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

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Landmark/District: **Mount Pleasant Historic District** (x) Agenda  
Address: **1710 Irving Street, NW**

Meeting Date: **December 20, 2012** (x) Alterations  
Case Number: **13-089** (x) New Construction

Staff Reviewer: **Tim Dennée**

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The applicant, Aaron Design & Build, designer and contractor for property owner Marcia Berthin, requests the Board's review of a concept for the construction of a garage at the alley and for the creation of a basement entrance under the front porch.

**Context**

The five-unit row at 1704-1712 Irving Street was constructed in 1926 by the Shapiro Company, to a design by prolific residential architect George Santmyers. Like most of the 1700 and 1800 blocks of Irving, this row is not characterized by original basement entrances, although some basement openings have been altered to accept doors. The 1600 block more typically has front cellar entrances, most original.

One-story garages are quite common on the alley south of Irving, built of frame, with various siding, or of brick masonry, and sometimes of stuccoed concrete block. The topography there is unusual; while generally falling off southward, the alley, and Hobart Street beyond, is on a ridge substantially higher than Irving Street or the homes fronting it.

**Garage**

A one-story garage is proposed, which is consistent with the pattern of the alley. But the structure would actually contain a second level, below the alley grade and facing the house. As the land drops off toward the house, the present gated parking pad is now supported by a retaining wall. The basement level would simply replace that retaining wall, and its face would be visible only from the adjacent homes, somewhat obscured by surrounding fences.

The structure is to be of concrete masonry units, parged, but possibly with the block of the basement level exposed. If the cladding is to be a Portland-concrete parge rather than a true stucco (the latter of which would be most appropriate), then the building should be painted, as Portland alone generally has a dead gray cast. The exterior material should be consistent throughout; exposed concrete block is not considered compatible with the character of the historic district, except in very limited exposure as a foundation.

The vehicular door material is not specified as yet, nor are the details and materials of the house-facing door and windows.

### **Basement entrance**

While less common on this stretch of Irving Street, a basement entrance seems feasible, if it takes cues from similar alterations nearby. The applicant proposes to lengthen and widen an existing window opening to install a door flanked by two sidelights or windows. The Board's design guidelines for basement entrances emphasize several important principles: the minimization of the visual alteration of a property, especially as viewed from the street, and the minimization of permanent, physical interventions. The subject house is favorably situated, as its position above the sidewalk would make the excavation for basement stairs mostly invisible from that vantage point. Still, what is above grade would be easily seen—as the basement window is now—and the surrounding porch apron is solid brick (matching the rest of the house), which should be affected as little as possible.

Instead of widening the opening as drawn, it is recommended that the sill simply be dropped to become the door threshold, and that no windows or sidelights be added to the porch base. This is consistent with similar alterations nearby as well as with many of the original, narrow openings on the 1600 block. It would also permit the stair itself to be tighter, eliminating the need for an areaway.

### **Recommendation**

*The HPO recommends approval of the concept as compatible with the character of the historic district, with the conditions that:*

- *the exterior of the garage be stuccoed or parged throughout, and if parged with a straight Portland/sand mix, that it be painted;*
- *the basement entrance be limited to a standard-sized door replacing the existing window, with no sidelights or additional windows, and with no areaway beyond the excavation required to accommodate the width of the stairs; and*
- *that further review of details such as rails, doors and windows be delegated to the staff.*