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

Property Address:	3300 Newark Street, NW	X	Agenda
Landmark/District:	Cleveland Park Historic District		Consent Calendar
Meeting Date:	February 24, 2022	X	Concept Review
H.P.A. Number:	22-147	X	Alteration
			New Construction
			Demolition
			Subdivision

Owner Stephanie Cutter, with plans prepared by landscape architect Joseph Richardson and CAS Engineering, seeks conceptual design review for construction of a swimming pool, a sports court, and landscaping at the rear of a house in the Cleveland Park Historic District.

Property History and Description

3300 Newark Street is a two-story Dutch Colonial Revival styled house constructed in 1920 designed by architect Robert Beresford. The rear yard drops precipitously into a ravine that runs between Newark and Macomb Street, one of several valleys that run through and define the distinct topography of the Cleveland Park Historic District.

The Board approved construction of a substantial rear addition and deck to this house in 2018, proposed by a development entity, which has been completed; the house has since been sold to the present owner. HPO has since approved minor work on the rear of the property, including enclosing the area under the deck to serve as a screened porch.

Proposal

The project calls for constructing a swimming pool below the rear of the deck, with two stairs extending from the deck and the parking area down to the new pool level. Due to the sloping topography, the south face of the pool would be exposed to the rear yard, with a 8'6" high retaining wall to be clad in stucco. The existing retaining wall at the rear of the house would also be clad in stucco and landscaped with trained vines. A 17' x 9' stone terrace would be located below the swimming pool with concrete slab stairs leading down to the yard.

A 25' x 25' sports court would be established at a lower elevation of the rear yard, indicated on the plans as consisting of permeable pavers.

When initially submitted, the plans included a batting cage and a linear planting plan of evergreens around the perimeter of the yard. The plans have been revised to eliminate the batting cage and to provide a more naturalistic planting plan of native ground covers, shrubs and trees.

Evaluation

While the Board has traditionally given flexibility for the design of rear additions and work in rear yards when they have little or no visibility from public street view, it has identified the

topography and naturalistic character of the ravines in Cleveland Park – and particularly the subject ravine between Macomb and Newark Street – as an important contributing feature of the historic district that warrants careful attention and protection.

The first project that raised the importance of the ravine to the character of the historic district - and to the community - took place in 2005, when staff-level approval was given for two retaining walls in the rear yard of 3316 Newark, located in the same square as the subject property. That project resulted in a substantial change to the natural topography (which, in HPO's defense, was not entirely evident from the plans); the resulting construction resulted in an abrupt and fundamental change in character from a sloping, naturalistically planted landscape to a series of high CMU walls supporting plateaus of lawn. In 2013, the Board found a proposed plan for a swimming pool and pool house located behind 3210 Newark to be incompatible with the ravine's character.

Most recently, in 2018, the Board reviewed the plans for the addition and deck at the subject property. Through the course of several reviews, the Board required the addition to be reduced in size and pulled further back so that it didn't intrude as far down the hill into the ravine. Unfortunately, during the course of construction, it became evident that the topography at the rear of the addition wasn't accurately represented in the conceptual plans, resulting in the need for a larger exposed retaining wall than was shown on the HPRB-approved plans. While partially mitigated through additional grading and landscaping, the result is a larger exposed wall than had been anticipated by the HPRB and the community.

While it would seem reasonable that a property of this large size could accommodate a swimming pool and additional terrace, the result is a further intrusion into and another tall retaining wall facing the ravine. While the proposed wall could be somewhat mitigated by pushing more grade up against it, this would only modestly reduce its exposure. Given the scrutiny that the Board gave to the proposed addition and deck - and the requirement that it be pulled further back out of the ravine - it is difficult to find the proposal consistent with that previous direction. Similarly, the creation of a large, flat paved area in the middle of the rear yard also runs counter to the Board's past efforts to retain the natural sloping topography and to limit paving within the ravine. As an alternative, the applicants may want to consider whether the flat base of the existing driveway could be programmed to provide a court area.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Review Board find the proposal inconsistent with the Board's past efforts to retain the ravine's sloping topography and to prohibit large exposed retaining walls and flat paved areas as inconsistent with the character of this feature.

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