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

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Landmark/District:	<b>Engine Company No. 19</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agenda
Address:	<b>2813 Pennsylvania Avenue, SE</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Consent
Meeting Date:	<b>April 28, 2011</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> New Construction
Case Number:	<b>HPA #11-081</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Addition
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Alterations
Staff Reviewer:	<b>Tim Dennée</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Concept

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The applicant, property owner the District of Columbia Fire and Emergency Medical Services Department (with JDOS Internationale and K. Dixon Architecture PLLC), requests the Board's review of a proposal to reconstruct the two vehicle-bay openings on the building's primary elevation in order to increase their width. The widening of the doors would demolish the watch room between them.

The firehouse is to undergo a thorough modernization. The drawings accompanying this report are somewhat conceptual, although we understand that a full set of permit drawings has been undergoing review at the Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs for some time. The plans received a recommendation of final approval from the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts in November.

The drawings forwarded by the Commission depict some site work, but the entire property is already paved, with the exception of the portion between the building and 28<sup>th</sup> Place. The drawings Commission depict some new and replacement fences, but their details were not clear, and we have been told that there will be no fences as part of the project. There is already a vehicle-access gate at the alley and a fence along the common property line at the rear of the apartment building to the west.

There is considerable interior work, the windows would be replaced, the slate roof would be replaced to match, and some disused electrical and mechanical elements would be removed from the exterior.

**Background**

Engine Company 19 was built in 1910 to serve and promote the new Randle Highlands subdivision. Designed by the firm of Averill & Adams, it was among the first projects supervised by the new Office of the Municipal Architect and is a fine example of the eclectic buildings that replaced the Victorian firehouses—and that preceded the Commission of Fine

Arts-favored Colonial Revival “bungalows” of the interwar period. One of the best loved designs, 19 Engine was designated a historic landmark in 2009.

In addition to modernizing many of its older facilities, Fire/EMS is seeking to increase the size of the vehicle doors on many of the historic firehouses to ease the movement of its existing fleet and to accommodate a new generation of trucks grown larger to accommodate equipment required to address EPA limitations on emissions.<sup>1</sup>

Fire/EMS expects that the truck bodies available will measure eight feet wide. The Department wants the doors to accommodate these with a rigid, one-foot-wide, rear-view mirror on each side, plus a full one-foot clearance on each side beyond the mirror, equaling a total twelve-foot-wide opening sought. Fire/EMS would like the heights to be twelve feet as well, to accommodate ladder trucks and their tiller cabs.

### **Window replacements**

The elevations suggest that the windows would be replaced with a combination of single-light casements and one-over-one double-hungs to fit the original rough openings. The drawings do not specify material but the window sections are rendered like wood windows, and the notes state “contractor to provide historically accurate replacement windows based on existing aesthetics and the District of Columbia historic preservation guidelines, window and doors for historic buildings.” There is photographic evidence to indicate that the original windows were multiple-light—nine-light casements and generally nine-over-nine double-hungs.<sup>2</sup> The original pattern is typically the standard for replacement, per the window regulations, although some flexibility on the rear is often applied. This is a simple enough matter to adjust, of course.

### **Vehicle doorways**

The project’s central challenge is to find a solution to the door issue that may be determined sufficiently compatible with the character of the landmark. Regarding doors, the Board’s design guidelines state that: “The location and appearance of doors are important character-defining features of historic buildings.... Historic main entry doors of institutional and government buildings are typically imposing in design with elaborate details and ornamentation.... If located on the primary facade, it is critical that the proposed alteration not significantly change the character of the facade.”

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<sup>1</sup> Over the past few years, the concerns have been with particulates, requiring filtration of the exhaust, and nitrogen oxide emissions, initially addressed through existing exhaust-gas recirculation (EGR). Manufacturers are mostly addressing nitrogen oxides through the addition of a Selective Catalytic Reduction system “which requires a storage tank to hold diesel emissions fluid (DEF) that is injected into the exhaust stream ahead of a special catalyst.” This kind of equipment adds cost and requires space and additional maintenance and operating costs (as do the somewhat smaller, alternative, advanced EGR system available from one manufacturer). Newly proposed regulations will also phase in carbon reduction over the 2014-2018 period, with the consequences as yet unknown, and attempt to increase fuel efficiency. Compliant custom cabs and chassis, which cost substantially more than stock, will apparently only be available from two manufacturers.

