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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>630 G Street SE</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Consent
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Concept
Meeting Date:	<b>November 30, 2023</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Alteration
Case Number:	<b>23-574</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> New Construction
		<input type="checkbox"/> Demolition
		<input type="checkbox"/> Subdivision

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Anthony Wilder Design Build, agent for property owner Amit Kumar Trustee, seeks conceptual design review for construction of a 3-story rear addition and roof-top deck with penthouse stair structure in the Capitol Hill Historic District.

### **Property Description**

The property is a circa 1841 three-story detached brick house built by Samuel A. H. Marks and is one of the oldest existing residences in the historic district. For much of the nineteenth century, Capitol Hill residents referred to the building as the “Marks Mansion,” and, according to the *Washington Post* in 1897, it was considered “a landmark for years.” At some point during the later part of the nineteenth century, a new family purchased the home and added a two-story rear addition, which was later removed.<sup>1</sup> It is unknown exactly when the rear addition was removed, but it lasted well into the twentieth century.



**At left is a present-day image of 630 G Street SE (Google Street View). At right is a present-day aerial view showing the house (lower right) in relation to the church, G Street, and the alley (Sanborn).**

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<sup>1</sup> “Flames Among Bric-A-Brac: Heirlooms of the Bieber Family an Irreparable Loss,” *Washington Post*, January 30, 1897, 2.

The house abuts a named alley, F Street Terrace, immediately to its west. That alley along with the other alleys within the same block are significant for the number and quality of their remaining historic alley dwellings. It should be noted that the alley dwelling immediately to the rear (north) of 630 G Street SE, which will be the most affected by this project, dates to the 1960s. To the west of the house and alley is Christ Church (built circa 1807) one of the oldest houses of worship in the District of Columbia. The historic church is setback approximately 90 feet from the curb (about the same distance from the curb as the rear wall of 630 G Street SE). The result is a prominent front yard surrounded by iron fencing and populated by some mature trees. The church, front yard, and 630 G Street thus share a unique relationship among Capitol Hill buildings, preserving a rare, and largely unchanged view that dates to before the Civil War.



**Christ Church (left) and 630 G Street SE (right) circa 1930 (Image from the DC Public Library).**



**Christ Church (left) and 630 G Street SE (right) in 2011 (Image from Google Street View).**

## Project Description

The applicant proposes two major alterations of interest to the Board: 1) A three-story rear addition, and 2) A roof-deck with penthouse-level stair access. The rear addition will extend approximately 25' behind the historic house and share the existing house's width. The first floor of the rear addition will be garage space, with a paneled garage door located at the rear. The exterior will be brick painted to match the existing house. A brick soldier course will mark the line of separation between the first and second stories. Fenestration will be traditional 2/2 windows with brick sills and lintels. The second and third story windows furthest north on the west elevation will be wider and taller than the other windows found on the house. One existing historic window on the west elevation will be bricked in. The rear elevation will be relatively sparse with only two small, square windows on the third floor, one small, square window on the second floor, and the garage door on the first floor. The east elevation, which will not be within public view, will feature one 2/2 window, one small, square window, and an exterior door.

The roof deck will be placed upon both the rear addition and the existing historic house. Railings and decking will not be visible from the street. To access the roof deck, the applicant proposes to build a staircase through the roof of the historic house. The stairs will be topped by a penthouse structure sheathed in stucco with a sloped roof. It will measure 7' 10" wide and 13' long atop the roof. Its max height will be approximately 6' higher than the current historic roof and 46' 6" above ground level. The applicant has already revised the concept following discussions with staff to remove visible pergolas from the roof deck and to lower the penthouse roof. However, even after these revisions, approximately six inches of the small penthouse will still be visible from G Street from perspectives both southwest and southeast of the house. Three options have been developed to hide that portion of the penthouse from view: 1) Lower or remove the penthouse roof by using a roof hatch, 2) Extend the cornice, 3) Raise the brick parapet wall.



