

<b>HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION</b>
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Property Address: **1334 Riggs St NW**  
Landmark/District: **Fourteenth Street Historic District**  
ANC: **2F**

Meeting Date: **March 24, 2015**  
H.P.A. Number: **16-196**  
Staff Reviewer: **Brendan Meyer**

( ) Agenda  
( **x** ) Consent Calendar  
( ) Denial Calendar  
( **x** ) Concept Review  
( ) Permit  
( **x** ) Alteration  
( ) New Construction  
( ) Demolition  
( ) Subdivision

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The applicant, owner Gregory McCarthy, seeks concept review for a partial third floor addition on a two-story brick rowhouse at 1334 Riggs Street NW, a contributing building in the Fourteenth Street Historic District. Plans were prepared by Williams Design Group.

### **Property Description and Context**

The 1300 block of Riggs Street NW consists of two and three story rowhouses built in groups of about five houses each. Three-story rowhouses and mansard rowhouses predominate on the east half of the block while two-story rowhouses occupy the west half. The west end of the square is occupied by a clinic and its associated surface parking lots which expose the subject rowhouse to long lines-of-sight from the west and south. 1334 Riggs was built as part of a row of five houses in 1882 which as a group have a strong degree of integrity. Each house has a matching projecting bay, corbelled brick cornice, and crenellated metal cresting which is a particularly fragile type of ornament often removed or lost from historic rowhouses. On the rear, each house in the row has a two-story chamfered rear wing. The unusual shape of the rear bays gives the row a distinctive presence and unity of form on the alley.

### **Project Summary**

The applicant proposes to add a partial third floor setback from the front façade approximately 14-1/2 feet. The front 18 feet of the addition will rest on top of the main block of the house and the entire rear wing. To accommodate the addition the flat roof and rafters will be removed and the floor of the addition will rest on the existing second floor ceiling joists. This alteration will produce a parapet of four feet at the front. At the rear, the chamfered plan will be extruded up so that the addition is flush with and takes the shape of the existing rear wing. No deck is proposed in conjunction with the addition.

### **Evaluation and Recommendation**

Adding on top of a rowhouse in a compatible manner has two fundamental challenges: how to avoid excessive demolition of the historic house and how to add the additional story when its height and scale is an important contribution to the character of the historic district. As a general rule, a rooftop addition that is set back off the top of the main block of a rowhouse will successfully address both of these challenges by reducing the amount of demolition and hiding the addition from primary views. The more a rooftop addition extends on to the top of the main block of the rowhouse, the more potential it has to be visible and result in excessive demolition. These assessments should be calibrated against the context of the addition. If the context has a

high degree of integrity, additions that might produce a conspicuous change should be reviewed guardedly, but if the context has eroded integrity the addition could fit inconspicuously into its surroundings. In this case, the alley behind 1334 Riggs already hosts similar rooftop additions at 1326 Riggs and 1329 R Street.

Section 305.1 of the regulations lists the several permutations of demolition that shall be considered demolition under the act.<sup>1</sup> The addition proposed for 1334 Riggs would only demolish the roof, and that alone does not constitute demolition. In another positive respect, the addition does not compel the demolition of the significantly shaped rear wing. Chamfered rear wings, both two and three-story versions, are distinct features when found on Victorian rowhouses. Extruding the chamfered shape into the new third floor and using matching materials to make the addition seamless preserves this characteristic.

The addition has been flag tested by staff and the proposed addition will have no significant visibility within the historic district. The site benefits from being one house in from the end of the row. The only alteration that will be visible from in front of the house will be a chimney that needs to be raised to meet code. It will be minimally visible but no more so than several other examples already on the row. The addition will have some visibility to the west from 14<sup>th</sup> Street, but the distance will be such that the new roofline will make no noticeable change to the profile of the end of the row established by 1336 Riggs. The most visible view will be from R Street to the south due to a north-south alley and surface parking lot, but extruding the chamfered rear wing the additional 8'-3" will not be distinctive because of the length of the sight-line and because the additional height will be back dropped by the receding oblique perspective of the rest of the row. This result will be contingent on the wall material of the addition being brick to match that of the chamfered wing below.

### **Recommendation**

*The HPO recommends that the Review Board find the concept for a partial third floor addition setback 14'-6" from the front façade at 1334 Riggs Street NW to be compatible with the character of the historic district, consistent with the purpose of the preservation act, and that final approval be delegated to Staff.*

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<sup>1</sup> District of Columbia Municipal Regulations Title 10A Historic Preservation, Section 305.1(c), "Work considered demolition under the Act shall include, but is not limited to, any of the following, as determined by the Mayor's Agent: ...The removal or destruction of all or a substantial portion of the roof along with all or substantially all of one or more exterior walls;"