
HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION

Property Address: **1618 14th Street, NW**
Landmark/District: **14th Street Historic District**

Meeting Date: **December 18, 2014**
H.P.A. Number: **15-064**
Staff Reviewer: **Steve Callcott**

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Owner Stephen Jaffe, represented by attorney Larry Kirsch and structural engineer Peter A. Neubauer, seeks a permit to raze a corner commercial building at 1618 14th Street, NW at the corner of 14th and Corcoran Streets, NW in the 14th Street Historic District.



Property Description and Context

1618 14th Street, NW is two-story corner commercial building. The building is 25' wide x 58' deep occupying a 74' deep lot. It has a pressed brick façade and common brick side and rear walls resting on a brick foundation. The first floor façade once featured a one-story projecting bay and transom windows over the doors, since bricked in, with three double hung windows on the second floor; the façade is capped by an Italianate bracketed wood cornice. The side elevation has three small windows on the first floor and five double hung windows on the second.

No building permit could be found for its construction, but its construction materials and detailing suggest it likely dates from the mid-1870s.¹ While stylistically modest, the

¹ Building permits were first issued in 1877 in Washington; the absence of a permit may indicate that it predates that date.

building is representative of the first post-Civil War wave of development in the emerging mid-city neighborhood. It was most certainly constructed within the period of significance for the 14th Street Historic District (1855-1940) and is listed as a contributing structure in the district nomination.

Project History

The applicant submitted a raze application for the property in 2013 (HPA 13-350) which was withdrawn just prior to the hearing. Rather than pursuing the raze at that time, the applicant agreed to follow the recommendation of the HPO report that called for more fully evaluating a plan for stabilizing, repairing and selectively reconstructing the structure. Hapstak/Demetriou Architects was hired and, over the next year, worked with HPO to develop a plan for bracing and reconstructing most of the exterior walls, constructing a new interior structure (floor and roof assemblies) and installing new windows and storefronts. Permit plans (dated March 28, 2014) were prepared and were approved by HPO in June.

In September, the applicant met with the HPO to inform the office that while the project for bracing and reconstruction may be technically possible, it would result in virtually all of the south, north and west exterior walls having to be reconstructed, and the project was financially infeasible for him to do so. The applicant stated that he felt that he had no other option than to seek demolition of the building, either by making a case to the HPRB that the building has lost structural integrity or by seeking approval from the Mayor's Agent with a claim of unreasonable economic hardship.

Proposal

The applicant proposes to demolish the building due to structural deficiencies and deterioration. As was outlined in a report prepared by structural engineer Peter A. Neubauer in 2013, and further documented by the investigations by Hapstak/Demetriou, the deficiencies include:

Roof structure: The rafters are intact and do not show evidence of deterioration but are undersized. The supporting wood beams and columns are relatively recent, but deficiencies in their installation are identified.

Second floor structure: The second floor structure is undersized and compromised by alterations.

First floor structure: The first floor structural assembly, located essentially at grade and tied into the south exterior brick wall which has absorbed significant moisture, is severely deteriorated due to rot and termite damage. It is also undersized.

Exterior walls: The exterior walls are constructed of only two wythes of brick rather than three, which is more typical of the era. The first floor south side wall is bowing out from the base, resulting in a significant separation crack at the building's southeast corner where it is pulling away from front face brick. While there are tie backs at the second floor level, there is evidence of deflection there as well. The brick foundation and mortar

has deteriorated and eroded from moisture. There are cracks around window lintels and widespread evidence of deteriorated and missing mortar.

Evaluation

The interior structural framing issues – a combination of undersized elements that wouldn't meet occupancy loads, removal and alteration of structural elements without providing adequate restructuring, and deterioration due to rot and termites – are sufficient to require wholesale reconstruction of the floor assemblies. While portions of the roof assembly could conceivably be retained and further reinforced, a substantial portion of it is of relatively recent construction, so retention would have limited preservation value. The Hapstak/Demetriou rehabilitation plans approved by HPO included wholesale removal and replacement of the building's floor and roof framing.

In the previous report to the Board, the examples were cited of masonry structures that had been retained and rehabilitated that involved an exterior wall being reconstructed to address a collapsed or deteriorated situation. These included 2032 17th Street, NW, (an Italianate house in which the side wall partially collapsed and was entirely reconstructed); 251 8th Street, NE (a corner commercial store in which the face brick was entirely reconstructed after a partial collapse); 1313 31st Street, NW (a two-story carriage house in Georgetown that required extensive reconstruction); 2739 P Street, NW and 3257 O Street, NW (rowhouses that required demolition and reconstruction of exterior walls that had separated from their structure); and Montrose Walk at 3008-3044 R Street, NW (in which the stepped parapets and second floor facades were removed and reconstructed to provide lateral reinforcing).

However, as has become evident from further investigation of this building, the situation at 1618 14th Street would likely require reconstruction of both the interior wood structure and essentially all of the north, south and west masonry walls of the building. Whether that work is done in stages (as was proposed by the Hapstak/Demetriou plans) or all at once, the effect is the same, which is that the building requires an extent of reconstruction that is well beyond the examples cited above or what is normally required for continued use of an historic structure. Given its substandard construction and deteriorated condition, and the need to replace all of the interior structure and to reconstruct the majority of its exterior walls, it is reasonable to determine that this building no longer retains structural integrity.

Recommendation

Based on the deteriorated condition of the building's structure and masonry walls, the HPO recommends that the Board find the building at 1618 14th Street, NW to no longer retain sufficient integrity to be qualified as contributing to the historic district and that the raze application be cleared for issuance as consistent with the purposes of the preservation act.