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

Landmark/District:	Foggy Bottom Historic District	(x) Agenda
Address:	2513 I Street NW	
Meeting Date:	November 4, 2021	(x) Addition
Case Number:	21-560	(x) Concept

The applicant, Jerald Clark, architect and agent for property owner Stefano M. Buonaiuti, requests the Board’s review of a proposal to construct a third-floor addition to a two-story early twentieth-century brick dwelling.¹ The construction would also fill in, or rather replace, the rear porch, altering openings.

The one-story addition would be set back about fourteen feet from the facade. The present roof would be demolished, sinking the addition behind a façade that becomes a parapet. Consequently, the addition would likely not be visible from I Street.

The view from the rear would be an issue here, however. Additional floors are frequently set forward of a rear wall—whether the original wall, an addition, or an enclosed porch—so that the original and, in this case, pretty consistent two-story height for the neighborhood can be retained in some sense. Here, the addition would cover the footprint of the rear two-thirds of the house, carrying the brick walls upward (there appears to be a drafting error in that the rear elevation does not depict the new brick being carried across the west portion of the third story).

Foggy Bottom is a historic district where the straightforward preservation principle is that a two-story house really should remain a two-story house. It is a very small district, the equivalent of perhaps three squares, that is, with three of the four affected squares being fragmentary. It is also unique for the degree to which alleyscapes and alley dwellings—Hughes Mews on this square (with alley rowhouses near the subject property), and Snow’s Court on the square to the east—contribute to the neighborhood’s character and significance. Anything atop the historic buildings fronting the streets intrudes upon the alleys. Even if concealed from street view, the additional height and awkward massing has a significant visual effect. If we proceed down a road of introducing such additions to Squares 16 and 28, the cumulative effect on the alleys will be detrimental to the scale and character of the district.

There are three-story buildings in the district, but two-story rowhouses predominate, the modest homes of workers. In fact, all the historic buildings on Square 16 were all built at two stories’ height. One, 913 26th Street, had its basement exposed by the cutting down of the front yard, and two—917 Hughes Mews and 912 25th Street—had third stories added, but before the historic

¹ The referral form states that this is a permit application, but no permit application has been opened with the Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs, and the drawings are almost at permit level.

district was established, and one can witness their qualities. These anomalies have not so altered the historic district that the present proposal could be considered consistent with or typical of the district's pattern of development.

The Board has generally not approved additional stories on contributing buildings in Foggy Bottom, with a few exceptions that now serve as cautionary tales. Across I street are a few roof additions, beginning from the 1990s, that were intended to be invisible or nearly so, but failed in that regard, despite the fact that they were placed on deeper houses and deeper lots. The last one approved by the Board, in 2012, was 2512 I Street, in which the additional floor is entirely behind the historic main block. But all such attempts have been failures in the respect that the setback additions and the resultant odd massing of the house are visible from somewhere. But explicit in the discussion of those applications was the notion that those additions had less of an impact upon the character of the district, because they were at the southern edge of the historic district, seen principally from outside it, across a block that has been devastated by redevelopment and highway construction immediately to the south.

In recent years, the Board has turned away concepts for additional stories, at 916 25th Street in 2012, at 2431 I Street in 2014, and atop a rear addition at 2507 I Street in 2018. Even the new construction at 909 Hughes Mews was held to two stories, to be consistent with the heights of the historic dwellings, both street fronting and alley fronting.



Recommendation

HPO recommends that the Board support adding to the rear of the house, replacing or enclosing the porch at both levels, rather than adding a story to a two-story historic house in Foggy Bottom, an incompatibility. If the Board does approve an additional floor, its exterior material should be distinguished from that of the lower floors, and it and any rooftop appurtenances must be required to be invisible from any point in the I Street right-of-way.