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

Property Address:	515 Cedar Street, NW	X	Agenda
Landmark/District:	Takoma Park Historic District		Consent Calendar
Meeting Date:	July 1, 2021	X	Concept Review
H.P.A. Number:	21-373		Alteration
Staff Reviewer:	Steve Callcott	X	New Construction
			Demolition
			Subdivision

Applicant MSP1 LLC, with plans prepared by Main Street Design, seeks concept review for construction of a two-story frame house on a vacant lot in the Takoma Park Historic District.

Property History and Description

515 Cedar Street (lot 2, square 3190) is one of three lots historically associated with the house at 517 Cedar. 517 Cedar (lot 3) is a large Queen Anne styled house that was constructed in 1893 by H.A. Curtis, a government clerk, and was noted in a newspaper article at the time as being the first house constructed in the Grammer’s Addition to Takoma Park subdivision. The subject lot and lot 5 (immediately to the west of 517) were never developed or sold separately from the house lot until recently.

515 Cedar has an unusual two-story barn-like outbuilding clad in board-and-batten siding with a steeply pitched roof and a large open-sided addition on its west side. While it is known that the open-sided addition was constructed in the 1970s as a pottery shed, the history of the board-and-batten structure is not entirely clear. Map research indicates that Curtis built a carriage house on the property sometime before 1903. However, the location of that building doesn’t align with the present structure. A structure appears on a 1927 map that is the same general size and location as the existing building, however, its orientation is different. It is possible that the 1927 structure was relocated and reoriented in the 1970s when the pottery shed addition was built – a possibility that would explain why the building sits on a relatively new poured concrete foundation -- or that the current structure post-dates the 1927 map. Internally, the building has a confusing mix of old and new framing that suggests that it has been substantially reconstructed over time, and the exterior has a variety of plate glass and plexiglass windows [see pictures below and those in the applicant’s submission]. The remainder of the lot has vestiges of a garden, including a home-made patio, a large concrete pond and a healthy crop of artichokes.

Proposal

The project calls for construction of a two-story frame house with a full-width front porch. The house would be capped by a front-facing gable clad in shingles and windows would be one-over-one sash. The roof on the west side elevation would have a large dormer.

A new driveway would be cut through the perimeter retaining wall and run to the rear of the property. The driveway would span the property line and be shared with 517. The original driveway to 517 would presumably be dedicated solely to lot 5.

Evaluation

While the outbuilding at 515 Cedar is an unusual structure and it is possible that portions of it may date from the period of significance for the historic district (1883-1940), the building's extensive alterations and overall condition do not warrant classifying it as a contributing building to the historic district.

The general idea of two-story, frame, detached house on the lot is compatible with this block and the historic district. While set slightly forward of the front plane of 517, that house is set unusually far back on its lot and houses on this block do not have a uniform setback. The use of clapboard, wood-trimmed openings and wood shingles on the walls and asphalt for the roof are consistent with surrounding properties.

However, additional design work is needed for the house to achieve compatibility. At 39 feet, the proposed width is noticeably greater than other houses on the block, which range between 25' - 34' (an average of 29 feet).¹ The building's mass also appears greater by having no articulation on the sides for bays, changes in plane, or distinguishing between a primary form and secondary masses; the situation is exacerbated by the incorporation of the garage into the body of the house rather than separating it and placing it at the rear of the lot. The front porch is also too shallow to provide a commensurate sense of shadow and void as is found on houses in the historic district. While all of these are addressable issues within the context of the general program, further attention to the width, mass, and articulation are necessary for the building to be a compatible addition to the Takoma Park Historic District.

Recommendation

HPO recommends that the Board find the existing outbuilding at 515 Cedar to non-contributing to the historic district and that the design be further developed as outlined above and return to the Board for further review when ready.

¹ House widths on the 500 block of Cedar Street measure 30' (535); 25' (529); 27' (517); 32' (516); and 34' (528), 28' (530 and 532).



Interior of outbuilding at 515 Cedar showing older wall framing and newer roof framing. The older framing elements are of different sizes, possibly indicating that they were reclaimed and reused.



Modern concrete floor and foundation of 515 Cedar outbuilding



Modern roof framing and plexiglass windows at 515 Cedar outbuilding