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

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Landmark/District:	<b>Capitol Hill Historic District</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agenda
Address:	<b>400 - 418 D Street, SE</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Consent
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Concept
Meeting Date:	<b>September 28, 2017</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Alteration
Case Number:	<b>17-488</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> New Construction
Staff Reviewer:	<b>Gabriela Gutowski</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Demolition
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Subdivision

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Evergreen Urban, in partnership with Ebenezer Methodist Church (as Ebenezer Flats, LLC), seeks conceptual design review for the construction of five townhouses, construction of rooftop additions, and subdivision lots in the Capitol Hill Historic District. Plans have been prepared by R. McGhee and Associates.

### **Property Description**

Ebenezer Methodist Church is a red brick Romanesque styled building built in 1897 by architects Crump & Palmer and builders Masson & Harper. The church, which faces D Street, occupies three lots on square 820 that have never been combined: 806, 805 and 4. The congregation also owns lots 804 and 803 to the east which are vacant except for a playset, stone retaining wall, and steps. The project also includes 416 and 418 D Street; both are flat-fronted, two-story, brick rowhouses built by John Riddle in 1894. The square does not have an alley. There is an existing driveway at Seward Square SE leading to a parking lot adjacent to the Capitol Hill Methodist Church

### **Proposal**

The project proposes to combine the three lots occupied by the church building (806, 805, and 4) into a single lot. Lots 804 and 803 would be divided into five lots and developed with a row of five houses. The new rowhouses would front D Street and abut the sides of 416 and the church.

Each new rowhouse would be three stories tall with a basement, and measure 37' 0" in height and 18' 0" in width. The primary elevations would be clad in brick and share continuous brick string-courses and decorative metal cornices. The color of the exterior brick cladding and stringcourses would vary slightly in an A-B-A-B-A pattern. Each building would feature a projecting rectangular bay and square-headed one-over-one double-hung windows. The first-floor entrances would feature a single-leaf paneled and glass door be accessed by metal stairs. Each entrance would feature a metal canopy. The stone retaining wall at the sidewalk's edge would be removed and replaced with a 3' 0" tall brick retaining wall with concrete stairs to each public space front yard. The rear elevations would also be clad in brick and feature regular spaced one-over-one double-hung windows. The spiral metal staircase would provide the second floor access to the rear yard. The rear elevations at the townhouses would face the interior of the square, which has no alley, and would not be visible from any streets.

The western-most rowhouse would abut the southeast corner of the church. The portion of the church that would be concealed by the new construction consists of plain masonry and is off-set from an existing window by 1 ½ feet.

One-story rooftop additions clad in fiber-cement siding are proposed on 416 and 418. The additions would be set back approximately 15 feet from the front elevations and 3 feet from the rear. They would each feature one-over-one double-hung windows at the front, and have an interior ceiling height of 8'6". The additions would not be visible from D Street but would be visible from 5<sup>th</sup> Street.

In addition to the new construction, the plans show a new curb cut and driveway at 5<sup>th</sup> Street. The driveway would be located in the rear yards of 416, 418, and 420 D Street and lead to a designated parking area at the rear of the church and the new rowhouses. The applicant proposes to install mechanical parking lifts at this location to provide spaces for multiple cars. The parking structures would accommodate three cars stacked on top of each other. The bottom car would be below grade and the total height of the structure above grade would be 12' 0".

### **Evaluation**

It is common and characteristic in the Capitol Hill Historic District to have multiple rowhouses built simultaneously and designed by the same architect/builder, and the proposal is consistent with this historic development pattern. The shared designed aspects of the houses, including the continuous use of brick with string courses, cornices, double-hung windows, and repeating projecting bays unify the row of buildings. The proposed three-story plus basement height and overall massing is similarly compatible with the context of the historic district. The eastern-most townhouse will connect with the rear of the church in an area of plain masonry and not cause damage to, or conceal, significant architectural features of the church.

The applicant performed a flag test in the presence of HPO on September 18, 2017. The additions as represented in the plans – with a 15' setback from the front -- were visible from street view. The applicant has agreed to provide an 18' setback, which will be sufficient to ensure that they not be seen from D Street over the primary elevations. The corner building, 420, is taller than 416 and 418 and will block the view of the rooftop addition from the corner of D and 5<sup>th</sup>. Currently the rear of 418 is partially visible looking south on 5<sup>th</sup> and the proposed rooftop additions will be seen from this vantage point. However, the addition will be set back from the existing rear elevations and will be seen in the context of other rear elevations, therefore not detracting from the architectural character of the buildings or streetscape.

The proposal calls for the retention of the raised berm within public space, which is consistent with the Board's policy of retaining existing topography. The proposed brick retaining wall will align and match the existing brick retaining wall at 416 and 418.

While the general concept for subdivision, new construction and alterations to the existing rowhouses are compatible with the character of the historic district, the plans would benefit from further development and refinement. HPO recommends further work on the following:

- 1) Investigating whether the rowhouses should be sunk slightly lower on their site. Setting the first floors of the building five feet above the already-raised berm results in a long set of stairs to reach the front doors; setting the buildings 12-18" lower would improve their relationship to grade and the proportions of the stairs. Shallow window wells could be compatibly provided for the basement windows.
- 2) Developing a wall section that shows how depth and shadow can be introduced to ensure that the facades won't read as too flat particularly at the cornice;
- 3) Consideration should also be given to providing some slight variety between the five houses, as was typical of Victorian-era rows to heighten their picturesque quality. For a row of five such as this, this variety would often have been done in an A-B-A-B-A pattern, with some variety given to the height or shape of the bays, the fenestration, the front door surrounds.
- 4) Provide additional information on the operation and finish of the parking structures. Consideration should be given to enclosing the sides of the structures with brick walls to provide the appearance of garages.

**Recommendation**

*The HPO recommends that the Board approve the general concept as consistent with the purposes of the preservation act, with further development of the plans as outlined above.*