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

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| Property Address: | 925 M Street NW | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agenda |
| Landmark/District: | Blagden Alley-Naylor Court Historic District | <input type="checkbox"/> Consent Calendar |
| ANC: | 2F | <input type="checkbox"/> Denial Calendar |
| | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Concept Review |
| | | <input type="checkbox"/> Permit Review |
| Meeting Date: | November 20, 2014 | <input type="checkbox"/> Alteration |
| H.P.A. Number: | #14-716 | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> New Construction |
| Staff Reviewer: | Brendan Meyer | <input type="checkbox"/> Demolition |
| | | <input type="checkbox"/> Subdivision |

The applicant, owner Ditto Residential, LLC, seeks concept approval for a new 3-story, 2-unit brick and metal rowhouse on a vacant lot at 925 M Street NW in the Blagden Alley-Naylor Court Historic District. Plans were prepared by DEP Designs.

Property Description and Context

The existing lot has been vacant since designation of the historic district in 1999. Historic maps show that a rowhouse with a typical projecting bay occupied the lot from 1890 to around 1968. The lot is bounded on the east by Blagden Alley and on the west by a rare 3-story flat front frame rowhouse setback from the front property line. The rest of this part of the block shows a variety of rowhouse styles including Greek revival, Victorian, and two recently completed in a historicist manner; all either two stories on raised basements or three stories tall. Across the alley, a large development project was approved by the Board in July 2014.¹

Proposal

The proposal calls for a contemporary ensemble of brick, metal panel and glass, three stories tall on a short raised basement. A front bay would project off the southeast corner of the house and feature large areas of asymmetrically arranged windows at each floor, with this fenestration pattern wrapping around to the alley side of the projection to a depth of 12 feet. The remaining portions of the alley and front walls consist of brick with punched openings and rice husk wood fiber panels intermittently grouped with windows on the alley. The building would be 53 feet deep without a rear wing. A deck is proposed for the roof with a front railing set back 12 feet from the front face of the projecting bay. Roof access would be provided by a stair overrun penthouse set back from the front façade and along the west party wall.

Evaluation and Recommendation

The form and massing of the rowhouse is compatible with the historic district and consistent with the massing of the rowhouses on this block. While it is not ordinary for a bay to turn a corner and run any significant length down a side wall, the effect is appropriate at this location since it is a corner location. It is not uncharacteristic for projecting bays on corner rowhouses to be made more prominent by special shape or ornamentation. The non-rhythmic pattern of windows along the alley is also a common trait of historic rowhouses where, on informal side facades, windows are placed according to interior room arrangement. One small shortcoming of the front façade is a lack of windows in the narrow west face of the bay. A common trait of historic bays is that they are fenestrated on all three sides and it is recommended that this detail be replicated at 925 M.

¹ Two completed rowhouses at 939 and 941 M Street NW, HPA #11-523 and #11-525, December 2011. Large development at 917 M Street NW, HPA #14-373, July 2014.

The one aspect of the design that is of questionable compatibility with the historic district is the proportion of glass used within the tower, which is obviously far greater than is typical of residential buildings in the historic district. Regardless of the particulars of architectural styling, rowhouses in the late 19th and early 20th century provided a balance between solid and void, glass and masonry, and outward public expression and interior private use. While some greater extent of glazing and translucency than is typical of historic rowhouses could be compatible for this location, additional efforts should be made to improve the compatibility of the proposal with the character of this streetscape and the historic district. Consideration should also be given to how the building will look both in daylight, when the glass will likely be reflective, and at night when it will project significantly more light than its surrounding buildings.

The rear wall of 925 generally aligns in depth and height with the major massings of the rest of the row, and the visibility of the stair penthouse from the rear comports with the utilitarian nature of the alley. Based on a model presented to staff, the roof top deck and stair penthouse appear sufficiently set back and placed so that they should not be visible from M Street NW. This is a minimum standard for roof decks, even on contemporary new rowhouses, since the characteristic of the historic district being protected is the cumulative roof line created by all the buildings of the district together. While the railing above the roofline along the side elevation would have limited visibility, the existence of the roof deck would better hidden if a brick parapet was substituted for the railing.

A final positive benefit of the project to the historic district is that the dimension, scale and feeling of this part of the alley itself will be restored by a new long side wall, especially in combination with the large project pending across the alley.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Review Board find the concept for a 3-story brick and metal rowhouse at 925 M Street NW to be generally compatible with the character of the historic district, on the condition that extent of glazing within the bay be restudied to achieve greater compatibility with the historic district.