

HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION

Studio Crowley Hall, architects and agent for property owner Han Jan, seeks conceptual design review of a six-story addition at the rear of two two-story rowhouses built in the late 1800s.

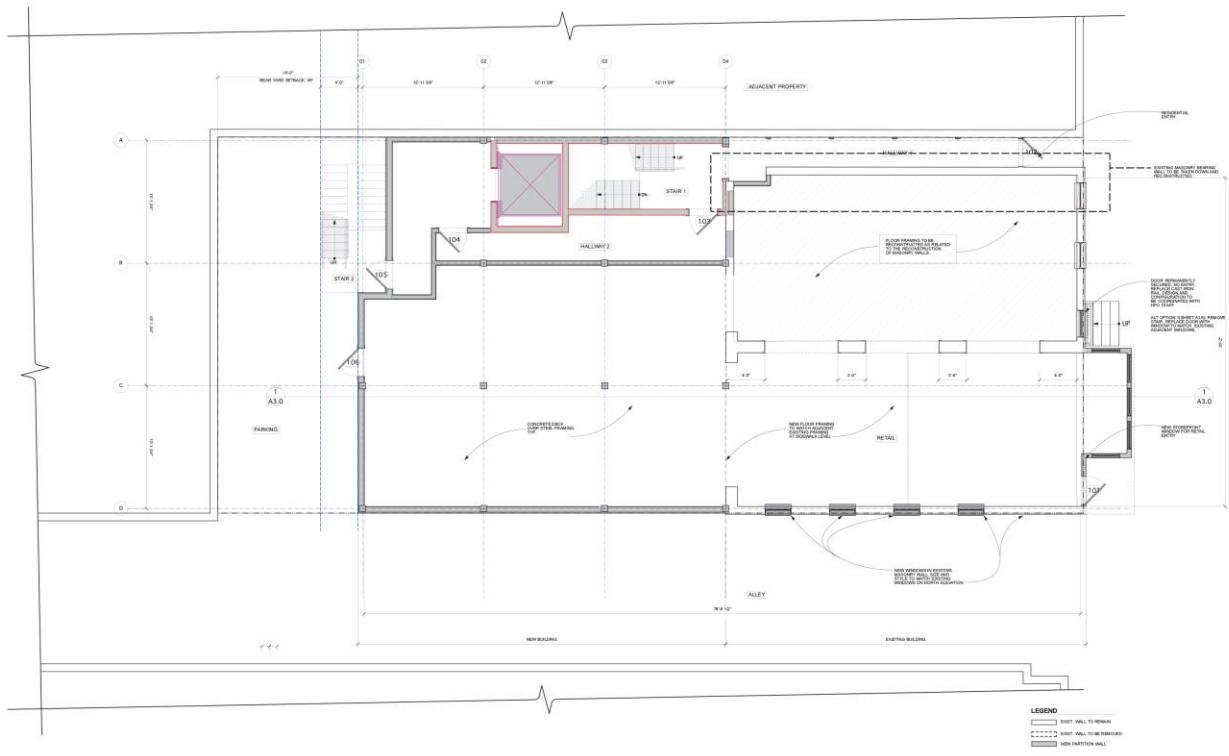
Property Description

This pair of two-story Italianate rowhouses was erected in 1874 and now operates as a commercial business. Both buildings have short, rear dogleg additions —the one at 446 is significantly altered and also does not extend as far back as 444. The façades of both buildings were once identical, but 444 K's façade at the first floor (and interior) has been altered by removal of the front steps, relocation of the raised entry to street level, and reorganization of the structural floors inside. According to the applicants, the buildings have also suffered structural damage from the recent surrounding construction. That construction has resulted in a significant change in context for the historic buildings, which are now surrounded on three sides by twelve-story residential buildings.

