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

Landmark/District:	Capitol Hill Historic District	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agenda
Address:	418-420 7th Street, SE	<input type="checkbox"/> Consent
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Concept
Meeting Date:	July 27, 2017	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Alteration
Case Number:	17-487	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> New Construction
Staff Reviewer:	Gabriela Gutowski	<input type="checkbox"/> Demolition
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Subdivision

WFA Endowment Fund, with plans prepared by Square 134 Architects, seeks concept review for lot consolidation to combine two rowhouses on a single lot, construction of rear and rooftop additions, and a new building at the rear of lot in the Capitol Hill Historic District.

Property Description

418 and 420 7th Street, NE are two of a row of six brick rowhouses built by Weller and Repetti in 1889. Each building has a half-hexagon projecting bay, one of which is topped by a slate turret roof. Both rowhouses retain their historic cast-iron stairs and decorative brick detailing. The two facades are painted turquoise and for many years were occupied by the same commercial tenant. At the rear, both buildings retain their “dog-leg” ell wings, and 418’s rear elevation retains its historic fenestration with arched brick-lintels and two-over-two double-hung windows.

The buildings are located mid-block between D St. and E Street one block south of the Eastern Market Metro. The block has no alley. All the buildings on the block were historically constructed as residences, however there are a mix of residential and commercial occupants, as the block is zoned as Mixed -Use (MU-4). The eastern half of the square, along 8th and parts of D and E, is characterized by commercial buildings.

Proposal

The proposal calls for combining lots 809 and 810 into one lot for a project that would provide eight residential condominiums. The plans show demolition of the party wall separating the buildings, the rear elevations, the southern rear wing walls, the interior stairs, and the interior finishes; while not explicit, the section drawings imply that the roof would also be removed for the construction of the additional floor. Instead of two stairs, the building would have one stairway located in 420. Both dog-legs would be infilled and the infill set back from the newly constructed rear elevations approximately 12 inches.

The roof addition would rise 10 feet high, be clad in copper, and would straddle the two buildings with access to a shared roof-deck at the front portion of the roofs. The dimension of the set back from the front elevation is not indicated; it would align flush with the rear elevation. HVAC units are proposed on the roof of the addition.

The first-floor entrance at 420 would lead to a hallway providing access to the rear yard and to a proposed new building located at the rear of the lot. The new building would be set back from the property line the 15 feet required by zoning. The building would be 28 feet tall and extend the full width of the lots. The first and second floors would be clad in brick with decorative brick stringcourse and lintels. The third floor would be set back from the yard-facing elevation and be clad in copper panels with sliding glass doors leading to a front terrace. The new building would not be visible from 7th Street but would be seen from E through a space between two buildings.

A lightwell would be excavated at the rear of 418 and 420. The remainder of the rear yard would be a combination of brick and wood patio hardscape with planting beds.

Evaluation

The proposal has five components for the Board's consideration: subdivision, demolition, the roof addition, the rear additions, and the new rear building.

Subdivision

418 and 420 have a history of shared occupants and use with small openings existing between the two buildings. Other pairs of rowhouses on the block are similarly combined and occupied by a single tenant, such as the SMYAL Youth Center at 408 and 410. Combining two rowhouses into one building on a single lot has been found to be compatible by the Board as long as interior demolition and removal of party walls between the buildings is minimal, and that exterior features that identify each property are retained (e.g. retaining both sets of exterior stairs and front doors).

Demolition

As proposed, the party wall, all interior walls, the rear ell wings, the rear elevations of the primary building blocks, and the roofs of both buildings would be removed. This scope would result in substantial demolition as defined in the Board's regulations, and is inconsistent with the preservation law.¹

Roof addition

The plans indicate that the addition would not be visible from 7th Street. However, the site line provided is drawn over 418, which has a conical roof over the bay, unlike 420 which would have a lower line of sight. The applicant should construct a mock-up to ensure that the addition will not be seen from 7th Street, and relocate the mechanical equipment off the roof of the addition to the front roof of the main blocks of the building in a manner to ensure that they are not visible. One-story non-visible rooftop additions have been found compatible within the district, however, the Board has required that any roof-decks be located at the rear of the roof and not the front. One other building within the row has a rooftop addition (414), which is pulled away from both the front and rear elevations. The proposed addition should similarly be pulled back from the rear

¹ Among the definitions of substantial demolition in the preservation regulations is DCMR 10-C, Section 305.1(b): "The destruction of all or a substantial portion of the structural components of a building, such as structural walls, floor assemblies, and roofs."

elevation allowing for the two-story volume of the rowhouse to remain intact and the continuous rear rooflines at the rear of the row maintained.

Rear additions

All of the buildings that front 7th Street currently retain their original dog-leg ell wings. In residential blocks where all the dog-legs were intact, such as in the case of 316 G Street, NE (HPA 17-227), the Board has determined that it was important for the dog-legs to be retained. However, this square differs from the G Street case by not being purely residential nor having the extent of consistency throughout the block. Instead, the square is a mix of residential and commercial scale buildings of various sizes. In this instance, infilling the dog-legs at 418 and 420 will not disrupt a shared residential rhythm of dog-legs within the square. However, to effectively preserve the memory of the dog-leg, the infill should be pulled back at least 12” from the rear elevations and the rear elevations of the main blocks of the buildings should be retained.

Rear building

The Board has approved several new two-story carriage house structures within the historic district, some of which have been visible from the street. For example, in January 2017 the Board approved a new two-story carriage house visible from the street at 202 9th Street, NE. However, the Board has consistently limited the height of two-story carriage houses to 20 feet so that they have a height and proportions consistent with those found in the historic district. Removing the third floor and reducing the height of the rear building to 20’ 0” would result in the building shorter than the height of 418 and 420, thus result in a subordinate relationship to the rowhouses and clearly read as a secondary structure. Although the rowhouses on 7th Street abut the rears of the commercial buildings facing 8th, they retain significant amounts of green space and are screened from the commercial buildings by mature trees and landscape. Aligning or pushing the new construction closer toward the rear of the lot would have less of a negative impact on the shared greenspace within the row and reduce the visibility of the new structure from E Street. While this approach would require zoning relief from the required rear yard setback, this alternative placement on the lot should be explored.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Board find this concept incompatible with the character of the historic district and inconsistent with the purposes of the preservation act. For the project to be found consistent with the act and compatible with the historic district, the plans should be modified to accomplish the following:

- *Significantly reduce the amount of demolition to be consistent with DCMR 10-C, Section 305;*
- *Retain the rear elevation walls;*
- *Pull the rooftop addition in several feet from the rear elevations, eliminate the deck at the front of the roof, and relocate the HVAC equipment off the roof of the roof addition, and prepare a roof mock up of the proposed roof addition to test for visibility;*
- *Inset any infill next to the dog-leg additions from the rear elevations to retain a memory of the original massing and rhythm of the rear elevations;*
- *Limit the height of the new rear building to 20 feet and explore the possibility of pushing it further back on the lot.*