

---

---

## HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION

---

---

Landmark/District: **Capitol Hill Historic District**  
Address: **637 E Street, NE**

Meeting Date: **June 28, 2018**  
Case Number: **18-432**

☒ Agenda  
☐ Consent  
☒ Concept  
☒ Alteration  
☐ New Construction  
☐ Demolition  
☐ Subdivision

---

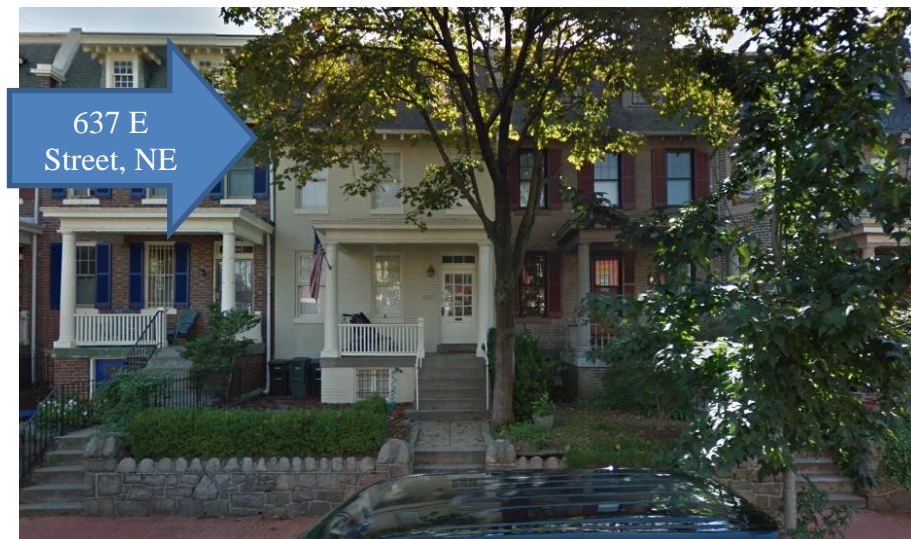
---

Owners Jonathan and Amber Beckmann, with plans prepared by architect Scott Sterl, seek concept review for a new basement entrance and door opening at the building located within the Capitol Hill Historic District.

### Property Description

637 E Street is located mid-block between 6<sup>th</sup> Street and 7<sup>th</sup> Street, NE. The house was designed by A.H. Sonnemann for the Kennedy Brothers builders in 1914. The same builder and architect developed all the houses on the block, as well as the three blocks directly south, between 1909 and 1914.

The primary elevation features a steep sloped roof with slate tiles, decorative wood eaves and two dormers. There is a flat roof porch at the first floor supported by Doric columns. The front yard at the house is elevated approximately 37" above the sidewalk and retained by a random laid rubble stone wall. The primary entrance is accessed by four concrete stairs, a walkway, and seven concrete porch stairs. The condition described above is the building's historic condition.



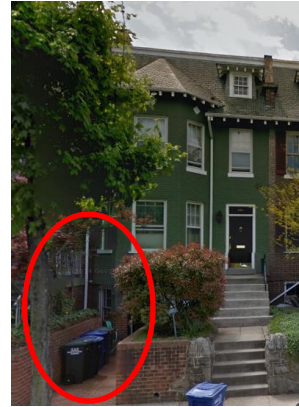
Five of the houses within the blocks designed by Sonnemann for the Kennedy Brothers have altered at-grade basement entrances like the one proposed; 641, 619 Lexington Place NE; 643, 639 E Street, NE; and 425 6<sup>th</sup> Street, NE. These alterations took place before 2004.



641 Lexington Ave NE May 2014



619 Lexington Ave NE Aug 2004



643 E Street, NE Aug 2004



639 E Street, NE May 2014



425 6<sup>th</sup> Street, NE May 2014

## Proposal

The plans call for the removal of 4' 0" of the stone retaining wall and excavation to accommodate an at-grade concrete walkway leading to a new basement entrance. The grade would be retained on either side of the walkway by painted brick walls. An existing basement window would be removed, the masonry opening enlarged, and a single-leaf door installed. A metal picket gate would be installed at the end of the walkway facing the sidewalk.

## Evaluation

Alterations to accommodate requests for basement entrances are reviewed according to the principles established by the Board's "Preservation and Design Guidelines for Basement Entrances and Windows." The guidelines specifically address the importance of maintaining a building's historic topography:

*Raised or terraced front yards and the linear strip of landscape that is formed by continuous front yards are distinctive features that define the setting for buildings in most*

*of the city's historic districts. The depth of the front yard, the relationship of the building to grade, and the relationship of the building to sidewalk grade all affect the visibility and impact of basement entrances on a building and its site.<sup>i</sup>*

To prevent the loss of significant topography the design guidelines find it inappropriate to lower the front yard of historic property to provide an at-grade entrance, stating:

*3.2 Lowering the front yard of historic property to provide an at-grade entrance is generally not appropriate. New entrances should be designed to minimize disruption of existing topography.*

The guidelines also state that any new walkways should be shared with the walk serving the main entrance. This design principle also helps to maintain the maximum amount of green space within the front yard.

*1.3 Walkways to basement entrances should be shared with the walk serving the main entrance to retain the maximum amount of green space in the front yard. Separate walks for main and basement entrances are generally not appropriate.*

As proposed, the new walkway and basement entrance door do not conform to the above stated design principles. The design guidelines describe the appropriate design principles for new basement entrances at buildings with projecting porches. If followed, a new basement entrance and door could be found appropriate at this property. They include:

- *Retain existing or original topography and grades of the front yard*
- *Retain and enhance the landscaped nature of the front yard and limit paving*
- *Retain original or historic stairs, landings and porches*
- *Retain character-defining features of front porches, including masonry piers, decking, and railings; removal of a portion of the porch skirt (lattice) may be acceptable*
- *Use the existing primary walkway for access to the new entrance, rather than creating a separate walkway*

### ***Recommendation***

*The HPO recommends that the Board find the concept to be incompatible with the historic district.*

---

<sup>i</sup> *Preservation and Design Guidelines for Basement Entrances and Windows, Chapter 3, page 4*