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

Landmark/District: **Anacostia Historic District** (x) Agenda
Address: **2221-2225 Chester Street SE** (x) Concept

Meeting Date: **September 18, 2014** (x) New construction
Case Number: **14-613**
Staff Reviewer: **Tim Dennée**

The applicant, owner District Properties (Mohamed Sikder), requests the Board's review of a conceptual application to construct two semi-detached two-story frame houses on two adjoining vacant lots.

In October of last year, the Board approved the applicant's concept for a single two-story house at 2221 Chester Street (see drawing below and staff report attached), but its design has changed, in addition to being joined by, and to, a second building. The earlier staff report is attached, as it discusses the compatibility issues in more detail.





The vacant lots.

Massing

As the applicant wishes build wide houses identical to the proposal for 1616-1618 U Street, the setback of a portion of the façade should be increased to at least three or four feet to be effective visually. Any setback is likely going to require a little elbow room around the door, especially if the units are to be handicap-accessible, so widening of the set-back area at the expense of the forwardmost section of the façade is warranted, also making the façade division closer to two-thirds and one-third and allowing a wider second-floor window.

Details

The reduction of the plans to eleven-by-seventeen-inch sets as also reduced the legibility of the notes. The siding would be Hardiplank lapped boards (one note describes the exposure as six inches, but two other appear to say five inches). The partial mansard roof would be covered with fake slate. The materials of the windows are not specified. The front door would be wood. There would be a low balustrade on the front porch, possible because the concrete porch slab is low enough not to require a code-compliant rail.

Front and back yards would be fenced, with a solid-steel 42-inch fences in front and six-foot plank privacy fences around the rear, up to the parking pads off the alley.

Construction issues

The HPO has the same concerns about attention to details as with 1616, 1618 and 1622 U Street.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Board approve the concept, with the condition that the entrance recesses be deeper and wider, with further review delegated to the staff.

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

Landmark/District: **Anacostia Historic District** (x) Consent
Address: **2221 Chester Street SE** (x) Concept

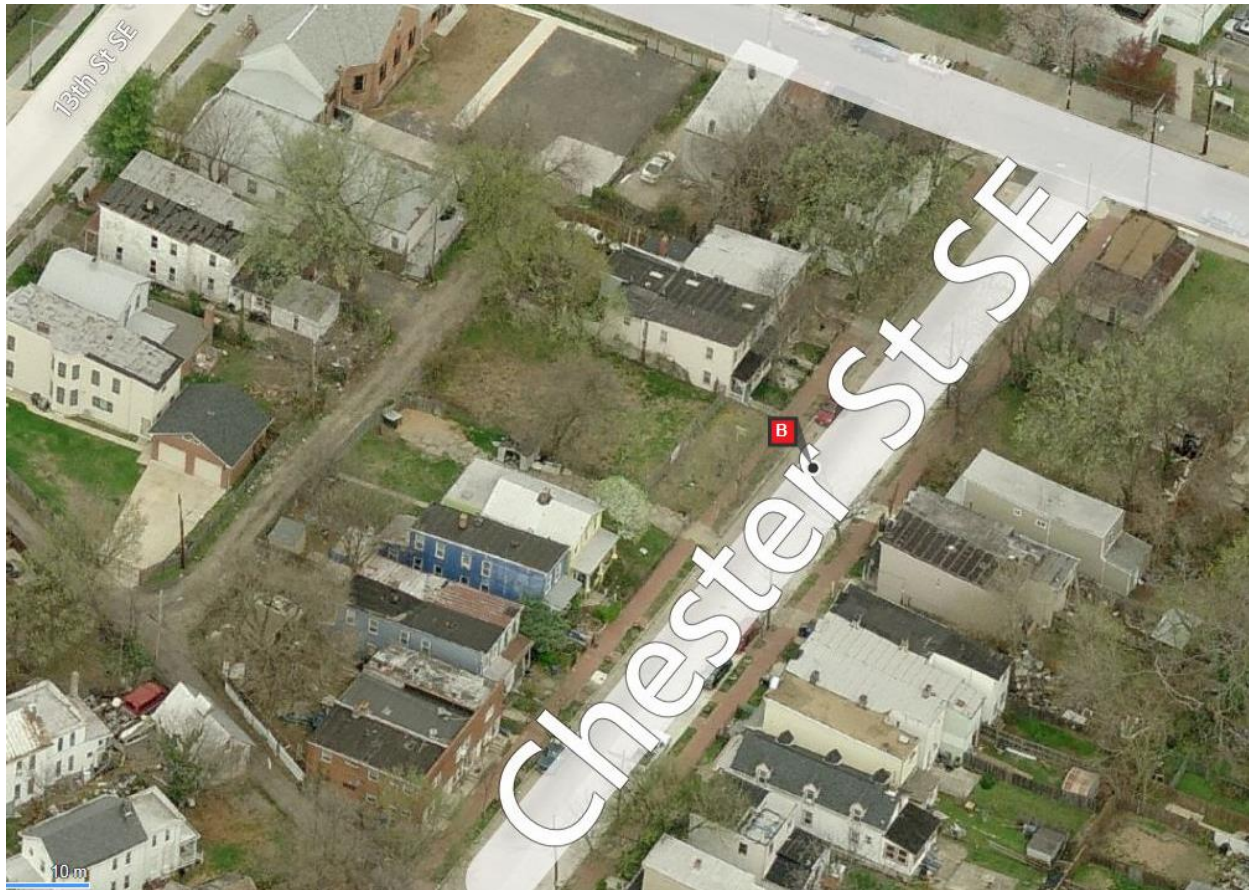
Meeting Date: **October 24, 2013** (x) New construction
Case Number: **13-618**
Staff Reviewer: **Tim Dennée**

