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

Property Address:	1901 4th Street NW	() Agenda
Landmark/District:	LeDroit Park Historic District	() Consent Calendar
ANC:	1B	(X) Denial Calendar
		() Concept Review
Meeting Date:	September 18, 2013	(X) Permit
H.P.A. Number:	14-566	(X) Alteration
Staff Reviewer:	Brendan Meyer	() New Construction
		() Demolition

The applicant, builder Derrick Sieber of Precision Contracting Solutions, LLP, on behalf of owner Jeff Ahn, seeks permit review for a roof deck on top of a three-story commercial and residential building at 1901 4th Street NW which is a contributing property in the LeDroit Park Historic District. Plans were prepared by GCR & Associates.

Property Description and Context

LeDroit Park saw two distinct phases of historical development. The original phase started in 1873 and consisted of large, detached and semi-detached cottages and villas on large lots laid out in a park-like fashion by James McGill in the manner of nationally known A.J. Downing. Surviving examples from this period are concentrated on T and U Streets, between 4th and 6th Streets. The second phase began in the early 1890s when the original LeDroit Park developers gave up their exclusive rights to the area. Fairly rapid infill development by varied builders and architects followed which consisted of attached and semidetached rowhouses. 1901 4th Street belongs to this latter phase of development.

1901 4th Street NW was built in 1892 with a store on the ground floor and residences above. The building is designed very similarly to the historic rowhouses to the north and east and features brick construction, projecting bays at the corner and west elevation that are the full height of the building, both ornately capped. The ground floor includes projecting storefronts and the upper stories are fenestrated by arched double hung windows typical for late 19th-century rowhouse. The attached one-story garage at the north end of the building and fronting 4th Street is not original. It was built in the 1920s based on historic map research.

Proposal

A roof deck on the uppermost roof and accessed by a spiral stair-case is proposed for 1901 4th Street NW. The roof deck would be 10'-4" wide and 14'-4" deep and set back from the north elevation 5'-6" but flush with the west property line along 4th Street. The west side of the deck along 4th Street would be at least partially obscured by a parapet and the gable top of a projecting bay.

Evaluation

Roof appurtenances such as a deck which do not require demolition of historic fabric and are temporary in nature are generally judged solely for their visibility from public streets and impact on the roofline of the historic building and streetscape within the historic district. In most rowhouse contexts this only requires an analysis of the view from the public street in front of the house.

However, due to its unattached condition above the garage, the north elevation of this house is open to view from 4th Street. In fact, the rear elevations of several T Street rowhouses are also visible through the gap above the garage. Placing the spiral stairs in this location, the only location available for exterior access to a roof deck, would create a very prominent and modern intrusion into the character of the historic district. By projecting 4 feet above the roofline of the north wall, it would alter the perceived dimensions not only of 1901 4th Street, but it would also obstruct the view of the rowhouses beyond. The west edge of the deck set flush against the parapet wall along 4th Street is positioned such that its railing would be obscured from view, but this cannot guarantee that the furniture, illumination and activity associated with a roof deck would also not be visible.

A roof deck on the uppermost roof of 1901 4th Street would be incompatible with this row of Victorian houses and inconsistent with the general pattern throughout the LeDroit Park Historic District in which there are no roof decks on the highest roof of any contributing house.

Recommendation

The staff recommends that the Board advise the Mayor's Agent that the proposed alteration for a roof deck visible from a public street at 1901 4th Street NW is not consistent with the purposes of the preservation law, because it is not compatible with the character of the historic district.