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

Landmark/District:	Capitol Hill Historic District	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agenda
Address:	1229 E Street, SE	<input type="checkbox"/> Consent
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Concept
Meeting Date:	October 28, 2010	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Alteration
Case Number:	09-394	<input type="checkbox"/> New Construction
Staff Reviewer:	Amanda Molson and Steve Callcott	<input type="checkbox"/> Demolition
		<input type="checkbox"/> Subdivision

Applicants Paxton Helms and Mary Quillian Helms, with owner Larry Quillian and architect Lee McAllister, seek ongoing conceptual review for an addition to 1229 E Street, SE (commonly known as “The Shotgun House”) in the Capitol Hill Historic District.

Background

The Board first reviewed this project in February 2010, and staff has met with the applicants on several occasions to review potential revisions. At the Board’s last review, it approved the demolition of the two rear additions to the original house with the understanding that the front two rooms would be fully restored, directed that the massing of the new addition be considerably reduced, and a less conspicuous location for the garage door be explored. The Board recommended that the massing of the two-story “camelback” be emphasized to screen the three-story portion, and that the overall depth of the structure be reduced. The Board also offered specific recommendations such as siting the garage as a separate accessory structure in the rear yard, narrowing the width of the addition and possibly including an open side porch, and considering the opportunity for archeological investigation.

The staff report also requested that ongoing development of the concept include specific information on the restoration plans for the original house, more developed floor plans for the addition (to facilitate the discussion with the applicants as to how the mass could potentially be manipulated to reduce its size), side elevation drawings, and detailed information on materials, fencing, and hardscaping.

Property Description

The two-room front section of the Shotgun House was constructed prior to 1853. Sometime before 1887, it was extended with the construction of a third room of the same narrow 14’ width. A front porch was added in 1925 (replacing an earlier porch), and a brick kitchen addition was added in 1938. In the 1850s portion of the house, the original windows were replaced and the clapboard siding covered over with asphalt siding in 1942. A rear garage building, built in 1917, was approved for demolition by the Board several years ago due to its deteriorated condition.

The house at 1229 E Street, SE is one of only two frame “shotgun” houses known to exist in the Capitol Hill Historic District. The shotgun house is a vernacular building type constructed predominately in towns and cities of the American south, generally for working class families, and the form is distinguished by a long, narrow gabled form and floor plan, which is one room wide and two or more rooms deep with no hallway. While the building is clearly deteriorated due to neglect by the current owner, the original block of the house is in relatively good condition and is salvageable. Modest frame houses such as 1229 E Street, SE tell a more complete story of how working class residents lived than is reflected in the middle and upper class houses, grand public buildings, and high-style commercial buildings more typically appreciated and protected. As such, they are a valuable part of the city’s historic districts.

Proposal

The applicants are presenting two revised options. Option 1 features a two-story, frame, side addition with a sloped roof, thereby assuming the form of an enclosed side porch that terminates at the eaves of the camelback. A third story sits above, set back 10’ from the front elevation and assuming a mansard roof form. The depth of the camelback behind the historic house would also be 10 feet. The overall depth of the addition has been reduced from 66’ to 62’.

Option 2 features a masonry “carriage house” side addition, terminating at the eaves of the camelback but including a mansard roof on the third floor set flush with the front elevation. The depth of the camelback behind the historic house would be 10’, and the overall depth of the addition reduced from 66’ to 62.’

More developed floor plans have not been included, and the revision in fact includes no floor plans at all. Also missing from the revised drawings are the requested information on the restoration plans for the original house (elevation drawings have been provided, but this portion of the proposal lacks any internal floor plan showing preservation of the original two-room layout, any information on materials, and appears to have a new side door inserted directly into the foundation of the historic house). Side elevation drawings and detailed information on materials, fencing, and hardscaping have also not been developed.

Evaluation

The garage door remains on the front elevation of the house. However, the substantial setback (approximately 30’) of this portion of the addition from the façade of the Shotgun House, and the door’s inclusion in either a carriage house vernacular or a simple, frame side addition allow its visibility to be diminished and not incompatible.

