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

Property Address:	3219 Wisconsin Avenue, NW	X	Agenda
Landmark/District:	Cleveland Park Historic District		Consent Calendar
Meeting Date:	November 29, 2018	X	Concept Review
H.P.A. Number:	19-041	X	Alteration
Staff Reviewer:	Steve Callcott		New Construction
			Demolition
			Subdivision

Preservation DC LCC, with plans prepared by Teass-Warren Architects, seeks conceptual design review for relocating a two-story frame house on its lot, removing a later rear wing and restoring the house, and constructing a seven-story apartment house on the Wisconsin Avenue frontage of the property.

Property Description and History

3219 Wisconsin Avenue is located at the corner of Macomb Street and Wisconsin Avenue in the Cleveland Park Historic District. The house faces Wisconsin and is set back approximately 26 feet from the front property line. It is a two-story stucco-over-frame four-square set on a stone foundation with a hipped roof, a full-width front porch and one-over-one wood windows. The house originally had open porches off the rear which have since been enclosed and clad in stucco. A one-story frame garage was once located at the rear of the lot but has since been removed.

3219 Wisconsin was built in 1901 for a cost of approximately \$4,500; the building permit lists Dr. Louis Engster as the owner/builder and Harry Blake as the architect. It was built in response to the construction of a streetcar line along Wisconsin Avenue which began operation in 1890 and opened rural Washington County to speculative suburban development. In that same year, Thomas Fisher & Company platted the nine-block "Oak View" subdivision on land formerly part of the summer estate of President Grover Cleveland. The subdivision included portions of the 3400, 3500 and 3600 blocks of Woodley Road, Newark, Macomb and Lowell streets, and including this block of Wisconsin. Initial development was slow to take off; when 3219 was constructed in 1901 it was one of only a few in the Oak View subdivision.¹

By the 1920s, Cleveland Park was well established and flourishing, and Wisconsin Avenue had been developed with other detached houses, row houses, small-scale apartment buildings, and one-story commercial buildings. The University Apartments (3213 Wisconsin) was constructed in 1925, contemporaneous with the one- and two-story apartment buildings and commercial buildings across the street that are located outside the Cleveland Park Historic District. While reflecting a variety of building types and architectural styles, these buildings share a commonality of size and scale with 3219. More dramatic change came after World War II, when the street was rezoned for 90' apartment buildings. 3201 Wisconsin Avenue, at the corner of Lowell, was constructed in 1957; 3217 Wisconsin immediately to the south of the subject property was constructed in the 1980s just prior to the designation of the historic district.

¹ The first houses, constructed in 1897-8, were clustered at the intersection of 36th and Macomb.

Based on its date of construction, architectural character and association with the Oak View subdivision, 3219 was included in the boundaries of the historic district when it was designated in 1986 and is listed as a contributing structure in the National Register nomination. The house appears to be generally sound and retains integrity of form, materials and general architectural character, albeit showing signs of deferred maintenance.

Proposal

The proposal calls for relocating the house, moving it back (east) on its lot and reorienting it to face Macomb Street. The enclosed rear porches, one bay of the front porch that extends past the primary mass of the building, and a small non-original one-story projection on the side of the building would be removed, and the house otherwise restored.

A seven-story apartment building would be constructed on the corner site; while appearing as a separate building, it would technically be an addition connected to the historic house in order to meet the zoning requirement that only a single building occupy the lot. The new building would be contemporary in design, with a two-story masonry base and largely-glass oriel projections on floors three through seven. The applicants acknowledge that the plans are only schematic intended to obtain a determination from the Board as to whether the general concept is acceptable before undertaking further design development.

Evaluation

Moving an historic building is not standard preservation practice and is discouraged by the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties. Relocating a building off its original property can sever the relationship between the building and its context, and potentially jeopardizes the building during the process of relocation. Relocation within a building's existing site is somewhat less problematic as it retains it on its original property and reduces the potential for damage but is not ideal as it can still change the relationship of the building to surrounding properties and its site.

However, there have been limited instances where the Board has found building relocation to be an acceptable preservation treatment. These have been situations where the building's historic context has been substantially compromised by the loss of surrounding historic buildings and/or incompatible adjacent new construction. In such cases, the Board has approved projects if the building's new siting is compatible for the building and improves its setting, results in a high-quality renovation of the building, and the associated new construction is found compatible for the historic district.²

In applying those principles and considerations to the subject site, the building's context has been compromised both by the loss of other similar adjacent single-family residential buildings and by the looming blank wall of the adjacent apartment building to the south. Turning the building to face Macomb Street would return the house to a more compatible context while remaining associated with its original lot and the Oak View subdivision.

² Examples of projects approved by Board meeting these principles include three bungalows relocated within their square in Takoma Park, relocation of a two-story commercial building in the 1900 block of 9th Street in the U Street district, and 3211 Wisconsin Avenue in the same block as the subject property, in which the house was pulled forward on its lot and a mid-rise apartment building constructed behind.

The project would provide the preservation benefit of needed renovation to the building, and removal of the altered and enclosed rear porches would not compromise the property's character. However, removing a bay of the original front porch is not an appropriate treatment. And while it is unknown if the interior has original or character-defining features, the floor plans shown in the concept drawings suggest extensive demolition. For the project to be found consistent with the preservation act, the front porch should be retained and the extent of removal limited so as not to result in demolition as defined in DCMR 10-C, section 305.

Architecturally and urbanistically, a new building on the corner has the potential benefits of covering over the stark side wall of 3217 Wisconsin and providing a more attractive Wisconsin Avenue frontage for the historic district. However, the relationship between the relocated house and apartment building is quite tight, and even a few additional feet of separation would make a substantial difference. Additional fenestration on the east side wall might reinforce that the new building is free-standing and designed in the round, and reducing the size of the projecting oriels on the Macomb Street side – and increasing them on Wisconsin – could help reduce the building's scale when seen adjacent to the smaller house and reinforce its frontality on the avenue. Lowering the height of the oriels by a floor, particularly on Macomb, might also lower the building's apparent height.

More generally, the applicants have been encouraged by HPO to consider how the design of the new building could be made more specific to the character of the site, the house and/or the Cleveland Park Historic District. This advice has been intended to suggest an interpretative rather than literal or historically replicative approach in achieving this goal.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Board find that in this instance building relocation and new construction on the corner could be found compatible with the character of the historic district, but that the concept needs further development before resubmission to the Board. Consideration of the following is recommended:

- 1) Retain the full width of the front porch;*
- 2) Limit alteration to the house to a level consistent with the preservation regulations;*
- 3) Increase the separation between the house and new construction;*
- 4) Study how reductions in the height, width and distribution of projecting bays could help reduce the height and scale of the building on Macomb and strengthen the building's presence on Wisconsin;*
- 5) Consider how the design of the building could be made more specific to its site and the historic district through the use of materials, color or other characteristics.*