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

Property Address:	1220 and 1224 11th Street NW	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agenda
Landmark/District:	Shaw Historic District	<input type="checkbox"/> Consent Calendar
ANC:	2F	<input type="checkbox"/> Denial Calendar
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Concept Review
Meeting Date:	September 22, 2011	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Alteration
H.P.A. Number:	#11-464 and #11-465	<input type="checkbox"/> New Construction
Staff Reviewer:	Brendan Meyer	<input type="checkbox"/> Demolition
		<input type="checkbox"/> Subdivision

The applicant, Brook Rose Development, seeks concept approval for rear and top floor additions to two 3-story rowhouses at 1220 and 1224 11th Street NW in the Shaw Historic District. The applicant is the contract purchaser for both properties. Plans were prepared by District Design LLC.

Property Description and Context

1220 and 1224 11th Street NW are matching, non-adjacent houses within a row of four attached houses built in 1877. All four houses were built on a single permit and credited to builder David T. Cissel (no architect is listed, which is typical of early permits). A cursory review of contemporary newspaper records shows that Cissel was a mason of some prominence who consistently won contracts to work on the Smithsonian and numerous federal buildings.

As a row, the four houses from 1218 to 1224 are a very intact example of the late-Italianate style of flat-front rowhouses that were constructed prior to the evolution of the projecting bay rowhouse which became widespread after the passage of public space and projection laws in the 1870s. While tall, verticality is offset by a rhythm of fenestration consisting of wide sections of masonry. Cornices are robustly proportioned and feature wood modillions at the top of the façade and on the one story projecting bay. Masonry is constructed of very thin joints with stone keystones in the arched window openings and skewbacks at the front entrance.

The houses are 20 feet wide and 32 feet deep and were not originally constructed with rear ells. Over time, 1218 and 1222 were added to with multiple generations of rear additions. While 1222 exhibits a single, well-composed rear ell of 2-stories, 1218 is a riotous collection of dendritic ells and additions that climb to three stories and nearly fill the entire lot. The subject properties at 1220 and 1224 stand in stark contrast for the fact that they have never been expanded with rear additions, save for a one story bump-out at 1224.

Proposal

The concept review as submitted is primarily a massing study in order to pin down the general size and location of compatible additions to the two rowhouses. The elevations and floor plans for the proposed additions have not been developed yet.¹

Both rowhouses would receive four-story, rear, full-width additions approximately 32 feet deep resulting in a total depth of about 64 feet. Also proposed is that the fourth story would not only

¹ As a point of clarification, perspective streetscape renderings show a row of five matching rowhouses when in fact there are only four. This is an insignificant error that does not interfere with evaluation of the proposed massing. The street elevation labeled, "Proposed Elevation along 11th Street NW" is accurate.

extend the entire length of the rear additions, but also project onto the top of the existing rowhouses a length of 8 feet. This would result in a 24 foot setback from 11th Street and no portion of the additions being visible from 11th Street.

Evaluation and Recommendation

While preventing visibility from 11th Street is a worthwhile objective, it should not be the sole consideration whether or not an addition is compatible with its historic building or the larger character of the historic district.

In most instances, a rear addition is the best way to add extra space to a historic building. This traditional pattern of growth has a long and established history in Shaw as evidenced by the existing ells on the other houses of this row. Rear additions should generally be lower in height and smaller in mass and footprint than the original building. Rear additions should step down in height toward the rear yard. Additions should be subordinate to the original building, allowing the historic structure to remain dominant. This usually means that the mass of the addition should be noticeably smaller than the original building, as it is difficult for an addition to be subordinate when it approaches or exceeds the size of the original structure. For larger additions, breaking the mass of the addition down into smaller components may be appropriate. However, a level of flexibility can be applied to additions that are visible only from the rear of the property.

Fundamental to the character of the rowhouses from 1218-1224 is their simple block like massing in the main part of the house, and their expansion with a series of smaller additions and ells. A four-story addition extended on top of the existing building would create a large, atypical massing that would subsume the existing three-story rowhouses, make them secondary to the addition, and likely require a substantial amount of demolition. Reducing the new construction to a four story addition attached to the rear only, and not on top of 1220 and 1224 would lessen the impact on the historic rowhouses. This might still result in large intrusions into a square dominated by two and three story rowhouses, but that could plausibly be addressed when the elevation and floor plan details are developed.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Board approve the concept for the four-story rear additions at 1220 and 1224 11th Street NW, with the exclusion of additions on top of the existing buildings, as consistent with the purposes of the preservation act, and instruct the applicant to return for further review once plans and elevations have been further developed. No part of this recommendation should be construed as approval or endorsement for any necessary zoning relief.