Despite numerous discussions with HPO over the past months, a number of conceptual issues regarding the redevelopment of the site remain unsolved or unaddressed:

- 1) Several potential adjustments to the massing have been explored, but all have retained the third story across the width of the lot with a variety of setbacks, roof forms, and changes in material. The massing of the third floor, in addition to the substantial depth of the addition, has been a considerable hurdle given the relatively narrow (less than 13’) width of the portion of the lot where the garage is sited. The result has been a narrow and oddly

tall side addition that does not convincingly read as a stand-alone townhouse, a carriage house, or an enclosed side porch.

For example, Option 1 features a relatively successful two-story, frame addition, but any softening of the massing is mostly negated by the third floor above, which looms over the historic house and its two-story camelback addition and is also awkwardly set back from the side addition in contrast to the traditional placement of a mansard form at the front edge of the roofline. Similarly, the two-story masonry “carriage house” in Option 2 successfully achieves the simple proportions of an accessory structure on the first two floors but employs a steeply-pitched third floor above in an effort to accommodate a full third-floor. The impact of either option could be detrimental to the house to the left (east), whose backyard will likely become a cavernous space compressed between the three floors of the new addition and the deeper house at 1235.

An option that successfully emphasizes the camelback section and softens the overall impact of the third floor has yet to be developed, leading the HPO to conclude that the third floor over this portion of the addition should simply be removed. Removal would reduce the height of the side addition and introduce either a masonry, two-story wing compatible in form with the proportions of an accessory carriage house, or a frame, two-story side addition in a form compatible with the character of an enclosed side porch.

- 2) The overall depth of the addition remains overpowering and does not address the Board’s direction for a “generous reduction” in depth. The decrease from 66’ to 62’ represents a reduction of roughly 6% and will likely provide little relief to the neighbor to the right (west), whose backyard will extend alongside a three-story rear addition of said depth with no relief. This 62’ expanse is substantial in comparison to the remaining 26’ of the Shotgun House. The end result would be double, and in some cases triple, the depth of other houses along the row.
- 3) The Board recommended that the two-story, frame camelback section be emphasized in order to further screen the third story behind it. However, both options have reduced the depth of the camelback to 10’. The depth of the camelback should be a minimum of 16’, comparable to the size of a comfortable room, in order to diminish the visibility of the third floor by pushing it deeper into the lot.
- 4) Substantive evaluation of this project and attempts to meet the applicants’ needs while designing a compatible addition have been difficult due to the absence of floor plans. While interior room configurations are beyond the regulatory authority of the Board, discussion of interior programming is an integral part of working collaboratively on how spaces might be configured within the shell of a compatibly-designed exterior form. Absent floor plans, this is an exercise in stacking together boxes with no regard for how interior space may be adversely impacted or, conversely, how internal room configurations can be restudied to reduce exterior massing. A successful project typically begins by exploring logical space needs and program, and responding with an overall form and design that add to the character of the neighborhood.

- 5) Apart from the concerns raised above, the conceptual proposal lacks the requested information on the restoration plans for the original house, side elevation drawings, and detailed information on materials, fencing, and hardscaping. The HPO cannot recommend approval of the concept absent this information.

Recommendation

The following modifications to the addition are necessary in order for the proposed concept to be compatible with the property:

- The third floor over the garage portion of the addition should be removed;
- The depth of the camelback portion should be extended to at least 16 feet;
- The overall depth of the rear addition should be substantially reduced;
- Restoration plans for the historic house, fully-developed plans for the interior layout, and drawings to depict side elevations, fencing, and hardscaping must be developed.

No approval is granted for the removal of the two rear additions to the historic house as a stand-alone raze. The Board has approved demolition of these two additions only as a compromise in the interest of restoring the original two-room portion of the house and constructing a compatibly-designed addition in order to return the site to service.