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

Property Address:	1626 1634 1644 1648 North Capitol St NW	X	Agenda
Landmark/District:	Bloomingdale Historic District		Consent Calendar
		X	Concept Review
Meeting Date:	July 9, 2020	X	Alteration
H.P.A. Number:	20-344		New Construction
			Demolition
		X	Subdivision

Syga Thomas, representing owners 1644 North Capitol LLC, seeks conceptual design review for a subdivision three-story addition on top of 1648 North Capitol Street NW in the Bloomingdale Historic District. Plans have been prepared by Atelier MjK.

Property History and Description

The Board last reviewed part of this project when at its June 25th meeting it approved combining lots and alterations to the Old Engine Company #12 landmark at 1626 North Capitol. 1648 North Capitol Street NW is a one-story commercial building at the corner of R Street NW. It was built as a store in 1929 by the Kass Realty Company. Sparse in architectural ornament, it has a corner entrance which is flanked on each street frontage by storefront projections. The long side elevation on North Capitol Street hosts an irregular pattern of fenestration and doors. Both facades have coped parapets that ramp into crenellations at their ends. The adjacent property on R Street NW is a two-story rowhouse with a two-floor addition on top that was approved just prior to designation of the historic district.

Proposal

The applicant proposes to join the lot and building to their on-going development plans for this block of North Capitol Street. A three-story addition on top of 1648 North Capitol Street is proposed which would match the height of 1644 and the in-fill construction approved for 1634. The addition on top of the corner building would not be setback on any side. It would be clad in brick and fenestration in matching floors of ganged and punched windows. Two bays of windows would project into public space at the south end of the North Capitol façade, but not include any projection at the ground floor. The new second floor would incorporate the existing parapet profile. A brick cornice on both facades and a crown at the corner give the new architecture an Art Deco character.

Evaluation

Though this building qualifies as a contributing building by virtue of its date of construction, its plain character, simple composition, and modest architectural expression does not strongly reflect the character of the historic district. Its one-story height is especially at odds with the historic district. While adding stories on top of a historic building is generally difficult to accomplish in a compatible fashion, 1648 should be considered an exception to the rule, especially because of its potential to remedy a much more incompatible existing condition. As proposed, the height of the addition is a comfortable fit. Its best benefit is that it will obscure the two-floor addition on the rowhouse to the west which is the sort of addition that historic district designation is meant to regulate. That benefit aside, the architecture of the proposed addition should be simplified.

To be found compatible with the building and its location in the historic district, the concept requires significant design work. It should come back for further Board review after such revisions. It should not aspire to replicate a specific historic style; especially Art Deco which has no real historic presence in the historic district. A modestly articulated cornice can help add scale to an elevation, but it does not need to make a grand statement in this case. The projecting bays on the south end of the North Capitol elevation are an awkward attempt to not disturb the existing east elevation and so they hang past the property line in an uncommon way. These bays should be reconsidered either altogether or to bring them to the ground; the latter approach taking into account that this part of the building is already altered and does not possess character-defining features. Fenestration in general should give up banks of windows for separate punched windows or the contemporary pattern already approved by the Board for the part of this project at 1634. The facades show that the parapet profile of the ground floor will be incorporated into the addition. This is a preservation detail that should not be lost as the project navigate the permit and construction phases.

The purpose of subdivisions being subject to Board review is to ensure that combining lots and joining attached buildings does not result in substantial demolition of historic resources or new construction projects that are incompatible.¹ The concept for a three-floor addition on top of the existing building at 1648 North Capitol meets this standard.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Board find the subdivision and the height of the addition on top of 1648 North Capitol Street NW to be compatible with the historic district, advise the applicant to revise the design of the facades, and return to the Board for further review.

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¹ DCMR 10C, 305.1, Work considered demolition under the Act shall include, but is not limited to, any of the following...(b) The removal or destruction of all or a substantial portion of the structural components of the building, such as structural walls, floor assemblies, and roofs;...