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

Landmark/District:	Capitol Hill Historic District	<input type="checkbox"/> Agenda
Address:	514 8th Street, SE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Consent
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Concept
Meeting Date:	April 28, 2011	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Alteration
Case Number:	11-216	<input type="checkbox"/> New Construction
Staff Reviewer:	Amanda Molson	<input type="checkbox"/> Demolition
		<input type="checkbox"/> Subdivision

Building owner James Townsend and restaurant proprietor Xavier Cervera, with drawings prepared by Orestes del Castillo, request concept approval for modifications to the storefront and rooftop of 514 8th Street, SE in the Capitol Hill Historic District.

Property Description

Constructed in 1935, 514 8th Street, SE served as a location for automobile sales and repairs during the mid-twentieth century. A wide ramp extends from the alley up to the roof, allowing vehicular access to the rooftop when it served these functions. In more recent decades, the building has been occupied by Capitol Video Sales on the left (north) and by Belga restaurant on the right (south), with a continuous roof spanning across both buildings. A low parapet extends across both facades, with little other ornamentation included on these modest one-story commercial buildings. The non-original storefront of Capitol Video Sales, which is the subject site for a new restaurant, currently features a large blue awning that obscures most of the façade above the storefront windows. The public space in front of the buildings is partially occupied by Belga's sidewalk café in-season.

Existing rooftop structures that are visible from 8th Street include a one-story rooftop addition at the rear of the building, which houses prep space for Belga and is topped by a substantial mechanical array. An enclosed staircase providing roof access is sited on the left side of the rooftop, with mechanical equipment serving 516 8th clearly visible on the right side.

Proposal

The applicants propose to remove the existing awning, entry door, and storefront windows. Working within the current masonry opening, a new entry door and full-lite, wood-framed sliding doors would be added across the façade.

On the roof, a glass railing would be set back 4' from the front wall, which should minimize its visibility from 8th Street in conjunction with some screening from the existing parapet wall. An open-air lounging and seating area will occupy the majority of the roof. The existing enclosed staircase on the left side of the roof will be raised in height slightly (from about 7' to 8'-6"),

which will accommodate needed head height for patrons accessing the roof and which will also include a low parapet of 6" to control water run-off.

In the middle of the roof, an enclosed service counter and prep kitchen will be constructed. The service counter will be accessed beneath a new pergola, which will also provide shade for a few tables. Both the pergola and the enclosed service counter will be 8'-6" tall, which is consistent with the proposed height of the nearby staircase enclosure. The height of the prep kitchen will rise to no more than 10'-6" at the rear wall in order to position kitchen equipment within the space. All new mechanical equipment will sit on the roof's surface, behind the prep kitchen and out of view from 8th Street. Two small expanses of wall, rising to about 8' in height, will provide security and privacy, with one located on the left (south) side of the wall to block views to/from neighboring backyards and another blocking access to and from the ramp that leads down to the alley.

Evaluation

The use of sliding or accordion doors as a substitute for storefront windows does not work in many situations. This is particularly the case for buildings with original storefronts that should be retained, for structures with a traditional design vocabulary that does not support the insertion of such a contemporary element at the street face, and in situations where the new doors require enlarging a preexisting masonry opening to such an extent that it is no longer proportionally appropriate for the building. However, this building features a non-original storefront, a simple design vocabulary, and an existing masonry opening that will accommodate the new doors without modification. Removal of the large awning that currently obscures much of the façade will be a welcome change.

Although the Board often finds visible rooftop additions to be incompatible on historic property, particularly on modest, one-story buildings, there are three factors that establish compatibility in this case. First, this building's interesting history includes prior use of the roof to park automobiles. As such, it is not unprecedented to utilize the roof space in a manner that is visible from 8th Street and capitalizes on these views. To minimize the potential impact, the setback of the glass railing ensures that restaurant patrons and furnishings will not be brought forward to the edge of the front façade.

Second, although the existence of other structures and appurtenances on the roof does not necessarily justify the addition of more massing, it is important to recognize the nature of those elements that are visible now. The mechanical equipment sited next door to 516 is prominently visible from 8th Street, and the mechanical equipment serving Belga at the back of the roof is visible from the sidewalk across the street. The equipment is not visually pleasing and detracts from the character of 8th Street; the visibility is exacerbated by their elevated position on top of existing structures. The proposed new construction has been designed to screen views of the mechanical equipment with the new prep kitchen, and the applicants also plan to erect lattice screening around the equipment belonging to 516 (if that owner is in agreement).

Finally, the new rooftop elements have been sited on the roof to include a substantial setback from the façade, such that they are not prominently visible from street views. Using the building's deep footprint as an advantage, the pergola has been set back approximately 30' from

the front wall, with the service counter/prep kitchen structure set back approximately 39'. All rooftop elements, including the existing enclosed staircase, are kept at a low height that permits head clearance and minimizes structure to the extent possible. The simple design of the stucco-clad structures is quiet, recessive and clearly secondary to the building.

Two elements of the plan require further study before final construction drawings can be approved:

1. There is no shading device shown for the seating area other than the relatively shallow pergola with its open rafters. The proposed visibility of new rooftop elements is compatible with the character of the historic building and the neighborhood largely because a considerable setback, low height, and simple design have been established in order to minimize obtrusiveness from the public right-of-way.

The addition of umbrellas, a covering over the pergola, the enclosure of the pergola on its open sides for year-round seating, or the allowance of patrons or furnishings to spill over the glass railing could be a detriment to permitting some flexibility to the Board's general rule on rooftop additions for this case. As a result, any such addition to the plans, either before final drawings are submitted or after construction begins, must return to the Board for review.

2. The drawings suggest the addition of lattice around the mechanical equipment at 516 as minimally perceptible and lacking in detail. If the equipment is to be screened in its totality, the lattice will actually be quite substantial in height and very visible from 8th Street. Although the use of an open lattice is more appropriate than a solid wall, considering that the lattice will read as a lightweight and temporary solution, the applicants should work closely with HPO to design a solution that minimizes views of the equipment rather than exacerbating their presence. The screening solution must be included in final construction drawings that accompany the permit application.

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, with the condition that:

- the applicants return to the Board for consideration of any anticipated shading devices not shown on the plans currently
- the applicants work with HPO to develop a screening solution for existing mechanical equipment and that this solution be shown clearly on the final construction drawings.