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

Landmark/District:	Mount Pleasant Historic District	(x) Agenda
Address:	3215 Mount Pleasant Street NW	
Meeting Date:	April 30, 2020	(x) Addition
Case Number:	20-118	(x) Concept

Goulston & Storrs, representing 3215 MP Partners LLC (Velocity Property Management), with designs by architect KASA, requests concept design review for construction of a three-story addition atop a one-story commercial building dating to 1906.

The existing building was erected for Antonio Sanbataro. The flanking buildings were constructed within three years. From the beginning, Sanbataro’s property was divided into two shops, 3215 and 3215½ Mount Pleasant. The former initially served as a lunchroom, and the latter was shoemaker Domenico Pappalardo’s shop. Pappalardo moved to 3215 in 1909, and that space remained a shoe-repair shop under a succession of Italian-American proprietors until at least the mid 1950s. 3215½ became a delicatessen in the mid 1910s and Paul Riedel’s bakery in the mid 1920s. After Riedel’s murder in a robbery, the business was assumed by one of his assistants, August Heller, who relocated the business to the building in which he lived, 3219 Mount Pleasant, in 1939. In recent years, the subject building has been a laundromat.

Demolition

The plan indicates that only the façade and the side walls would be retained. Although no demolition permit has yet been filed, the degree of proposed demolition raises the question of whether the property contributes to the character of the historic district (see 10C DCMR § 305.3). The regulations (10C DCMR § 305.2) state that, “In general, the determination whether a proposal involves destruction of a building ‘in significant part’ shall depend on the extent to which character-defining historic features, historic or structural integrity, historic materials, or ability to convey historic significance would be lost. This decision shall depend on all the facts and circumstances of the case.” The answer to the question in this case is, only maybe, but if so, barely.

The building was obviously simple to begin with, and its appearance has suffered greatly from the removal of the storefront windows and doors and their infill with concrete block, panels, incompatible windows, and mechanical and electrical. The storefront’s skeleton remains—the brick piers supporting steel beams and the brick wall and cornice above. The rear wall remains. The former interior partition dividing the original spaces is gone, but a column line remains. The interior finishes all postdate the historic district’s period of significance.

As most of the structure remains, it is difficult to argue that the historic building is effectively gone. But it has lost many formerly character-defining features. The further loss of the roof, and

rear wall will contribute to its loss of character. More of the rear wall could probably be retained. But more important is the retention of what is left of the brick façade and its cornice and the restoration of storefronts within the original storefront openings.

The almost unrecognizable condition of this building cries for restoration, but it also provides an opportunity for a substantial addition, something that would be incompatible with buildings that retain better integrity and should be preserved as they are.

The addition

Typically, a one-story building should remain a one-story building, but the highly compromised state of the subject property opens up the possibility of an addition. Excepting the apartment zone off 16th Street and Park Road, this square is characterized by one-, two-, and three-story buildings, and it faces a block of similar heights. For that reason, an addition of one or two stories is compatible. However, there is a variety of heights elsewhere on Mount Pleasant Street, including some tall apartment buildings, so a four-story building is worth considering.

If the building is to be four stories, it may be preferable *not* to set back the top floor, to improve the proportions of the building by giving it more verticality. Setting back the fourth floor does allow the third to align with the top of next-door 3217 Mount Pleasant, but it hardly conceals the upper story, especially as viewed from the south. Setbacks are most appropriate for subordinating a single-story addition to a historic building, and not setting back would avoid the need for three cornices: storefront, third floor, and attic story. The details of the principal cornice have to be developed, and it should be more prominent than the storefront one.

The plans require additional development. It is unclear how rooftop appurtenances, such as the suggested green roof, mechanical units, access, and perhaps a deck or solar panels would co-exist, and how these might be seen from the surrounding area. The idea of growing plants up the façade—as opposed to just on the green screen in the side court—seems of dubious viability and not particularly compatible.

This historic commercial street would benefit from a restoration of the storefront, for which sufficient physical and photographic evidence remains. Restoration is an appropriate mitigation of the effects of the addition upon the underlying building. The drawings depict instead a contemporary re-imagining of the storefronts. While there will have to be some modification for a residential entrance, the applicant should be looking at re-establishing a projecting bay or two within the original storefront opening. Unless the brick is chemically stripped, we are going to have to live with a painted ground floor, but a single color should be chosen for the base that matches or is complementary to the brick of the upper stories. While there will be no long-term regulatory power to control the paint colors of the base, the project should start off right. When there were two shops in a single one-story building, bisecting that building with different paints made some sense, as they appeared as two separate structures. But it makes less sense to create a tri-colored building with a bi-colored base. The residential section and the commercial section (if any) can be sufficiently differentiated from each other that no such additional signal is necessary.

The Heller's Bakery sign

Constructing the addition would permanently encapsulate the Heller's Bakery sign on the side of 3217 Mount Pleasant. The historic preservation regulations for signs (at 10C DCMR § 2513.4)

state that “A historic sign that is not integral to the design of historic property, such as the ghost of a painted sign, shall be retained where feasible.” This sign, however, is of dubious integrity. The original—which probably dated to the second half of the 1930s—has not been retained; the background and lettering have been entirely repainted, with the background extended. The lettering is mostly similar, if a bit cruder, and not always precisely placed relative to the original. The phone number and the tiered-cake logo are recent, and the founding date is erroneous (too late for Riedel’s establishment of a bakery, and too early for Heller’s proprietorship).

Recommendation

HPO recommends that the Board support the concept, while deciding whether a four-story addition with a full or set-back fourth floor is compatible, with the conditions that: 1) the façade of the existing building be further developed to be more closely restored to its original condition, 2) if the brick is repainted, it be painted a single color complementary to the color of the brick, 3) there be no green wall or trellis on the façade, and 4) new cornice, brick and window details and rooftop appurtenances be further developed, subject to staff review.



