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

Landmark/District:	Capitol Hill Historic District	<input type="checkbox"/> Agenda
Address:	17-19 9th Street, SE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Consent
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Concept
Meeting Date:	July 26, 2012	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Alteration
Case Number:	12-510	<input type="checkbox"/> New Construction
Staff Reviewer:	Amanda Molson	<input type="checkbox"/> Demolition
		<input type="checkbox"/> Subdivision

Owner Getinet Bantayehu, with drawings prepared by Kim Jones, requests Board approval for façade alterations and a rear addition to the non-contributing (side) portion of 19 9th Street, SE in the Capitol Hill Historic District.

Background

Constructed in 1878, 19 9th Street, SE is a two-story, Italianate rowhouse with character-defining features such as elongated window openings on the ground floor and a bracketed cornice and door header. When constructed in 1892, 15 9th (located two lots to the right/north) included a substantial side yard that remained open for several decades. During the second half of the twentieth century, ownership of that side yard was transferred to 19 9th. In the 1970s, a side addition was constructed at 19 9th, measuring approximately half the depth of the main house. The side addition has long included a wide curb cut, with a basement-level garage entrance.

In 2005, the Board approved façade alterations to the side addition (HPA #05-391), which featured a series of c. 1970s casement windows when constructed. Work included construction of an oriel bay and a mansard roof on the front elevation, both of which were designed in the Italianate style to better complement the main house. The project also included interior changes and the construction of a small, one-story addition at the rear of the historic house.

Proposal

The property was sold this year, and the new owner wishes to turn the side addition (which will become 17 9th) into a single-family residence by building an interior dividing wall to separate off the historic house. An enclosed porch at the back of the side addition will be removed, along with the one-story addition to 19 9th, which straddles the property line. A three-story rear addition, which will be shallower than 15 9th and approximately 5' deeper than 19 9th, would be constructed. Parged in stucco, the rear addition would make use of some of the existing windows and doors that are proposed for removal from the front and rear elevations. The existing mansard roof would remain, with the third floor set back approximately 28' from the front elevation. The third floor would feature a canted roof, with a dormer providing double doors to access a roof deck.

Currently accessible only through the garage door or from the main house at 19, the converted addition will need its own entrance from the sidewalk. A new lead walk, supported by a retaining wall, would result in the welcome narrowing of the existing curb cut. A new front door with a bracketed hood would be installed on the right side of the façade, consistent with neighboring properties, below which a small areaway would be provided to house the meter box and trash cans out of view.

Two window openings would be added to the first floor of the façade to accommodate what will become the living room, and three window openings would be inserted on the second floor to serve a bedroom. For a seamless expanse that avoids infilling the masonry, the brick on the front elevation would be replaced. The idiosyncrasies of the side addition include a ceiling height of only 8' on the first floor, which is low for the main level of a house and is being driven by the garage door opening below. The applicants would raise the floor structure on the second floor slightly to provide a more comfortable ceiling height of 9' on the main level.

Evaluation

The removal of the one-story rear addition at 19 9th raises no preservation concerns as this element was constructed in just the past few years. HPO has been working closely with the applicant on other renovations to the main house, including window and door replacement and cosmetic work. Before the new owner closed on the property, the previous owner removed the historic cornice at 19 without benefit of a permit. A Stop Work Order was issued by HPO, and a permit was then obtained to reinstate the cornice. The new owner is committed to completing this work and has been consulting with HPO on the timeline. It should be reinstalled by mid-August.

The period of significance for the Capitol Hill Historic District extends through 1945. Therefore, the side addition is, in its entirety, a non-contributing resource by virtue of its c. 1970s construction date. As a non-contributing building to the Capitol Hill Historic District, the side addition does not add to our understanding of historically significant architectural qualities and associations in this neighborhood.¹ As a result, the proposal should be evaluated for its general compatibility with the immediate context and with the character of the historic district, rather than its effect on character-defining features of the building or the potential to otherwise alter the appearance of a historic structure.

