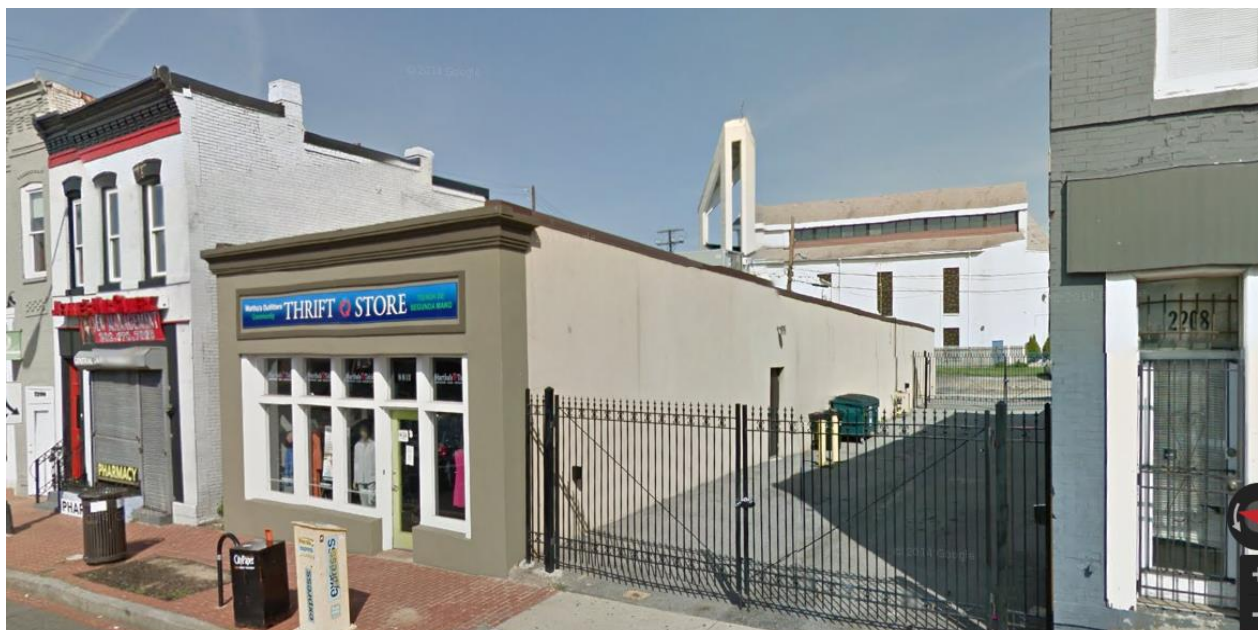

HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION

Landmark/District:	Anacostia Historic District	(x) Agenda
Address:	2204-2206 Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue SE	
Meeting Date:	July 23, 2015	(x) Addition
Case Number:	15-463	(x) New construction
Staff Reviewer:	Tim Dennée	(x) Concept

The applicant, Four Points LLC (Stan Voudrie), agent for property owner Curtis Homes of Maryland, Inc., seeks concept review for a three-story building that would connect to and extend atop an existing one-story building.

The one-story building was constructed 1916-1917 for George Bury. It was first “Bury’s Garage” for auto repairs, but after he was injured in an accident, it became Dering’s Garage for about a year. Bury returned and started selling second-hand cars to supplement the repair business before again it renting out. By 1923, it was the I.F. Bury Motor Company, first selling Chevrolets and then Buicks (plus auto parts) until the 1930s. Subsequently, it was Richardson Brothers, a Packard dealer, and then National Motor Company, selling DeSotos. The vacant lot beside the building was presumably used to park the stock, while the garage became the office, service bay, and perhaps showroom (which probably explains the vehicular door that remained in the side of the building until a decade ago or so). Auto sales ceased during World War II, and later uses included awning fabrication, a church, and other uses.



Evaluation

New construction

While this block of Martin Luther King contains only one- and two-story commercial buildings, a three-story building would not be out of place because such a height is in no way overwhelming and there is some greater variety in heights on the avenue. The Board has permitted new buildings to have a bit more height, but there are other issues with the particular design that require resolution.

