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

Landmark/District: **Capitol Hill Historic District** (x) Agenda
Address: **227-239 Massachusetts Avenue NE**
ANC: **6C**

Meeting Date: **June 2, 2022** (x) Concept
Case Number: **22-281** (x) Alteration

The applicant, Hillsdale College, with drawings by Roland Muñoz, seeks concept review of a rooftop addition and roof deck at 227-231 Massachusetts Avenue, and façade and site alterations at multiple adjacent properties.



Views of 227-239 Massachusetts Avenue NE from the opposite side of the street.

Property Description

The row at 227-231 Massachusetts Avenue NE were built in 1892 by F.M. Buckingham. They are three-story brick bay-front buildings with a raised basement. The bays have crenellated rooflines that create a castellated appearance. 233-235 Massachusetts Avenue are three-story frame mirror twins that were already depicted on the 1861 Boschke Map. 237 Massachusetts Avenue was built in 1915 for J.C. Sullivan by A.H. Ayloe, designed by W.S. Plager. It is a three-story brick building with a mansard roof and two substantial dormers. 239 Massachusetts Avenue was built in 1887 by Patrick Sullivan as a single two-story brick building.



Views of 239-227 Massachusetts Avenue from the sidewalk in front.

Rooftop addition

The rooftop addition would be partial-width and attach at the rear of the existing upper story, extending back about 22.5 feet over the present rear addition. There would be a mechanical area to the side of the addition and a terrace at rear. The addition is labeled as being at 227 in the application but is actually to be atop the building that historically was 231 Massachusetts.

This construction is an extension of an existing story and is expected to be minimally visible. The addition is compatible with the building and historic district.

Façade alterations

The existing light-colored stone at the base of the building would be replaced with a rusticated sandstone, as would be expected at the base of houses of this style and era. A deeper red-brown

color, more similar to Seneca sandstone, for the rusticated stone cladding would be more compatible than the yellowish brown suggested by the renderings.

The doors at the base of 227-231 would be replaced. A five-foot-deep canopy would be installed at the double doors in the bay of 229. The three stairs/stoops at the elevated, original main entrances would be removed and replaced with balconies spanning the width of each recess between bays. The main entry doors and arched transoms would also be replaced.

According to the *Preservation and Design Guidelines for Basement Entrances and Windows*, new basement entrances should not be the primary focus of the façade or alter character-defining features like stairs. The door guidelines favor alterations that are temporary and reversible. In previous renovations of 227-231, some alterations that conflict with these guidelines were permitted. The double doors and canopy at 229 further emphasize the primacy of the basement. A major question before the Board is whether this trend should continue with the addition of features like a canopy and removal of the three stoops.

It could be argued that, with regard to the former main entrances, the ship has already sailed; the original stoops are gone, and the ill-proportioned replacements will, in any case, be of no use, for the time being, unless students use them as seating. On the other hand, the removal of the stoops would free up some of the green space beneath.

At the very least, more attention should be paid to the openings on the basement level of the row. The greater solidity proposed is an improvement, but still more is called for, i.e., openings that are more window-like than door-like, as one might expect in the base of a bay. The opening in the bay to the right of main entrance may be a required egress from the lounge space behind, but the one in the bay to the left of the entrance would appear to be blocked by the crossing ADA ramp anyway.

Site alterations

The public space inside the sidewalk is physically and visually divided into three sections reflecting the previously separate uses and ownership. The proposal is to unify them into a single plaza with raised planted areas and secluded seating areas. Brick would be used for the paving and retaining walls.

The public space would be improved by the proposal, substantially increasing the amount of planted area. The seating areas should be reduced in number or area, to be more compatible with the residential character of the historic building, and they should be better screened with additional vegetation.

Three entry points would be maintained from the sidewalk, reflecting that these were multiple distinct properties. The location and hierarchy of these is unrelated to the architecture and the historic patterns of development, dictated by the programming of the property as a mini campus with a new, primary approach. Beyond those flanking the main entrance, the tall brick piers seem arbitrary and out of place, not related, for instance, to the modest mid-nineteenth-century frame buildings. Most of the brick piers should be eliminated and the retaining wall at the back of the sidewalk lowered as feasible—with the planted areas gently sloped, as necessary—to restore the

sense of connection to the public realm. It is the buildings themselves that should be the most prominent features in public view, not a barrier retaining wall.

If the paved area abutting 227-233 is to be used as a wheelchair ramp, it may require additional railings that are not depicted.

Recommendation

HPO recommends the Board provide feedback on the compatibility of the proposed façade and site alterations and have the project return to the HPRB after revisions. The basement level of the rowhouses should be revised, including the openings and the stone cladding.

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