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

Property Address:	606 H Street, NW	X	Agenda
Landmark/District:	Downtown Historic District		Consent
Meeting Date:	September 28/October 5, 2017	X	Concept Review
H.P.A. Number:	17-414	X	Alteration
Staff Reviewer:	Steve Callcott		New Construction
			Demolition

Studio Crowley Hall Architects, representing the On Leong Tong Church Community, seeks conceptual design review for alterations and a seven-story addition to the rear of a three-story rowhouse.

Building History and Description

606 H Street, NW was constructed in 1853 as a three-story, red brick flat-fronted rowhouse capped by a bracketed wood cornice. Based on an historic photograph of the building dating from around the turn of the 20th century, the building originally had a raised entrance, a Greek Revival door surround, and six-over-six windows with shutters. The building has since lost those features, and at some point in the early 20th century, its raised basement was converted to a ground-level retail space.

The property is adjacent to the former Mary Surratt Boarding House, an 1843 Greek Revival house that was this site of meetings in 1864-65 between John Wilkes Booth and other conspirators to assassinate President Lincoln. Surratt was found guilty of conspiracy in the plot and was the first woman executed by the federal government. The Surratt House is listed on the DC Inventory and National Register for its historical significance.

Proposal

The plans call for constructing a seven-story addition, with an elevator overrun penthouse above, to the rear of the building; the addition would retain and encompass a three-story brick ell-wing that is either original or was constructed very soon after the building's original construction. The addition would be a contemporary office building with a modular skin of full-height storefront windows within a metal framework. A deck would be created on the roof of the historic building, accessed from the addition. The plans indicate that they are not to scale and heights are not given, but the addition would rise three floor plus the penthouse above the historic building. The façade renovation plan has been based on historic photographs, and calls for recreating the appearance of the 6/6 windows, shutters, and the missing Greek Revival doors surround.

Evaluation

When reviewing additions, the Board has most frequently cited the principle that an addition should be subordinate to the historic building to which it is being added to ensure that the

historic structure to remain dominant and not be overwhelmed by the new construction. This principle is of greater importance when the historic building and the addition are seen simultaneously from public street view. In some limited instances where the context supported it, the Board has found additions that are larger than the buildings to which they are attached to be compatible if the addition can convincingly appear as a separate building to the rear or side of the historic building and when the size of the addition was found to be appropriate for its context where buildings of different sizes and types allowed for the compatible insertion of a larger structure.



606 H Street on right; Surratt Boarding House, 604 H Street, on left. Photo c. 1900.

The proposed addition, which will be prominently visible from street view, is clearly not subordinate to the building in size and height. While the block does have taller construction to the south and west, the height and placement of the new tower immediately behind the historic building results in an incongruous and uncomfortable juxtapositions of forms. For a taller addition to be compatible with this building and the small-scale row of which it is a part, it would require a noticeable setback from the rear of the historic building in order to successfully appear as a separate building. Alternatively,

or in combination with a greater setback, the addition should be reduced in height so that it doesn't loom over and crowd the historic buildings. The pergola structure on the rear roof of the historic building should also be eliminated.

While designing the addition with windows on the east side elevation is potentially helpful in having it appear as a separate stand-alone building, it is unclear how this party wall could contain as much glass as is shown and remain consistent with the fire code. This aspect of the proposal should be confirmed with the code officials and revised if necessary.

The replication of missing façade features will enhance the historic character of the building and would provide a valuable preservation benefit.



Photo c. 1910-20 of 606 H Street showing conversion of basement level to retail storefront.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Board find the concept for a seven-story addition to be incompatible with the character of the historic building and its context within the Downtown Historic District.