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

Landmark/District:	Capitol Hill Historic District	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agenda
Address:	645 Maryland Ave, NE	<input type="checkbox"/> Consent
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Concept
Meeting Date:	November 20, 2014	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Alteration
Case Number:	15-065	<input type="checkbox"/> New Construction
Staff Reviewer:	Sarah VanLandingham	<input type="checkbox"/> Demolition
		<input type="checkbox"/> Subdivision

Applicant OPaL, LLC with plans prepared by GPS Designs seeks concept review to construct an addition above and behind a one-story commercial building in the Capitol Hill Historic District, and convert the entire structure into a multi-family dwelling.

Property Description

The one-story commercial building is located mid-block amid a residential section of Maryland Avenue and is surrounded on either side by three-story brick rowhouses. A row of three early porch-front houses abuts the garage to the west. The fronts of the porches are aligned with the façade of the garage resulting in a 12' setback of the main block of the houses. To the east are Victorian era rowhouses in line with the garage and featuring bays that project into public space.

According to permit research, the brick garage building was built about 1906. It occupies almost the entire lot and features a large garage door, two windows, and a pedestrian door on Maryland Avenue. Based on its date of construction and architectural integrity, the building is a contributing structure to the historic district.

Proposal

The proposal calls for converting the building into three units by adding two stories to the existing building. The addition will be setback more than 12' from the façade of the garage, just behind the façade of the porch-front houses. The addition will be of a modern design and feature rhythmic fenestration with large openings and Juliet balconies on the top floor. The façade will be clad in dark weathered zinc.

The existing openings on the garage will remain with the garage bay being converted to double doors leading in to a shared courtyard with skylights through the historic roof. The existing pedestrian door will also lead into this space but will be in line with another door leading to a corridor from which the apartments are accessed.

The plans note a roof deck but its exact location and size are not identified on the drawings. Parking for six cars is provided in an alley-accessed garage in the rear portion of the first floor. The extent of demolition is not clearly illustrated in the plans.

Evaluation

The Board reviewed a previous proposal by a different owner and design team in 2003/2004. That project initially came in with a 12' setback (in line with the houses to the west), which was then increased to 17' for the revised proposal approved by the Board. Without having access to the proceedings for that case, it is difficult to know the rationale behind the increase and thus to determine if the issues raised by the Board previously have been adequately met by this design. Since that design was ultimately approved, the HPO is operating under the assumption that a visible addition to this building is compatible with the Capitol Hill Historic District.

Designing an addition that is compatible with both the garage and the surrounding residential character of the neighborhood is difficult. A 12' setback allows the historic building to read as a one-story garage without creating a tunnel effect. The use of a simple repeating pattern of glazing speaks to the character of the district but the modern materials and scale are a departure from a historicist design.

The previously approved design was also in a contemporary style. The HPO seeks the Board's guidance on the compatibility of the modern design of this proposed addition. In the previous project, the Board asked the applicant to study the materials of the addition to ensure they were recessive and understated so as to not accentuate the height. More information is needed on the appearance of the proposed material here but an initial rendering suggests that the darker metal on the addition will allow the garage building to retain its prominence. Full plans including proposed demolition information will be needed to fully understand the scope of the project.

The most recent version of the elevations show a roof access structure and railing of a roof deck. Due to the long sightlines across Maryland Ave and D Street, the HPO is not confident that this structure will not be visible from public space. If a roof deck is deemed to be compatible with the historic district, it should be setback as far as possible and accessed in some other manner such as an internal stair or rear circular stair that does not add to the height of the building. A full roof plan will be needed to better understand the proposal.

The project has the ability to improve the site condition of the property, which has resulted in the removal of the berm, failing retaining walls on each side, and extensive paving. The landscape plan should continue to be developed in consultation with staff

Recommendation

The HPO recommends the Board find the concept of a two-story addition to be compatible with the Capitol Hill Historic District and direct the applicant to further refine the design and return for further review when appropriate.