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

Landmark/District:	14th Street Historic District	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agenda
Address:	1631 13th Street, NW	<input type="checkbox"/> Consent
Meeting Date:	November 18, 2021	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Concept
Case Number:	21-554	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Alteration
		<input type="checkbox"/> New Construction
		<input type="checkbox"/> Demolition

1606 Strategies/1631 13th St LLC, with plans prepared by R. Michael Cross Architects, seeks conceptual design review for alterations and a third story addition to a two-story brick row building in the 14th Street Historic District.

Property Description

1631 13th Street is a two-story, flat front brick row building with simple Colonial Revival detailing found in its jack-arched window lintels, stone door surround, and flat roof parapet with shallow inset panels. The structure was built in 1936 as a small apartment building, designed by prolific Washington architect George Santmyers.

When the 14th Street Historic District was initially designated in 1992, the building fell outside of the period of significance for the district (which ended in 1920 for architecture) and was classified as non-contributing. When the Board approved an expansion of the district in 2007, the nomination also expanded the end-date of the period of significance to 1940, having the effect of reclassifying this building as a contributing building.

Proposal

The project calls for adding a third story topped by roof decks (one at the front, another at the rear), a front areaway stair to access an excavated basement, and exterior spiral stairs in the interior lightwell and on the rear elevation. The third story would rise just behind the retained brick parapet, expressed as a sloped roof form with a shed dormer containing multi-light casement windows.

The project will be going to the BZA to request a special exception for the existing 70% lot occupancy.

Evaluation

The 14th Street Historic District is noteworthy as one of the city's prime examples of a late 19th and early 20th century streetcar neighborhood, illustrative of the post-Civil War speculative development boom that resulted in a rich collection of architect- and builder-designed houses for a rapidly expanding middle class market and served by commercial services clustered along the

streetcar lines. The expansion of the historic district in 2007 brought in some of the large, multi-story 1920s and 1930s apartment buildings along Rhode Island and Massachusetts avenues and the 1400 block of N Street that were left out of the original district and which represented the increasing urbanization of the neighborhood and acceptance of apartment building living by a middle-class clientele. The 1940 period of significance end-date was selected as the year that the municipal Riggs Market closed, which had served as a central commercial cornerstone for the streetcar neighborhood.

This history is to provide context for the subject building in relation to the historic district. While 1631 falls within the period of significance and could be seen as illustrative of the post-1920s construction of apartment buildings in the neighborhood (albeit on a much smaller scale than the buildings cited in the expansion nomination), it is not particularly representative or architecturally or historically significant. Based on this evaluation, it is suggested that the building warrants somewhat greater flexibility in treatment – specifically for a visible roof addition -- than a more architecturally distinguished or historically representative building.¹

The third floor has been designed to be distinguishable in form, materials and fenestration from the underlying building and to retain its existing parapet roofline. However, its compatibility would be improved if its height was reduced. As shown in the section drawing (H303), the new third floor is slightly more than a foot taller than the underlying floors and the side parapet walls extend another five feet higher to enclose the roof deck. Eliminating the roof deck atop the front portion of the addition (back to the light well) and reducing the height of the side parapet walls would result in a more deferential and appropriately scaled roof form for the building and for its immediate context.

The replacement windows and doors are compatible with the character of the building and district. The Board should note that the first floor window sills will be lowered slightly to improve their proportions relative to the second floor windows. While altering the size of window openings on a primary elevation is not typically a recommended treatment, the alteration is an improvement to the architectural character of the building. Due to the depth of the public space on 13th Street, the front basement areaway can easily be absorbed into the site without resulting in an inappropriate amount of paving or visual prominence to the areaway; the final plans should include a landscape plan that shows how the areaway will be screened.

Recommendation

HPO recommends that the Board approve the general concept for alterations and a roof addition on the condition that the front roof deck be removed and the height of the side parapet walls lowered, and that final approval be delegated to staff.

¹ Applying design standards based on the relative significance of historic properties is stated as a policy in the Historic Preservation Element in the Comprehensive Plan. Policy HP-2.4.4: Suitability to the Historic Context: Apply design standards in a manner that accounts for different levels of historic significance and different types of historic environments. Encourage restoration of historic landmarks while allowing enhancements of equivalent design quality, provided such enhancements do not damage the landmark. Exercise greater restraint in residential historic districts and areas with a clear prevailing development pattern or architectural style. Allow greater flexibility where the inherent character of historic properties can accommodate greater intervention or more dramatic new design, for example, in non-residential areas and in areas without a significant design pattern. 1011.9

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