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

Property Address:	3401 Lowell Street, NW	X	Agenda
Landmark/District:	Cleveland Park Historic District		Consent Calendar
Meeting Date:	April 25, 2019	X	Concept Review
H.P.A. Number:	19-270	X	Alteration
Staff Reviewer:	Steve Callcott		New Construction
			Demolition
			Subdivision

Owner Christopher Cahill, with plans prepared by Ballard Mensua Architects, seeks conceptual design review for alterations and an addition at the rear of a house located at the corner of Lowell and 34th Street in the Cleveland Park Historic District.

Property History and Description

3401 Lowell Street is a two-and-a-half story frame house constructed by W.C. and A.N. Miller in 1915. It is clad in stucco that likely covers the original clapboard and has prominent corner pilasters on all four corners.

The house was designed by B. Frank Meyers, who got his start in the profession by assisting his father, architect John Granville Meyers, in the preparation of plans for the Christian Heurich mansion at 1307 New Hampshire Avenue in 1892. B.F. Meyers went on to design scores of rowhouses, and attached and semi-detached houses, mostly for speculative builders, in Kalorama Triangle, Columbia Heights and other neighborhoods in the first decades of the 20th century. He designed only a handful of detached dwellings, including the three houses around the corner from the subject property at 3400-3404 Macomb Street, NW, which he also designed for the Miller Company. Like 3401, they are large, two-and-a-half-story, single-family dwellings influenced by the Colonial Revival, Tudor Revival and Craftsman styles. The front porch and door composition at 3400 Macomb appear to be identical to that at 3401.

3401 has been vacant for several years and exhibits a level of deterioration that is atypical for the Cleveland Park Historic District.

Proposal

The project calls for removing the exterior stucco and reinstalling wood siding and construction of a new dormer and infill on the second floor on the west (left) side elevation. On the rear, the two-story porch would be removed and a two-and-a-half story addition constructed that would sit above an exposed basement level housing a garage facing 34th Street. The existing curb cut at the rear of the yard would be removed and a new curb cut created to access the garage.

The addition would be clad in siding and corner pilasters to match the house and have ganged multi-light windows with transoms. The addition would be capped by a gable roof that would extend the form of the existing house back as well as having a reverse (or cross) gable facing 34th Street; the new roof would be clad in metal and set 6” below the ridge line of the existing house. A three-sided bay on

the side (right) elevation under the porch would be removed and squared off in line with the east face of the addition.

Evaluation

In its review of projects in Cleveland Park, the Board has required that additions be subordinate to the house that they are being added to. As outlined in the Board's design guidelines, particular focus is given to the addition's roofline and massing to ensure a subordinate relationship is achieved:

Additions should be subordinate to the original building, allowing the historic structure to remain dominant. This usually means that the mass of the addition should be noticeably smaller than the original building, as it is difficult for an addition to be subordinate when it approaches or exceeds the size of the original structure. For larger additions, breaking the mass of the addition down into smaller components may be appropriate.

Additions should not fundamentally alter the basic shape or orientation of the original building. Additions should be designed so that building's original shape and orientation is readily apparent. Particular attention should be given to retaining and relating to the form, height and profile of the historic building's roof.

Several minor revisions to the plans represent a positive step in making the proposed addition more subordinate to the house: the primary roof ridge of the addition has been lowered by 6 inches and the addition has been recessed from the wall plane of the house on the west (left) side. However, these don't address the primary compatibility problem that the mass of the addition projects forward of the mass of the house on the 34th Street elevation without any break between the two. The lack of subordinacy is compounded by the fully-exposed basement and the cross gable – making it apparent that the addition is four stories -- and the much larger scale of the addition's fenestration.

These are solvable design issues, albeit would require some change in interior floor plans and reduction in square footage. Eliminating the cross gable at the top floor would lower the perceived height and weight of the addition and reinforce the stepping down of the roof suggested by the modest 6" break at the ridge line. Recessing the corners of the addition on the 34th Street elevation so that they are recessed behind or aligned with the side of the house and using a bay to project forward would reduce the addition's mass and pull the weight of the addition away from the house. Reducing the scale of the fenestration would also improve the addition's compatibility.

It is further recommended that the form of the three-sided projecting bay on the 34th Street elevation be maintained. The bay projection is an original character-defining feature on a primary, street-facing elevation; its removal is not consistent with the requirement in the preservation law to retain character-defining features of historic properties.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Review Board find the concept incompatible as proposed, as the addition is not subordinate in its relationship to the house. It is recommended that the concept be revised and return to the Board for further review when ready.