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

Landmark/District:	Capitol Hill Historic District	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agenda
Address:	326 A Street, SE	<input type="checkbox"/> Consent
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Concept
Meeting Date:	October 26, 2018	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Alteration
Case Number:	17-591	<input type="checkbox"/> New Construction
Staff Reviewer:	Gabriela Gutowski	<input type="checkbox"/> Demolition
		<input type="checkbox"/> Subdivision

Owner, James R. Jones, with plans prepared by architect Kim Jones, seeks concept review to demolish and reconstruct a two-story frame house and construction a three-story rear and side addition in the Capitol Hill Historic District.

Property Description

326 A Street, SE is a wood frame house built between 1854 and 1857¹ featuring architectural elements of the Greek Revival and Italianate styles. The building is uniquely sited on a double width lot on a raised berm set back from the street. The east side elevation, which can be seen from the street, features a two-story full width porch with symmetrically spaced square Doric columns. The second floor of the porch has been enclosed and is currently boarded up with plywood panels. Concrete stairs lead up the berm to a primary entrance at the east elevation. The south street facing elevation has been resurfaced with aggregated stucco and features two-over-two double-hung wood windows and an ornate bracketed cornice. The ground floor porch at the south elevation likely dates from the early 20th century based on the construction details and a 1922 permit issued for “new 1-story front porch in front of house”.² The house is currently vacant and in poor condition. HPO staff visited the site and found a non-historic wing to be deteriorated beyond repair; after obtaining the necessary permits, it was demolished in August 2017.

Proposal

The plans call for demolition and reconstruction of the house. As part of their application, the applicant submitted a report prepared by Olde Town Engineering Co, P.E., dated August 24, 2017. The report details the existing conditions at the property and recommends the complete removal of the structure from the site. The applicant proposes to re-construct the building to match existing in terms of interior plan, material, and architectural features and details. The entrance would be relocated from the east elevation to the open porch at the south elevation. New concrete stairs would lead up the raised berm to the new porch entrance.

¹ The 1854 real property tax assessment shows the owner as Gillies Groenfeldt and others, Dutch bankers who were creditors of the speculator James Greenleaf, and who would not have constructed improvements. The house must have been constructed by a later owner and is seen, with a rear addition, in the 1857 Boschke Map, so it must have been built between 1854 and 1857. (Research credited to the Capitol Hill Restoration Society)

² Building Permit # 8351 issued May 10, 1922.

The plans additionally call for construction of a three-story side addition. The addition would be 22' 10" wide and set back from the south elevation of the historic house by 24' 2". It would overlap the east elevation and result in the loss of a small portion of the two-story porch. The proposed design of the side addition would recall the Second Empire style and would intentionally differentiate itself stylistically from the existing house. The front elevation would be clad in wood siding and feature two-over-two double-hung windows with profiled wooded lintels and trim; the third floor would feature a mansard roof with three dormers and decorative metal cresting at the roofline. A portion of the elevated berm would be removed and a gate installed at the sidewalk leading to an at-grade courtyard behind the berm with a first-floor entrance into the addition. The plans also call for construction of a three-story addition to the rear of the existing house. This addition would extend the full width of the rear elevation and extend one-story above the two-story house. The third floor would be set back 44' 9" from the front elevation and be clad in wood siding. A portion of the stair at the third floor would be clad in asphalt shingle to match the shingles at the mansard roof at the side addition. A portion of the third-floor rear addition would be seen from A Street.

Evaluation

Demolishing and reconstructing the building is not an ideal preservation strategy. However, in cases of extreme disrepair, the Board has found it acceptable to demolish a building and carefully reconstruct it using salvageable elements and detailed measured drawings. In the case of 1229 E Street SE, ("the shotgun house" HPA 16-379 June 28, 2016), the Board allowed the building to be dismantled, reconstructed and relocated, however, this was specifically noted to be an unusual case and solution based on the advanced state of neglect and decay at the property.

HPO staff visited the site on multiple occasions. There are limited interior finishes in place and parts of the wall studs, floor joists and roof rafters are exposed. There is visual evidence of damage due to insect infestation and rot. There is also evidence of bio-growth. The exterior wood siding is covered with stucco, although the wood trim around the doors and windows has been left exposed. The ornately carved bracketed cornice at the south elevation appears to be fair condition. The railing at the open porch at the east elevation is partially missing and deteriorated, but the square Doric columns are intact and their profiles discernable. Currently there is no rear wall at the building as a result of the demolition of the rear wing.

It is preferable that elements of the building remain intact and onsite. The submitted engineer's report states "removal of the existing structure is recommended as the roof and exterior walls will require either bracing and strengthening to remain". Further investigation should be made into what "bracing and strengthening" would entail and whether either is a viable option instead of complete demolition. If the Board were to find it necessary to demolish the building, a detailed methodology should be developed that timelines the process and means of documentation, storage, and reconstruction.

Relocating the entrance at 326 from the east elevation to the south elevation maintains the building's relationship to the streetscape and enforces the concept of 326 as a separate building from the proposed side addition. The proposed side addition, set back from the street and the house significantly, successfully reads as a separate building; while an it is an unusual solution for a side addition, it is compatible with the historic district and this specific location in terms of its general height, massing, the proportions and scale of its elements, materials and general level of detailing and articulation. While one story taller than 326, the addition's residential character and appearance as a separate house is consistent with historic three-story brick bay-fronted buildings within the streetscape. Designing the side addition to read as a separate rowhouse in a different architectural style creates a varied streetscape and helps mitigate the impact on the house.

The proposed rear addition will be set back significantly from the front elevation and will not extend onto the roof of the historic building. The majority of the addition is set far enough back from the street that it will not be visible or as incompatible as the straight-on elevation drawing suggests. A portion of the stair at the third floor will be seen from A Street, however the sloped roof and asphalt shingle cladding will cause it to recede from view and read as a secondary roof structure. The east elevation of the side addition may be visible from 4th Street over a one-story garage. As the design continues to be developed, the elevation should be designed in terms of material and fenestration to be compatible with the streetscape.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Board make the following findings:

- 1. Further investigation should be undertaken to determine the feasibility of bracing the house in place instead of complete removal from the site;*
- 2. If removal and reconstruction of the property is found to be the best approach, a document detailing plans to dismantle, salvage, relocate, and reconstruct the original house should be developed and that as much original historic fabric be retained and re-used as possible;*
- 3. The proposed additions, while unusual in siting and architectural approach, are compatible with the specific character of this property and streetscape;*
- 4. Detailed site-lines showing the third floor at the rear addition should be developed to document its visibility from A Street.*