The applicant, owner District Properties (Mohamed Sikder), requests the Board's review of a conceptual application to construct a two-story frame house on a vacant lot. The house would extend side lot line to side lot line, 22 feet wide. As a consequence, the side elevations cannot have window openings. The depth of the building would be more than 47 feet.

The house would be sided with fiber-cement boards, and the portion of the roof visible from the ground would be clad with faux slate. The design is historicist, derived from nearby historic homes. It is nearly identical to the plans for 1620 U Street that were permitted following the Board's review of that property in April. And it *is* identical to the proposal for new construction at 1352 Valley Place SE, from the same owner-applicant.



Unlike many squares in Anacostia, this one contains an alley, which means that parking can be accommodated on a pad at rear.



Evaluation

Although they are nearly all Italianate, rather than the vaguely Second Empire design proposed, Chester Street has a sufficient number of attached and detached, two-story, two- and three-bay-wide, porch-fronted houses to justify as compatible a similar historicist approach to new construction. In fact, the applicant could realize a cost saving by eliminating the mansard.

The historicist approach poses a perennial philosophical issue, that of possibly blurring the lines between genuine historic buildings and modern ones. The use of modern materials and some deviation in detail should serve to distinguish this house as new. Several other instances of new construction in Anacostia have taken the historicist path, not to the detriment of the district's integrity or character. An additional issue may be the repetition of a single design in a number of locations in the neighborhood—not only 1352 Valley Place, but also 1620 U Street and some anticipated projects immediately next door to the latter property. Still, it would not be the first time that a builder had its own trademark design, historically and in the present day. It may, in fact, serve to distinguish the new buildings as modern, the "District Properties Victorian." But even within Anacostia, the design will not fit every site, because the contexts vary, especially in Griswold's Addition.

Although the house is relatively deep, it is not out of line with the already enlarged dwellings at 2217 and 2219 or some of those across the street.

The plan shows that the building would be set ten feet away from the row of historic houses at 2213-2219 Chester and up against the opposite side property line. That means that the latter, southern side of the house would have to have a blank wall, for reason of fire separation. Indeed, it is likely to eventually abut a future structure. But the north side would remain exposed, and with a ten-foot side yard, ought to have windows to light the interior and to break up an otherwise unrelieved elevation.

The rooftop HVAC unit, which is shown near a front corner of the roof, should be shifted to a spot more central on the roof, so as not to be visible from the street.

The details of commonly available porch posts are more suited to larger-scale new construction and to code-complaint rail heights, rather than to historic rail heights or a situation like this, where no balustrade is proposed. The posts should resemble more traditional turned posts, with a lower base and a wider section of turning. The lower portion of historic posts typically accommodated 28- to 32-inch rails. New posts generally have a base, however, of 42 or 44 inches. Also, a nominal five-inch-wide post is probably called for, rather than six. Therefore, special-ordered posts (widely available online) or salvaged historic posts should be used.

The porch is designed without a balustrade because its slab is just above grade, so no rail or balustrade is necessary. While most porches have them, there are a sufficient number of historic examples without.

The porch roof could alternatively be a low hip, rather than flat. This would probably improve the proportion of the upper story. The trade-off, however, is that the roof material would become more of an issue, as it would be visible.

The most important stylistic issue is the mix of window configurations on the façade. They ought to be consistent, and six-over-six windows were typically not installed in Victorian buildings. One-over-ones throughout would be more compatible and preferable. Their casings ought to be consistent with those around the lower windows and those in similar historic houses.

Traditionally, the tops of the first-floor windows would align with the top of the transom at the entry door.

The notion of adding front and rear fences appears only in the small site plan, which specifies a 42-inch-tall “metal” fence in the front yard and a five-foot-tall “stockade” fence around the rest of the perimeter. On other District properties projects in Anacostia, the Board has approved as compatible solid-steel, hairpin-style or picket fences in front and butted-plank privacy fences at rear, *not* stockade fences. Such a conclusion is appropriate here as well.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends approval of the concept, with a delegation to staff of further review, including addressing the details issues discussed above, including adding windows to the north side, relocating the air-conditioning condenser, installing compatible of fencing, etc.