

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

Landmark/District: **Dupont Circle Historic District**
Address: **1721 20th St NW**

Meeting Date: **December 15, 2016**
Case Number: **17-074**
Staff Reviewer: **Kim Elliott**

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Harry Kirkman and Gayle Gibbons, with plans prepared by architect John Linam Jr., seeks conceptual design review for a 3-story plus basement and roof deck rear addition and alterations to a pair of rowhouses in the Dupont Circle Historic District.

Property Description

This pair of narrow 2-story rowhouses were built in 1879 by W.W. Sinclair. Although historic permits indicate they were built as dwellings, historic photos illustrate facades that were clearly commercial. The buildings, 12' x 40' with mirrored doglegs, sit on a very deep lot and are sandwiched between 3-story and 5-story apartment buildings with a side yard on the south side. The interior and facades have been altered on both buildings and the property is currently combined into 1 single-family house.

Proposal

The proposed design calls for converting a single family rowhouse into a multi-unit building by renovating the rowhouses, removing the doglegs, adding a full width addition across the back of both houses with a roof deck, and adding a 3-story plus basement plus roof deck at the rear of the property. The rear addition will be connected to the houses by a 22' circulation connector. The interior renovation of the historic houses includes demolition of the load bearing parti wall and the partial rear walls. The façade restoration will return the façade to the original design, as documented in the historic photos.

Evaluation

The proposed new construction is a substantial mass in comparison to the existing house form – approximately the same footprint and one story taller. The 3-story addition and connector, although set back significantly from the street, will still be visible from the side yard view which is 8'-3" wide. However, it is a very deep lot and is surrounded by taller buildings in a context of Dupont Circle that has varied building types, styles, and massings; as such, the proposed massing is reasonably compatible. The Board has frequently found a taller mass compatible where a rear building can be read as a separate building. In this case visibility of the addition through the side yard could be a compatible solution, but there should not be visibility over or on top of the historic buildings. A flag test will need to be performed to confirm that the addition and the roof deck on the front addition and rear roof deck with penthouse stair are not visible from the front of the house.

Currently the design shows the front roof deck overlapping the main block of the historic houses. This roof deck should be pushed further back so that it is only on top of the new construction.

The perception of the mass of the project is very large. There is a courtyard between the historic house and the new addition massing, but the circulation connector is on the south side making it visible through the side yard and creating a condition where you see an almost 100' long wall. The architect

should continue to develop the transition from the historic fabric to the new construction through a more significant change in plane, materials, and detailing so that the original form of the historic houses is legible and the long wall is visually minimized.

The drawings do not give much information about the scope of the restoration, but the architect should work with HPO to restore the front elevation and replace any windows with appropriate windows and detailing. Because this house is being converted to 7 units, the revised proposal will need to include a utility meter room on the interior of the building.

In addition, on the interior of the houses, the load-bearing wall and portions of the rear wall of the historic buildings should be maintained with openings located as needed instead of demolishing all of these walls.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Board find the concept generally compatible with the character of the historic district and consistent with the preservation act with the following recommendations:

- *That the interior of the historic houses maintain the load bearing parti wall and part of the rear wall with allowances for openings;*
- *That the plans identify that the utility meters will be placed in a room on the interior of the building;*
- *That the architect continue to work with HPO on the transition between historic and new construction, and on preservation of the front elevation;*
- *That a flag test be conducted with HPO staff to confirm there is no visibility of the proposed addition from across the street.*

HPO further recommends that the Board delegate final approval to staff with the above recommendations.