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

Property Address: **54 Rhode Island Avenue NW**
Landmark/District: **Bloomington Historic District**

Meeting Date: **December 15, 2022**
H.P.A. Number: **23-039**

Agenda
 Consent Calendar
 Denial Calendar
 Concept Review
 Permit Review
 Alteration
 New Construction
 Demolition
 Subdivision

Applicant Matt Medvene, on behalf of owners 54 Rhode Island Ave LLC, seeks concept review to add a partial third floor to 54 Rhode Island Avenue NW, a contributing property in the Bloomington Historic District. Plans were prepared by architecture firm //3877.

Property Description and Context

The subject property is exceptional as a building which derives its form from the intersection of diagonal avenues and the orthogonal street grid that characterized the L'Enfant Plan. In Bloomington these instances can be found where Rhode Island Avenue and Florida Avenue cross the grid and create triangular squares with buildable lots. When the apex of the triangle is narrow it was typically improved with a flatiron shaped building. The next several lots would span from avenue to street until the triangular square was wide enough to accommodate back-to-back lots like in a typical rectilinear square.

54 Rhode Island was originally built in 1905 as an apartment building on a lot that spanned from Rhode Island Avenue to T Street. The building utilizes a dumbbell plan bent at the middle so that both street frontages would have perpendicular party walls. Both ends of the building were designed with formally composed facades essentially giving the building two matching front facades. Each features a tripartite two-story porch with giant order piers decorated in a Mannerist fashion. They support a classical cornice across the façade which includes a pediment over the central bay. The porch bays of the first floor are spanned by elliptical arched spandrels and a short attic story stands just behind the pediment.

In 2003 the building was subdivided into two separate lots and a party wall was built across the waist of the building. The subject property is the north half of the historic building and has been used as a single-family dwelling since then. The south half of the building is now a separate property addressed as 49 T Street and is not part of this application.

Proposal

The applicant proposes to add a partial third floor on top of 54 Rhode Island for the purposes of converting the building back to an apartment building of 9 units. The low hipped roof hidden behind the Rhode Island Avenue attic story would be demolished and flattened to host the new addition. The addition would set back 24 feet from the front façade and extend the full depth of the modern lot. Its flat roof massing would be clad on all sides with fiber cement clapboards.

Evaluation

The addition sits itself in the most recessed part of the existing roof and, despite being visible from the T Street right-of-way, blends into its immediate context in a compatible fashion. The setback from Rhode Island has been flag-tested (see Sheet A0022) and is sufficient enough that the addition will not be visible over this façade.

The same is true for the T Street façade; the addition will not be visible above it when looking from directly across the street. However, the addition will be visible from the west. The geometries and building angles from this viewpoint are hard to describe because they are so small and numerous (see Sheet A0040). They are complicated due to the kinked dumbbell plan of the historic building and the adjacent rowhouses which each present common rear elevations, porches and yards. Together they form a disorganized visual jumble of nooks and crannies of different materials. The addition carries up the dumbbell plan of the historic building and in that way produces a similarly complex volume of small wall planes and many edges. By mimicking scale of its surroundings and sitting at the inflection point where the historic T Street elevation and adjacent rowhouses project into the flanks of the foreground of this view, the addition appears to be nested comfortably in its context. Though visible, it will not alter or overwhelm the character of the historic building or this part of the historic district.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Review Board find the concept for a partial third story addition on top of 54 Rhode Island Avenue NW to be compatible with the character of the Bloomingdale Historic District and delegate final approval to Staff.

Staff contact: Brendan Meyer