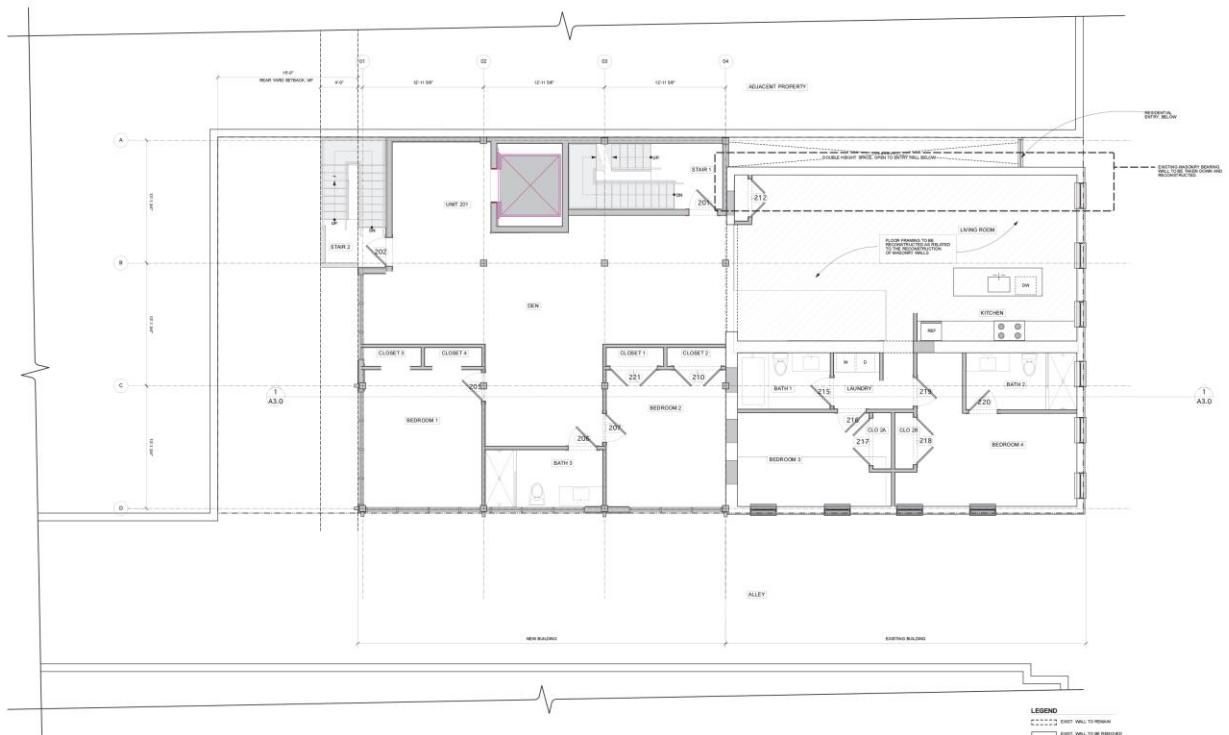
Proposal

In June 2015 the applicant presented a general massing study for a ten-story rear addition that extended over top the historic rowhouses. The Board found that a visible vertical addition could be compatible but should not overlap the existing historic buildings. In September 2016, the applicant presented a concept design for renovation of the interior of the historic rowhouses, restoration of the façade of the historic buildings - including a design for a storefront projection at 444 K St, and a five-story addition behind the historic rowhouses. This design concept was approved by the Board with conditions that: the rear wall and party wall were maintained with limited openings to the new construction; the original floor level of 446 be maintained with the floor height difference accommodated through interior transitions; the architect continue to develop the façade of the new construction screen cladding and relate it to the rhythm of the historic houses; the roof deck element be generously set back from the facades; and a structural engineer's report be provided illustrating the current structural conditions.

The project design before the Board today is similar but is now a six-story addition at the rear of the historic buildings with a revised interior plan on all levels. The architectural metal louver screen design would wrap the front and side elevations, similar to the previous submission. The first floor will be retail with a ground floor entrance at 444 K, and the entrance to the residential area will be located in a slot between 446 and 450 K Street – however, it is unclear if this space is wide enough to meet code requirements.



