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

Landmark/District: **Georgetown Historic District** (x) Agenda
Address: **1513 Wisconsin Avenue NW**

Meeting Date: **May 28, 2015**
Case Number: **15-275** (x) Addition

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

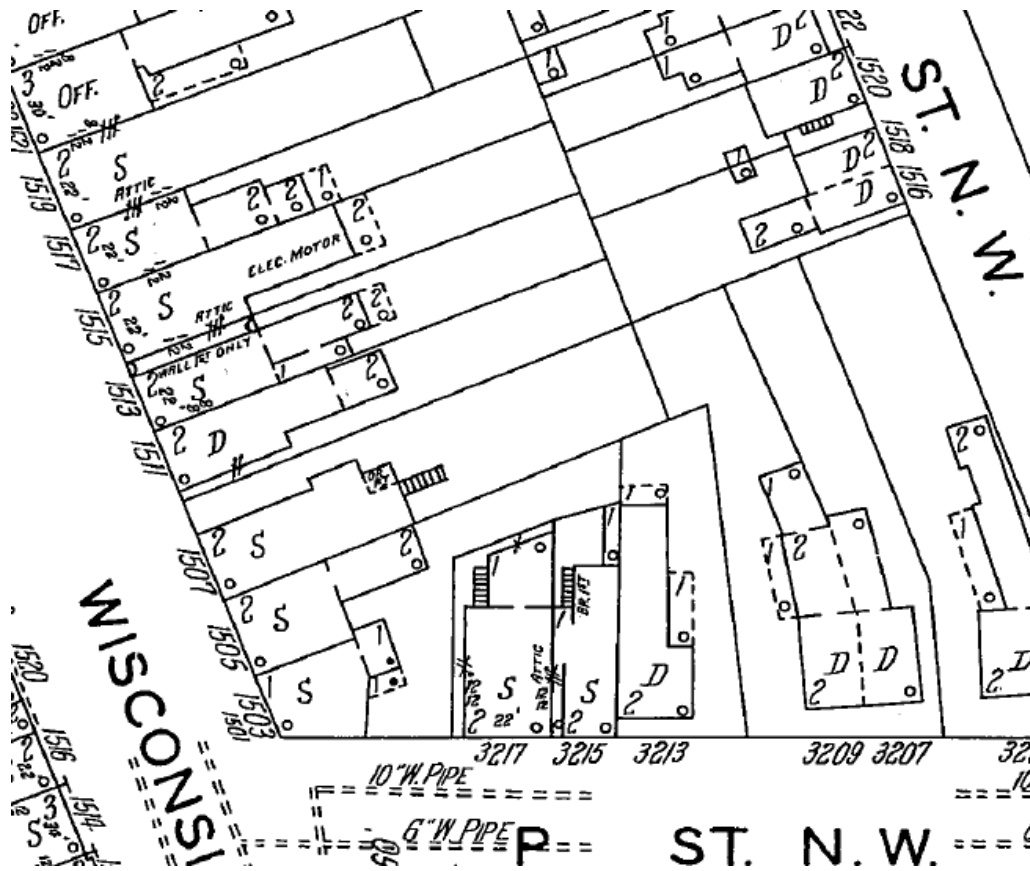
The applicant, property owner 1513 Wisconsin Ave LLC (with architect Stephen DuPont, Jr.), requests the Board’s review of a concept to construct a roof addition and a three-level rear addition to this two-story brick 1880s building. Like many of the commercial buildings on upper Wisconsin, this one was constructed as a dwelling, and its ground floor was repurposed later, in this case, during the first quarter of the twentieth century.



1513 and 1511 Wisconsin Avenue NW

This project would retain much of the building’s rear wing—building on top and behind—but would demolish the former two-story porch at the rear of the wing as well as a large, mid-twentieth-century shed at the rear of the lot. The addition would extend farther back than the

present wing, becoming even with the rear of the addition at 1511 Wisconsin, constructed more than 20 years ago.



The 1924 Sanborn insurance atlas indicates that the property was then a store.