The success of new construction lies in part in being compatible with its immediate context and in part in being a worthy composition in itself. If this building is to contain two or three uses, it makes sense that it somehow express those uses. The surrounding two-story commercial buildings provide an appropriate model: residential atop retail, with the ground floor distinguished from that above by an extensive display window and usually some kind of cornice or belt course. Much further distinction is unnecessary and can hinder a cohesive composition. The present design makes the new building look like it is a fairly complicated and a distinct two-story addition covering entirely a one-story masonry building (an impression that should ideally be avoided with the old garage building adjacent). This is in contrast to the surrounding buildings which, although modest, are unitary, straightforward and self-assured.

Roof addition

There is a presumption against street-visible roof additions expressed in the Board's guidance to applicants:

Adding vertically to a historic building is generally discouraged as such additions typically alter significant features, such as its roof line, height, relationship with surrounding buildings, and overall form and mass. Additions on top of a building can sometimes be achieved when they are not visible from street views, do not result in the removal or alteration of important character-defining features of the building or streetscape, and are compatible with their context... Under most circumstances, roof additions that are visible from a public street are not appropriate, as they would alter an historic building's height, mass, design composition, cornice line, roof, and its relationship to surrounding buildings and streetscape – all of which are important character-defining features that are protected for historic property. In rare cases, a visible roof addition may be found acceptable if it does not fundamentally alter the character of the building and is sufficiently designed to be compatible with the building.

This places the burden on the applicant to show that a roof addition that is visible from the street is compatible.

However, the Board has been more flexible in sometimes allowing visible additions atop flat-roofed commercial buildings, because such roofs are not character-defining, and commercial buildings have more often been added upon traditionally. But the form and design of a visible addition become all the more important. Unless it is one of the rare cases where the addition is compatible in the plane of the façade, or nearly so, the setback is crucial for establishing the appropriate relationship to the underlying building and compatible massing and proportions.

In this case, having little or no setback would cause the contributing building—and any vestige of its garage-like character—to be lost in the new construction. If, however, the addition were only a lightly framed single story, then a relatively small setback would be acceptable, enough to retain the building's roofline and distinguish the new from old, while conveying that the new is essentially an attic or penthouse. Perhaps as little as ten feet would be necessary, depending on the structure's height and design. In fact, such an addition would probably be the type most compatible with this building and its context of two-story neighbors, as well as being fairly efficient by placing greater area on a single floor. It could also be a more subtle way of relating to a modest underlying building.

However, at about twenty feet back, the proposed addition is problematic, because it is an intermediate location that neither fully incorporates the underlying building nor gives the impression it is standing behind it. Its two stories remain prominently visible but proportionally much taller than an attic or penthouse. The combination of height and depth creates an odd massing that overwhelms but doesn't really relate to the old. There is no opportunity to make a third story disappear no matter the setback, so the alternative to adding a single story would be to set the addition back far enough for the garage to read as a whole building. The Board's rule of thumb for this has been forty feet, which is less than half the depth of the garage.

In considering the compatibility of the design, it is also worth taking into account the amount of demolition to a building that is now little more than its four walls and roof. The proposal calls for the roof to be demolished, as well two rear walls and a portion of the north side wall.

Distinction between the buildings

A final principle that should be applied to the project is that an addition atop the garage should not be seen as a continuation of the design of the building adjacent. The present design gives the impression that the garage is swallowed up in a larger whole, rather than being a separate building with its own roof addition (or with a building behind). To the potential objection that this lacks "truth," because it all would indeed become a single connected building, one can see that the layout of uses and spaces do already relate to the different portions of the building. The project's proportions should be derived from the narrow widths of the existing building and the open lot.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Board support the idea of three-story new construction on the vacant half of the lot but request revision of the project so that:

- 1. the addition to the historic garage be made more compatible to the garage;*
- 2. the new construction next to the garage become a more unified composition; and*
- 3. the expression of the adjacent new construction be distinguished from that of the façade of any roof addition atop the garage.*