lots at the south end of the existing lots. There, two new buildings with three 18-foot wide front facades would be built. The buildings would be three stories tall and have four separate entrances for the four units. The historic corner building would be adaptively reused as a two-unit residential building. The front elevations would have flat fronts and vaguely Greek Revival proportions, largely stemming from the paneled frieze and cornice shadow line capping the elevations. The height of the new buildings would be 37'-6" and generally align with the historic building to the north and the contemporary mansard house to the south. A side yard of five feet would separate the new buildings from the adjacent house and reveal an unattached south elevation consisting of a three-story, panel-clad building extension setback 8 feet from the

¹ 1211-1213 4th Street NW (built 2011) built to evoke the historic house at 1215; 1220-1228 and 1232-1234 4th Street NW (2012) built as contemporary versions of the Victorian bay-front rowhouse at 1230; 1235 4th Street NW (2014) built to emphasize the two-story character of the row of frame houses but with a mansard.

front to accommodate an entrance. A common basement areaway would span the length of the new row. The roof plan indicates a partial fourth floor penthouse form at the rear with walk out decks, but this element is not shown in elevation or section.

The non-original storefronts of the historic building would be demolished and replaced with new panel and glass storefront systems divided to match the fenestration rhythm of the transom sashes above the wrap-around canopy. The corner entrance would be used as a separate entrance for one of the units. A new walk-out deck would be built on top of the two-story rear wing along 4th Street.

Evaluation

The primary question concerns the compatibility of the proposed building lots and whether their dimensions will be able to form the basis for front elevation proportions compatible with the character of the historic district. For as varied as the styles and materials of the houses on this block are, their widths are generally the same (14 to 18 feet) and create a casual rhythm and scale on the block. According to historic maps, the proposed location of the two new buildings was the site of five two-story houses that were likely very similar to the ones extant to the south. While the proposal calls for only two lots where there were once five, the front elevation renderings successfully show that the new buildings can be given a rhythm of three 18 foot wide rowhouses that fits comfortably into the rhythm of building widths already established. Building to three-stories achieves proportionality by arranging double-hung windows and a strong cornice design to good effect. Thusly, the lot dimensions proposed can result in building dimensions and proportions compatible with the historic district.

However, further development is necessary for important design matters peripheral to the first matter of the compatibility of the lot dimensions and front elevation proportions. The unattached south elevation is a complication that introduces a second major exterior material and an entrance setback from the property line. While articulating this section of building differently than the rest is vital to establishing the 18 foot rhythm of the front facades, the choice of material, three-story height and shallow setback likely will result in a feature prominent enough to be out of character with the historic district. Lowering the height, removing the entrance from this location, or changing materials are all options that would help this section of building appear more like a small side attachment, which though uncommon, are found on many semi-detached historic rowhouses. The long, common basement areaway has the effect of sinking four-story buildings in a one story hole and introduces incompatible feature into the historic streetscape. This component could be made compatible--much like the modern row across the street--by breaking the areaway into smaller, separate sections related to each of the 18 foot wide "facades" already established by the upper floor windows and cornice. If a partial fourth floor and roof decks are to move forward, sufficient sight line studies need to be developed to show that these elements will not be substantially visible to the historic district.

The applicants should be commended for the extra effort and attention they have put to the restoration of the historic building. While working with staff they have made several accommodations to their interior layouts in order to reuse—rather than remove entirely or alter incompatibly--the commercial storefront architecture they are adaptively reusing. While the current storefronts are not original and built clumsily within the last fifty year, the ones now planned will more accurately reflect the original 1880s time period of the building.

Calling for a roof deck on the rear wing rather than a brick addition to the third floor preserves the fundamental main block/rear wing rowhouse massing of the historic building, an essential element of a compatible concept.

Recommendation

Staff recommends the Board give concept approval to the subdivision of 12514th Street NW into three new lots for the purposes of building two new buildings with three 18 foot wide facades and return to the Board for further.