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

Landmark/District:	Greater U Street Historic District	<input type="checkbox"/> Agenda
Address:	933 Westminster Street, NW	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Consent
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Concept
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Alteration
Meeting Date:	April 28, 2011	<input type="checkbox"/> New Construction
Case Number:	11-131	<input type="checkbox"/> Demolition
Staff Reviewer:	Eldra D. Walker	<input type="checkbox"/> Subdivision

Architect Sacha Rosen, on behalf of property owners James A. Rinaca and Ryan C. Kidder, seeks conceptual approval for a proposed basement entrance at 933 Westminister Street NW.

Property Description

Constructed in the 1890s, 933 Westminister Street is one of several residences built for owner Henry A. Willard in this square. The well composed properties reflect the late 19th century Romanesque and Queen Anne styles and exhibit the characteristics of mature row house development in Washington, DC: the row features canted, rectangular, and circular projecting bays, dormers with pressed metal details, patterned brick, turrets, and varied fenestration patterns. The properties on this side of Westminister have very shallow front yards and their first floors are built close to grade. Numerous original cast iron stairs have survived, but 933's stairs have been modified over time.

Proposal

The proposal calls for constructing an exterior basement stairs, areaway, and entrance. To create the areaway, the primary stairs, which are centered with the main entrance, will be replaced by narrower stairs positioned off-center from the main entrance. Expanding the existing lead-walk by 2'5" will allow for the new basement stairs. Lowering the basement window sills and creating a window well will allow more light to enter into the basement. New landscaping will surround the window well. The projecting bay will not be altered to create the new stairs, areaway, or entrance.

Evaluation

The Board encourages the design of compatible basement entrances and has developed guidelines entitled "Preservation and Design Guidelines for Basement Entrances and Windows," to assist property owners. A compatible basement entrance, as outlined in the guidelines, should adhere to the following design principles:

1. New basement entrances should be visually discreet and subordinate to the main entrance;
2. New basement entrances should not result in alterations to main entrance stairs, porches, or projecting bays;
3. New basement entrances should respect existing topography and site characteristics; and

4. Basement windows should be compatible with the architectural character of the building, and window wells should have minimal visual impact on the site.

In this case, the proposed basement entrance is consistent with the Board's principles. Because the existing primary stairs are in poor condition and have been greatly altered, replacing the stairs with historically accurate stairs will improve the existing conditions. And, while the primary stairs will shift from their original position, the change in location is slight and will not detract from the building's architectural character. The new enlarged basement level windows are not incompatible with the architectural character of the building. As the Board encourages in its fourth principle, the modest window well and enhanced landscaping will conceal the true size of the new larger windows, so the new windows will read as if they are smaller and deferential to the upper story windows. Though the yard is shallow, the proposal ensures that the alterations will have minimal impact on the site.

Overall, the proposal meets the Board's guidelines. The proposed basement stairs, however, seem quite narrow. As a design consideration, the primary stairs and landing could shift the additional foot to the left, so as to provide more room and head height for the new basement stairs and areaway.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Board recommend the proposal in concept and delegate final review to staff.