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

Landmark/District:	Georgetown Historic District	(x) Agenda
Address:	1217 29th Street NW	
Meeting Date:	September 23, 2021	(x) Alteration/Addition
Case Number:	21-446	(x) Permit

The applicant, Carlos Saenz, agent for property owner ZigZag Capital, requests the Board’s review of a permit application to demolish the original one-story 1870s ell and replace it with a two-story addition.

In May 2020, the Board approved the applicant’s concept (see attached staff report and approved elevation), but the permit drawings are unexpectedly different. The applicant has since opted for a more contemporary and somewhat random approach to the fenestration and has raised a parapet above the roof.

The latter revision is said to be for safety in the vicinity of a roof hatch and rooftop mechanical units, but even a code-required safety railing could be installed much nearer those features without having to heighten the building relative to its neighbors—or possibly only raising it only farther forward on the house. The applicant’s designer/contractor has indicated by email that they would be willing to remove the parapet. However, there remains the issue of the windows.

The project has been before the Board previously because it is outside the jurisdiction of the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts and because the magnitude of the addition required Board review. Because a concept application represents what an applicant says will be built, a significant revision not in keeping with the concept may be a matter for further Board review, rather than for staff delegation, if it is not clearly “routine, minor, *and compatible.*” [*emphasis added*]

The Board’s design guidelines for additions state that “[t]he design of an addition should respect existing proportions of a building and those of neighboring buildings,” a principle that here relates both to the proposed fenestration and the heightening of the parapet.

The guidelines continue: “The review of windows and fenestration on additions... is intended *to promote design compatibility with historic buildings and districts.* It is not intended to discourage *good contemporary design* or creative architectural expression.” [*emphasis added*] Compared to those previously proposed, the revised openings are obviously not as compatible with the size, proportions, spacing or orientation of openings on the historic building or its neighbors, or with the historic district in general.

“If the new addition is not visible from the street or alley,” state the guidelines, “a less compatibly designed addition may be acceptable.”

In accordance with this final principle, HPO was willing to consider picture windows or ribbon windows—and to accept the more-random openings within the side court as a minor issue. After all, an addition that is clearly distinct, yet still sufficiently compatible with its context is a legitimate approach. And there are noncontributing buildings in Georgetown, mostly commercial, with large, horizontal expanses of glass. But a contemporary approach, as in those instances, is normally going to follow some pattern, some proportion, some hierarchy. As drawn, the height of every opening and the height of the solids between them varies and, with the present parapet, the whole has a high “forehead.” In the interest of the guidelines’ promotion of both “compatibility” and “good contemporary design,” staff has advised that the typical modernist way to handle the openings would be to have a repeating rhythm of same-height openings and solids between (as in a contemporary Mount Pleasant addition that appears on the Board’s agenda). A more traditional approach might have a hierarchy of openings, perhaps with the upper window and even the basement shorter, but with similar spacing floor to floor. Unfortunately, the applicant’s designer/contractor was resistant to further revision in this regard, landing the matter back on the Board’s agenda. Had the initial concept shown the same fenestration, these comments would have been offered last year.

Recommendation

HPO recommends that the Board again delegate further review to staff, but with the condition that the applicant first revise the rear elevation, 1) to remove the parapet there in favor of a railing or parapet farther forward, and 2) to better organize the fenestration to create a rhythm and a proportional relationship between the windows.

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

Landmark/District: **Georgetown Historic District** (x) Consent calendar
Address: **1217 29th Street NW**
Meeting Date: **May 28, 2020** (x) Concept
Case Number: **20-248** (x) Alteration/addition

The applicant, Carlos Saenz, agent for property owner Claudia Mihok, requests the Board’s review of a concept for the replacement of a one-story kitchen wing of this two-story 1870s residence with a two-story addition of a larger footprint.

The proposal calls for no changes to the front of the house, although the front entrance would benefit from a reversal of its mid-twentieth-century “Colonialization,” and the windows are not of the original configuration. The fact that none of the work would be visible from a public thoroughfare is responsible for the project’s appearance before the Board, as the work is thus not subject to review by the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts.



The wing to be removed appears to be original, mirrored in the twin house next door. The drawings set lacks a proposed floor plan that depicts the extent of demolition to the rear wall of the main block, but the site plan makes clear that the wing would be effectively demolished by the addition of a second floor, the extension of the rear ten feet, and the infill of the court that presently protects a central rear window. Still, the Board has found such a level of demolition—but not much more—to be sufficiently compatible as retaining the greater part of the historic building. While it would be better to retain more of the original windows on the rear, the Board has approved the removal or encapsulation of entire rear walls as appropriate adaptation of properties.

As in most cases, a two-story addition is compatible to a two-story house, and the narrow ell retains some sense of the original. The resulting whole would be comparable to other houses on this row of abutting properties.

One thing that the elevations have not accounted for is the necessary slope of the roof, which would presumably drain toward the court. This, and samples of the proposed brick are some of the more significant issues for subsequent staff review.

Recommendation

HPO recommends that the Board approve the addition and related demolition and alterations in concept as compatible with the character of the historic district and sufficiently retentive of the fabric and character of this contributing property. HPO further recommends that the project be delegated to staff for further review.