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

Property Address:	507 8th Street SE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agenda
Landmark/District:	Capitol Hill Historic District	<input type="checkbox"/> Consent Calendar
ANC:	6B	<input type="checkbox"/> Denial Calendar
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Concept Review
Meeting Date:	August 4, 2016	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Alteration
H.P.A. Number:	#16-518	<input type="checkbox"/> New Construction
Staff Reviewer:	Brendan Meyer	<input type="checkbox"/> Demolition
		<input type="checkbox"/> Subdivision
		<input type="checkbox"/> Archaeology

Applicant Michael L. Oxman, representing owner ELUL Joint Venture, seeks conceptual review for a two-story rooftop addition on top of 507 8th Street SE, a two-story commercial garage in Barracks Row that contributes to the character of the Capitol Hill Historic District.

Property Description and Context

507 8th Street was built in 1920 by the R.P. Whitty Company as a commercial automobile garage. Commercial garages, as a building type, emerged as automobile use and ownership became more prevalent in the first quarter of the 20th century and the needs to house, fuel, maintain and repair cars became necessary. Early commercial garages were multi-functional and included rooms specialized for all aspects of car maintenance: storage, battery charging, gasoline fueling, repairs, washing, as well as lounges for repairmen and chauffeurs. Whitty was a very active builder of garages, factories, warehouses and other buildings between 1915 and 1935 with over 70 to their credit.¹

Today the building shows few changes from its original construction that cannot be reversed. There are no additions because it was built to fill its lot. The front façade is tapestry brick with thrifty ornament consisting of panels of contrasting brick bond patterns. Window openings are industrial in scale with steel windows and soldier course brick headers and sills. The front first floor and entire rear, which have most of their openings bricked up, exhibit the most change from historic conditions. The two-story height of the garage sits comfortably in the Barracks Row neighborhood with its almost 200 year history of one-, two- and three story buildings serving as a commercial district for the Capitol Hill community. The three adjacent properties to the north are one story, and combined with the intersection of 8th and E, afford open lines-of-sight to the garage. The rear of the garage is partially visible from 7th Street but this view is dominated by the new Church of Jesus Christ and Latter-day Saints.

Proposal

The project calls for adaptively reusing the former garage as commercial space on the first two floors, with two new floors added on top for 12 housing units. The first floor openings will be restored to their original dimensions with new doors, windows and transoms. The rear elevation would be fenestrated with four small windows which do not align with the dimensions of the historic window openings. The new third and fourth floors would set back from the front façade 23 feet and the rear façade 36 feet, and add 20 feet of height to the 29 foot tall historic building. The areas of setback would be partially used as terraces for the third floor units, front and back. Fenestration in the addition would be industrial in character to complement the historic fenestration below with the units in the margins stacked in vertical arrangements.

¹ Examples of other R.P. Whitty Company built garages for which the Board has reviewed projects include 1501 14th Street NW (1919) and 1507 14th Street NW (1920) both incorporated into the adaptive reuse for The Studio Theatre (HPA #02-642, October 2002) and 1840 14th Street NW (1919) adaptive reuse for Room & Board furniture store (HPA #09-072, July 2009)

Balconies are included at the fourth floor units, front and back. Perspective renderings show the unattached north party wall with brick veneer colored and patterned to match the historic brickwork, with an area of stucco in the center.

Evaluation

A rooftop addition of worthwhile size and some limited visibility could be compatible on this type of commercial building, but not to the extent currently proposed.

The primary objective for rooftop additions is the same as it is for any other type of addition whether side, rear, or front: that the addition be compatible with the original building and the character of the historic district. The solution for rooftop additions often defaults to designing it so it is not visible because a visible addition on top of a building almost inevitably changes, in an incompatible way, such basic characteristics as height, massing, proportion, and the character of its roofline. This is certainly the case for simple rowhouses which very rarely had rooftop structures and rows of buildings with a uniform and coordinated roof line. However the historic garage at 507 8th Street is an industrial building type built for function rather than form, and this building type often had rooftop structures to house lifts, hoists, gantries and other devices and building systems that made their historic use possible. Therefore, a rooftop addition that took advantage of the commercial garage building typology could be compatible with the character of the building. In other contexts like the Fourteenth Street Historic District, the Board has approved rooftop additions on similar historic garages, but in those cases the additions did not turn one of the smallest buildings in the neighborhood into one of the tallest.²

Barracks Row, built over many decades for daily goods shopping, is not like 14th Street which was primarily developed in a short period of time as destination shopping for automobile purchase and goods. Barracks Row has a character as a small town “Main Street,” with a variety of storefront buildings low in height and scaled to the sidewalk shopper. There is no one consistent building height or cornice line but the tallest buildings are only three stories, and these are less common than the one- and two-story buildings that predominate. This low height and small scale is on display especially where 507 8th Street is viewed from the north. From here, the proposed third and fourth floor on top of the garage would be large, substantially visible, indistinguishable from the historic building below, and incompatibly alter the height and scale of this part of the neighborhood.

A combination of revisions could eliminate many of the incompatibilities of the current proposal and better fit the character of the historic building. The addition could be reduced to a third floor only, or setback from the north party wall like it is setback from the front and rear. This would greatly reduce the perceived size of the addition. Materials and fenestration should more precisely match the historic by eliminating stucco, projecting balconies and vertical groups of windows. Terraces should be scrutinized to make sure they are not perceptible from 8th Street. The applicant should be encouraged to take better advantage of the historic window opening dimensions on the rear elevation. The goal of any such revisions does not need to be to eliminate all visibility of the addition, but to make it secondary to the historic garage, consistent in form with this building type and so compatible with the building and neighborhood.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Board find the concept of adding a two-story addition of this size and visibility from the 8th Street SE right-of-way to be incompatible with the character of the historic district and advise the applicant to reduce the addition such that it will be smaller and less visible from the 8th Street SE right-of-way and return to the Board for further review.

² *Additions to Historic Buildings* , 1.1, 16.1, 16.2