**Option 1**



**Option 2**

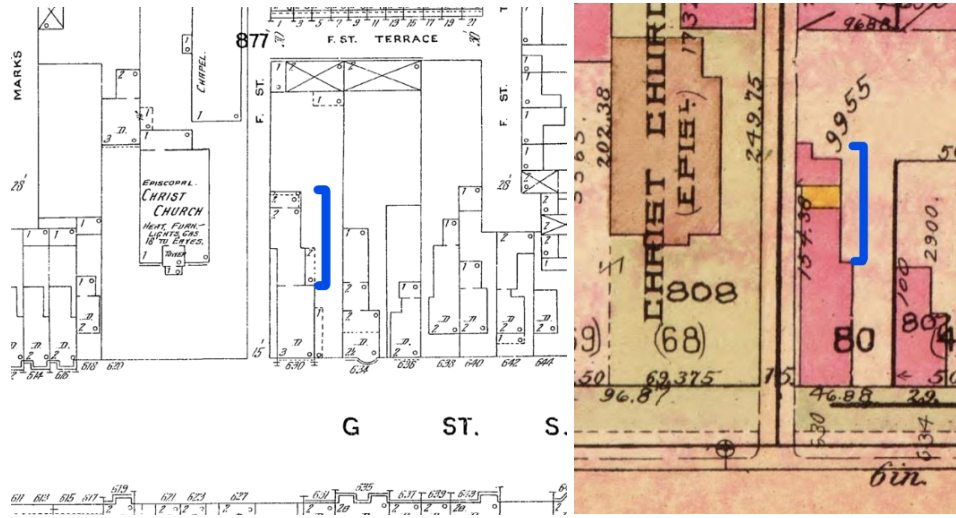


**Option 3**

With Option 1, neither the cornice nor the brick parapet of the existing historic house would be changed. In this case, the penthouse would likely have to be completely removed (and possibly the roof deck with it), since the penthouse roof cannot be lowered any further, and access limited to a roof hatch that would be essentially flush with the new deck. With Option 2, the cornice would be extended outward along the west elevation of the existing house and new rear addition to mimic the existing historic cornice at the front of the house. Under this option, the new cornice would be left unadorned so as to be differentiated and not compete with the historic cornice. With Option 3, the brick parapet wall of the existing house and new rear addition would be raised slightly. As currently configured the parapet has a stepped appearance. The height of the highest step would remain unchanged while the rest of the parapet would be brought to that height. All three options would be successful in removing the visibility of the penthouse from G Street.

## Evaluation

The proposed rear addition is compatible. The house already had a two-story rear addition during parts of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. According to historic maps and photographs, the predecessor addition, though shorter, was more than double the length of what is currently proposed. The proposed addition will also complement the existing house and other Capitol Hill structures with its use of traditional materials and fenestration. Though some of the proposed windows will be larger than what is found on the historic house, they will help differentiate the rear addition from both the existing house and its previously existing addition. The larger windows will also pay homage to bay windows that once existed on the former rear addition, as evidenced from historic photographs.



1904 Sanborn map (left) and 1919 Baist Map (right) with the since demolished previous rear addition marked by the blue lines.



The former rear addition as it appeared in photographs from the early twentieth century. The image within each yellow square is a zoomed in portion from the photographs. (Images from the DC Public Library).

In regard to the visibility of the penthouse level, staff believes that Option 1 and Option 3 would be compatible with the historic district. Option 1 (removing the penthouse or lowering the penthouse roof further) would be the most compatible but would also be the most restrictive to the applicant's program. Staff proposed Option 3 (raising the brick parapet wall) as a compromise that will allow the applicant to retain the penthouse for easy access to the roof deck. The applicant prefers Option 2

(extending the cornice). According to historical photographs, the former rear addition that existed on the house did feature a cornice, as evidenced by the close-up below from the larger photograph on the previous page:



**A cornice existed on the former rear addition. It was moderately decorated with modillions. (Image from DC Public Library).**

However, no historical documentation suggests a cornice ever existed on the west elevation of the three-story historic house. One can argue that a wrapping cornice, which is usually found on corner properties, is appropriate in this case since the house has essentially been a corner property for over 150 years on account of it being next to the large front yard of Christ Church and the named alley. Staff, though, finds the elaborate cornice at the front of the house is one of the structure's most important features. That cornice contributes greatly to the house's character and having a wrapping cornice around the other side of the house would diminish that feature's uniqueness.

Option 3 offers an acceptable compromise. What is proposed is to raise the lower sections of the existing parapet to be the same height as what is currently the highest portion of the parapet. Thus, the entirety of the existing parapet will not be raised, but only the rear portions of it. This will remove the stepped appearance of the existing parapet but will change only brick walls rather than more noticeable, character-defining features. This change would not alter the overall appearance of the house in as dramatic of a way as adding a cornice would. The top of the west elevation is currently characterized by brick and would remain so. This option is also beneficial since it can easily be performed on both the west and east elevations and so not negatively impact the house's balance. Lastly, Option 3 will better demarcate the historic house from the new rear addition by making the entirety of the historic house appear as one mass as observed through the west elevation's roofline. If the existing parapet was unchanged (per Option 1), then the proposed rear addition would stand slightly taller than the existing rear wall of the historic house. To revise such an issue would require significant alterations to the applicant's program, but to leave it mismatched would give the rear addition an unwarranted and unwanted height advantage over the original house.

### **Recommendation**

*HPO recommends the Board support "Option 3" and find the project compatible with the Capitol Hill Historic District, and delegate authority to staff.*

*HPO Contact: Todd Jones*