

HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD
STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION

Landmark/District:	Anacostia Historic District	<input type="checkbox"/> Agenda
Address:	1528 W Street SE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Consent
Meeting Date:	September 24, 2020	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Concept
HPA Number:	20-392	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Alteration
		<input type="checkbox"/> New Construction

The owners, Mi Casa INC with designs by Grid Alternative Mid Atlantic, seeks conceptual design review for the installation of solar panels on a new two story, detached single family home in the Anacostia Historic District.

Property Description

The property, currently vacant, is a corner lot that is adjacent to 16th Street on the east and a detached two-story Queen Anne/Victorian home on the west. It adjoins a row of detached frame houses on 15th Street that were built between 1890-91 by builder J.L. Poston. According to Sanborn maps, there is record of a house occupying this lot with a similar building plan as the Poston-built properties. In October 2017, the Board approved construction of a traditional, new two-story frame house on the site that would relate to the adjoining properties (HPA 17-599), which has not yet been built.

Proposal

The proposal calls for solar arrays to be installed on both sides of the new house, which would have a steeply-pitched attic story topped by a front facing gable roof clad in dark gray asphalt shingles. The plans call for installation of 16 panels solar panels on the west side gable roof and 10 panels on the east side. The panels would be mounted approximately 5” inches above the roof plane and set approximately 3’ off the edges of the roof at the ridge, the drip edge, and front edge at the façade. The panels would be seen from 16th Street looking north.

Evaluation

The Board has developed and applied standards for solar panel installations that take into account the character of the building and its context. For flat roofed buildings, the standard has been relatively simple: panels should not project above or interrupt the building’s roofline as seen from public streets. For sloped roofs, the standards include: limiting installations to secondary (non-street-facing) elevations, ensuring that character-defining roof features and finishes are retained, not projecting panels above the roof ridge, installing panels tight to the roof slope to minimize their profile, and ensuring that the panels are not prominently visible from public street views. However, the Board has accepted proposals that don’t meet all of these standards – particularly for prominently visible installations -- if the overall visual effect was not discordant with the building or streetscape and/or included a solar skin that minimizes the contrast in appearance between the roof and the panels.

The 16 west-facing panels are consistent with the Board’s standards and will have limited visibility, and the applicants have agreed to modify the mounting system to be no higher than 4” above the roof plane. The east-facing panels are not yet consistent with the Board’s standards, as they would be quite

prominently visible from street view. It is recommended that these panels either be relocated (placing more panels on the west side) or screened with a solar skin system.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Board approve the installation of panels on the west elevation of the building but that the applicants revise the proposal for the east elevation as discussed above, and final permit approval delegated to staff.