September 2016 – Proposed 1st Floor



September 2016 – Proposed 2nd Floor



Evaluation

The Mount Vernon Triangle Historic District is small and has a limited collection of historic buildings—many of which are sitting on sites zoned for much larger buildings—as is dramatically illustrated in this immediate context. The south corners of 5th and K Streets are the heart of the historic district, with the greatest concentration of early buildings. Retaining this collection relatively intact is essential to retaining the character of the district and modulating the scale of an area that is receiving much larger buildings. However, this pair of historic rowhouses clearly illustrates the dilemma in this small historic district—boxed in on three sides by twelve-story buildings that dwarf the existing property.

While there have been many alterations and also structural damage to 444 and 446 K over the years, the intent of the project is to keep as much of the load bearing walls of the historic buildings as possible, and to restore the exterior facades.

The submitted plans for today's hearing indicate that the party wall and rear wall will be maintained with some openings as directed by the HPRB Actions from 2016. However, upon a recent site visit it was discovered that the entire rear wall has already been completely demolished. According to DCRA a demolition permit was issued, however, HPO did not review or approve this scope of work or permit.

In a follow-up conversation with the architect regarding this recent discovery, they explained that when the rear doglegs were taken down, the historic rear wall began to crumble – resulting in the current condition.



September 18, 2018

In addition to this new information, HPO is also concerned about the amount of party wall that would actually be maintained in this proposed plan. The new design centers around a dorm-style concept with multiple rooms and bathrooms on each floor and a common shared living and kitchen space. At the second floor where the historic building and new construction meet - the layout includes 10 bedrooms and 5 bathrooms. This program requires cutting the space up into many small rooms—creating a floor plan that conflicts with the goal of maintaining the party wall with minimal openings. It is hard to imagine how much of the original historic wall will ultimately remain given the current configuration, location of plumbing walls, etc.

HPO has had numerous conversations with the architecture team about the importance of maintaining the party wall and the rear wall with only minimal openings. Now that the integrity of the historic building has been compromised, it is imperative that as much of the historic structure that remains be preserved. A definitive plan showing the retention of the party wall, the exterior walls, and other structural elements needs to be submitted and followed. In addition, the applicant will need to submit a structural report and preservation plan outlining how they will preserve the remaining historic elements and safeguard against any other unauthorized demolition.

Given the process so far with the proposed permit drawings and the demolition of the rear wall with lack of review or approval, this project will be carefully monitored by HPO.

Recommendation

While HPO recommends that the Board find the concept design of the 6-story height generally compatible and consistent with the purposes of the preservation act, HPO strongly recommends the following:

1. *The existing floor level of 446 be maintained, with the floor height difference accommodated through minimal transitions on the interior;*
2. *The party wall for the full two floors be maintained and connections provided through minimized openings;*
3. *The elevations of the addition should be fine-tuned, detailing the screen idea, relating to the rhythm and alignment of the historic houses;*
4. *A structural engineer's report be provided which illustrates current structural conditions and provides the approach to preserve the remaining structural elements of the building.*

Staff contact: Kim Elliott

September 2016 HPRB Actions:

SEPTEMBER 29 MEETING

Present: Gretchen Pfaehler (Chair), Andrew Aurbach, Graham Davidson, Nancy Metzger, Joseph Taylor and Rauzia Ally. Absent: Brian Crane, Charles Wilson.

MOUNT VERNON SQUARE HISTORIC DISTRICT

444-446 K St NW, HPA #16-607, concept/rear 5-story addition.

The Board found the concept generally compatible with the historic district with the following conditions: (1) The existing floor level of 446 should be maintained, with the floor height difference accommodated through transitions on the interior and the original entry and stoop at 446 should be maintained; (2) The elevations of the addition should continue to be developed; detailing the screen idea, focusing on the material, and re-organizing the layout to relate to the rhythm and alignment of the historic houses should be studied; (3) the architect needs to confirm that the egress/entry door is achievable to meet code. The Board would not support jogging the north wall on 446 to create a larger entry opening; (4) The canopy at the glass slot entry should be lowered; (5) Rethink the signage and remove the large illuminated signage at the top of the building; (6) The roof deck element should be designed to maintain a generous setback from the facades and sunk into the mass of the buildings so that they are not visible from street view; (7) Continue to provide structural information as the project progresses. Vote: 5-0