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

Landmark/District:	Capitol Hill Historic District	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agenda
Address:	429 12th Street SE, Rear	<input type="checkbox"/> Consent
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Concept
Meeting Date:	October 23, 2014	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Alteration
Case Number:	14-624	<input type="checkbox"/> New Construction
Staff Reviewer:	Sarah VanLandingham	<input type="checkbox"/> Demolition
		<input type="checkbox"/> Subdivision

Applicants Carl and Julie Moeller seek concept review for a renovation and second floor addition to convert an existing garage into livable space in the Capitol Hill Historic District.

Property Description

The garage is a free-standing one-story masonry and wood structure covering close to 100% of the lot. It was built sometime in the 1920s. The east wall is brick with four arch-top casement windows facing the rear of three rowhouses along 12th Street. The west side features two bays and two pedestrian doors. The south wall is comprised of vertical wood slats that appear to cover what was once a larger bay opening. The north side has another bay that has been filled in with CMU blocks. There is significant deterioration and cracking of that masonry wall.

Proposal

The proposal is to add a second story and roof deck to the garage and convert the structure into two units of livable space. The plans call for removing the deteriorated wood portions of the building and the failing masonry but incorporating some of the masonry walls of the existing building into the design. The building will be oriented toward the alley.

One of the two alley-facing pedestrian doors will become the main entrance to the bottom unit and the other will be converted to a window. The four openings on the east wall will remain and have new casement windows inserted into them. Large sliding panels will cover the XX corner.

The second floor is to be clad in unpainted horizontal wood slats with most of the fenestration on the west side facing the alley. Large sliding panels cover the corner window. Six small window openings are clustered in the middle of the east wall to allow light to enter while still respecting the privacy of the adjoining rowhouses.

An open-air stairway enclosed with a framework of wood slats provides access to the second floor and roof deck. The deck encompasses about half of the roof and is surrounded by a glass railing that continues seamlessly into clerestory windows providing light to the unit below.

Evaluation

Alley buildings are an important resource in Capitol Hill not only for their historic physical fabric but also for the role they play in shaping the alley-scape. In this case, the alley substantially retains its I-shaped configuration due in large part to the surviving buildings including the subject property. This somewhat altered and deteriorated building is arguably more important for its role in defining the edge of the alley than for individual architectural characteristics. Although this garage is a one-story building, there are other two story residential buildings in the alley so a building of that size would not be out of scale with its surroundings.

Conceptually, the proposal's choice of materials relates to and is compatible with the existing building and the historic district. That said, the overall design somewhat obscures the form of the original one-story garage. By keeping only pieces of the original masonry walls, the retained portions read as two-dimensional planes of brick rather than a retained three-dimensional building.

If the design were able to preserve more of the existing fabric, it could be clearer that this was a garage that is being retained albeit substantially expanded. The deteriorated condition of the structure may limit the possibility of retaining certain sections but greater retention should be the preferred option.

Additionally, the seamless use of materials and continuous plane confuses the old and new parts of the building making it difficult to read the original form as a one story building with a second story addition. A modest change in plane or material of the second story could make this relationship more evident.

December 2014 Update

At the October hearing, the Board found the concept of an addition to be generally compatible but found that the proposed addition was too large and occluded the understanding of the historic building.

Since then, the applicant has revised the plans to retain an additional masonry wall and to recess the second story walls slightly behind the one story building; while these changes are relatively minor, they improve the legibility of the original building as part of the overall composition.

In addition to these modifications to the plans, the applicant has included more photographs further detailing the extent of the structure's deterioration. This information both improves our understanding of the building as it currently exists and raises questions about its integrity. As a compromised structure, the extent of retention and reuse is probably the best that is possible and some greater design flexibility for the addition is warranted.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends the Board find the concept compatible with the Capitol Hill historic district and delegate final approval to staff.