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

Landmark/District: **Georgetown Historic District** (x) Consent
Address: **1226-1234 36th Street NW**

Meeting Date: **October 26, 2017** (x) Subdivision
Case Number: **18-003**

Staff Reviewer: **Tim Dennée** (x) Concept

The applicant, Anne H. Adams, agent for the property owner, Georgetown University, requests the Board’s review of a subdivision to consolidate the lots upon which the above buildings stand, in order to connect the six buildings. The subdivision is necessitated by the fact that the property owner has sought a permit for work at the properties and a certificate of occupancy for the connected spaces for use as a restaurant.

The Board is reviewing the subdivision because the HPO staff is authorized to administratively approve only “minor or insignificant lot changes” that are compatible.¹ It is difficult to construe as minor or insignificant the erasure of five common lot lines, resulting in the joining of six historic buildings.

Indeed, the Board has reviewed combinations of even two buildings, in Georgetown and elsewhere, to consider the likely consequences. One pertinent question is, does combining the lots allow more development potential that puts pressure on the historic buildings? Another is, how much alteration happens to the exterior when multiple buildings effectively become one, and how much demolition will occur in order to combine the buildings functionally? In general, the Board and staff have tried to minimize the demolition of party walls and connected structure, and have striven to maintain the buildings’ separate identities as read from the exterior. The compatibility of a subdivision largely depends on the compatibility of the project that necessitates it.

The applicant has not provided the project drawings to illustrate the purpose of the subdivision, which would in most cases mean that the application lacks sufficient information for Board review. In this instance, however, the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts and the Historic Preservation Office had already reviewed the project for its effects on the exterior and for demolition to the party and abutting walls. The first-floor demolition plan associated with that permit is attached for reference, because most of the work will naturally occur at the main-floor commercial spaces.

¹ The U.S. Commission of Fine Arts, which shares review jurisdiction in Georgetown pursuant to the Old Georgetown Act, does not have jurisdiction over subdivisions.

Evaluation

The subject properties presently consist of two assessment and taxation lots, which overlay earlier lots of record. But these “A&T” lots reflect a previous internal combination of some of the buildings. While the circumstances of these connections are unclear at this point, a Sanborn insurance atlas updated to 1997 indicates that the row that was formerly 1224, 1226 and 1228 36th had by then been joined by a passage, as had 1232 and 1234.

The greatest amount of demolition will occur at the side walls of the Victorian former house in the center of the complex, 1230 36th Street, to provide circulation across that building. But it is not extensive enough to constitute demolition of that building “in significant part.”

The work itself was found compatible and has already been permitted, despite the subdivision not occurring first. And the property remains under the jurisdiction of the District’s preservation statute and the Old Georgetown Act, which provide protection from inappropriate exterior alterations and extensive further demolition.

Recommendation

HPO recommends that the Board approve the subdivision concept as compatible with the character of the historic district, delegating to staff the clearance of the subdivision plat.