<sup>2</sup> The present windows mostly date to the early 1980s—made of wood, but with aluminum tracks for the double-hung sash. There are a few more recent replacements in which there has been an attempt to re-establish the original muntin pattern.

In February 2010, the Board reviewed the widening of the vehicle-bay doors at Engine Company 10, 1342 Florida Avenue, NE. Given the character of that building and the detailed drawings presented, the Board decided that the openings could be widened compatibly beneath semicircular arches. The Board discussed at the time, however, that the anticipated reconstruction of stonemasonry openings at other firehouses would constitute more of a challenge to compatibility, likely needing review by the Mayor's Agent.

As it happened, the reconstruction of the brick arches at Engine 10 proved sufficiently challenging in itself, even with the detailed drawings, with the left arch noticeably pointed. As each project comes forward, we all must be increasingly careful to ensure a successful outcome, not leaving the results to chance. Creating a form for a rustic stone arch and maintaining the arch despite the irregularity of the stone is more challenging than working with a material with as regular a module as brick.



*Engine 10/Truck 13*

Unlike the coursed ashlar fronts of many of its contemporaries, the suburban Engine 19 is principally of stuccoed brick, with fieldstone arches and quoins, which may allow for some wiggle room in reconstructing the openings without visibly pulling apart the whole facade. The watchroom between the doors would have to be demolished, as the building's corner tower forms an outward constraint that forces the doors to be widened only inward, toward each other, if the façade's symmetry is to be retained.

The present drawings for Engine 19 are not sufficiently detailed to provide direction to a mason undertaking the work, which is, after all, their principal and ultimate purpose.

The existing conditions drawings do not depict the present arches in full detail or entirely accurately. The arches actually curve gently, and do not spring from a corner point as drawn. The drawings also depict the bollards at the inside corners of the arch as taller, and probably wider, than they are presently.<sup>3</sup>

The representation of the arches and their constituent stones is stylized and not naturalistic. This is an impediment to conveying an understanding of the complexity, irregularity and layering of the rubble stones, and evaluating whether a broader arch requires adjustments to its thickness or to the height or extent of the voussoirs at the tops of the arches.

The drawings are not precisely scaled, so we have to use the measurements given. The vertical dimensions of the openings are not provided, but the tops of the arches are now more than twelve feet tall, and the drawings note that there is to be no increase in the height in the reconstruction. The actual doors proposed, inset well behind the arches, are shown as *lower*—at ten feet—than the existing, nearly twelve-foot-tall roll-up doors, a height said to be necessary for all the door reconstructions.

It is not clear why the widths of the arches are measured from the bollards at the foot of the openings rather than the inside of the arches themselves. It seems that the necessary opening width relates to the size of the truck bodies more than to the exact wheelbase. And while the distance between the bases of the bollards are said to be 9'0", the two doorways are not of the exact same size. The width of the left door is actually closer to 9'4" between the bollards and about 10'2" above the bollards. The width of the right door is about 9'6" between the bollards and about 10'3" above, the measurements allowing for the irregularity of the interior dimension because of the irregularity of the stones.

The "proposed" drawings also show a slight shift eastward (leftward) of the reconstructed, narrow, watchroom window, putting it just slightly off the façade's center line. Is this an accurate depiction and necessary, or a drafting error?

In short, the drawings do not answer the question of whether the door widening can be done successfully and compatibly, nor do they provide the path to that end. The answer, "maybe," is the same we had prior to drawings. More detailed drawings for the door widening are required, possibly even hand renderings. The preparation of such drawings will provide the opportunity to carefully study the dimensions and the appropriate appearance of the finished product. At least as important is showing that a capable historic mason will perform the work.

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<sup>3</sup> The main section of the bollards is about a foot tall and essentially a conic section three-quarters round, continuous with and dying into the upright rectangular blocks that form the inside base of the arches. Above this, the bollards narrow to peaks that reach about 21 inches tall against the tops of the blocks.

**Recommendation**

The staff recommends that the Board delegate to staff further review of appropriate window replacements, roof slate replacement, fencing, and minor interior and exterior work. The staff further recommends that the Board cannot now take action upon the door widening proposal placed before it, as the materials submitted are insufficient.



*Engine Company No. 19*