Façade Alterations

Since its construction, the side addition has struggled to be a subordinate player in the context of the historic portion of the house. During the 2005 review of alterations to the façade, both HPO and the Board acknowledged that the proportions of the side addition, which is the height and width of a typical rowhouse and sits at the building restriction line with no setback, made it difficult to ever achieve a deferential addition by today's standards. The oriel bay and mansard roof at least improved upon this inherited massing through design. However, in selecting a

¹ The National Register of Historic Places defines a non-contributing building as one that does not add to the historic architectural qualities, historic associations, or archeological values for which a property [historic district] is significant because it was not present during the period of significance (*How to Complete the National Register Registration Form*, p. 16).

traditional Italianate rowhouse design for these elements, the previous owner inadvertently created a challenge for the new owner, in that any forthcoming changes should honor the basic historicist overtones of the side addition or reimagine it completely as a contemporary building of its own time. Falling somewhere in the middle could result in an incongruous composition of parts that struggles to hold together with an understandable story.

Keeping the mansard roof added in c. 2005, along with the understandable desire to create a comfortable ceiling height on the first floor, have resulted in some oddities with the new window openings on the second floor. Those openings will extend nearly the height of the second floor in order to honor the vertical proportions inherent to the Italianate style. In the original drawings, the window openings were jammed against the existing frieze board of the cornice, resulting in rather squatty windows and the sense that something may have gone amiss in construction. Though a bit unorthodox, the openings now extend into the cornice itself, producing something closer to the verticality that the style demands and a design that appears more intentional. This is somewhat akin to historic examples of ornate cornices, in which the upper story windows may actually extend through and elevate a portion of the cornice (i.e. 909 M Street, NW, the Blanche K. Bruce House) or simpler examples in which the frieze may be scalloped as a decorative feature (i.e. 408 East Capitol Street, NE on Capitol Hill). The effect here, though not ideal, is generally compatible with the design of the side addition and makes the best of a challenging situation.

Though the curb cut and garage door are of no benefit to the visual qualities streetscape, they are long-standing, existing conditions that will arguably be improved as the new lead walk narrows their perceived expanse and serves as a meritorious distraction. The existing garage door, which is four bays wide, will remain, meaning that a portion of it will extend behind the areaway set below the front door. Though not ideal if the addition were being constructed new today, the applicants understandably do not wish to discard and replace what is an attractive and likely expensive garage door in order to narrow the opening. The applicants should consult with HPO on the design and material details of the retaining wall, which will likely need a railing alongside the sunken driveway for safety. Selecting a period-appropriate railing and screening the retaining wall with cascading plantings will improve the landscape and soften the effect considerably.

Addition

Considering the definition of a non-contributing building and the flexibility afforded, strategies of setting back the rooftop addition to preserve the original roof height and slope, or changing materials to differentiate old from new fabric, are generally not necessary. However, in considering alterations to non-contributing buildings, the Board has also been mindful that these changes should be reasonably appropriate for the design of the subject property and should not result in a building that becomes a focal point of the overall streetscape.

The original plans for the rooftop addition featured a setback of about 23', approximately 5' less than the plans submitted to the Board. Although a slight cant had been employed on the front wall, a mockup of the rooftop addition was quite visible from the southern end of 9th Street, from the intersection of 9th and A Streets, and from the triangle park abutting A Street. Though

invisibility itself was not necessary, the rooftop addition felt like a foreign and distracting element, and it was also difficult to gauge whether the addition was placed on the historic house or its non-contributing appendage, given the perspective and continuity of roof heights.

At the request of HPO, the applicants set back the addition by another 5' and also employed a more generous cant that lowers the visible apex of the roofline. In reviewing a revised mockup, the modifications made a significant difference, with the addition just barely coming into view, set against heavy tree cover, and clearly not sited on the historic house (see HPO photographs attached). Additionally, the front wall will be clad in a dark composite slate devoid of patterning or color variations, such that it will be less obtrusive. Though now minimally visible, the roof addition would also benefit from a dark paint color on the side (south-facing wall), which will help it to visually retreat when tree cover is reduced in the winter. An additional mockup was constructed for the railing of the roof deck, which is set in from all sides, and it was not visible from the street.

The façade alterations and rear addition are not incompatible with this non-contributing portion of the house or with the character of the Capitol Hill Historic District. This project has the potential to turn this awkward side addition into what its grand proportions have long suggested – a single-family house – and to improve upon its contribution to the streetscape. As the applicants move forward with the preparation of construction plans, they should consult with HPO on final details such as the aforementioned retaining wall, the exact location of the meter box, materials for window/door headers and the coursing extending across the rear elevation, and any rear fencing.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Board approve the concept as consistent with the purposes of the preservation act and delegate final approval to staff.