Background

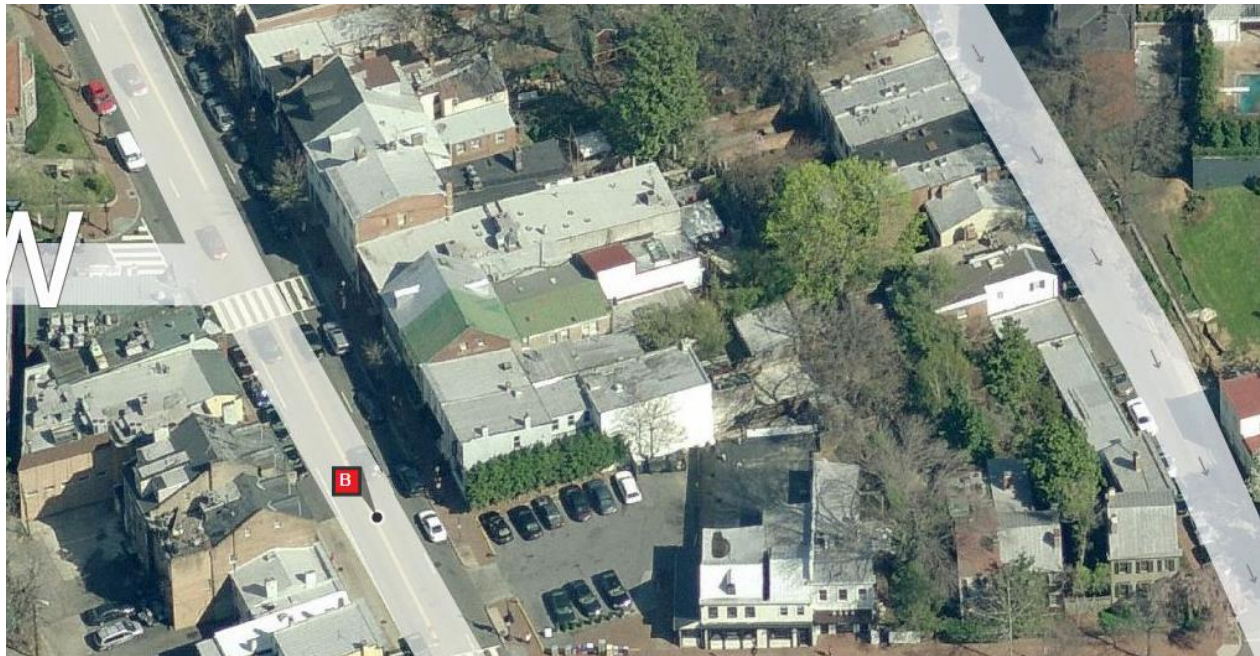
The project is undergoing review by the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts, which approved the concept in March but requested, prior to the submission of a permit application, that the applicant show further design development and particularly further study of the composition of the north elevation and the design of the pergola over the side court. The Old Georgetown Board reviewed the project in November, March, April and this month, and requested revisions, most notably, a reduction in the height of the addition and changes to its massing.¹ The Historic Preservation Office staff has contributed comments.

The reason the Board has the opportunity to review this project is that Advisory Neighborhood Commission 2E officially requested that it be referred. The specific reason given is that the Old Georgetown Board's March meeting was postponed one day because of a snowstorm that closed

¹ The case had been initially filed for the September meeting of OGB, but because of comments expressed at the Advisory Neighborhood Commission meetings, the applicant chose to withdraw from both the September and December OGB meetings in order to revise the plans.

government offices, and that this did not allow sufficient notice to the neighbors who had planned to attend to express objections.

The preservation law and regulations require that projects subject to Commission of Fine Arts jurisdiction be referred to the Commission for its recommendation in accordance with the Old Georgetown Act.² They do not require the HPRB to review the same projects, but they allow for any application to be referred to the Board at the discretion of the “Mayor’s Agent.”³ The Board may decide “whether a duplicate review would be appropriate” and then whether it has comments on the plans.⁴ The HPRB and the HPO staff have generally shown deference to Commission recommendations.



Evaluation

When initially presented, the proposed addition was too tall and came forward onto the building’s main block, which would make it too prominent from the west and south and require too much demolition. Indeed, these were the HPO staff’s principal comments at the time, consistent with the HPRB’s guidelines for rooftop additions and taller rear additions.⁵ These concerns were shared by the Old Georgetown Board. While perhaps not an ideal massing or height relative to the main block, the revised plans do seem consistent with the Board’s standards for similarly situated buildings in other historic districts. The addition would not be visible from

² D.C. Official Code §§ 6-1104(b), 6-1105(b) and 6-1107(b), and 10C DCMR § 316.1.

³ 10C DCMR § 316.2.

⁴ 10C DCMR § 316.2(e).

⁵ In its November comments to the Old Georgetown Board, the HPO staff wrote “The HPRB also typically applies a rule of thumb that rear additions that rise taller than the main block should commence that greater height wholly behind the main block, rather than on top of it. It may be possible to add a possible third floor to a rear addition that might be screened by the rear addition of 1511 Wisconsin.”

the front of the building. A little bit would be visible from a section of P Street, seen over the rear wing (but not the rear addition) of 1511 Wisconsin⁶ (see Sheet A4.4).



Because of the zoning and the historic use of the buildings in the commercial corridor, there is a pattern of deeper additions. The proposed addition would not make the subject building the deepest on this block, but it would be as deep as 1511 Wisconsin next door.

The principal community objection to the addition seems to be that its height and depth would cause visual impacts on residential properties to the east. Such concerns may be justified, as there is no reason a neighbor ought to prefer the proposal, despite the fact that those homes stand on slightly higher ground. Yet, the proposal does not appear to be out of character with the commercial half of the square, and if Georgetown's residential areas are indeed to be carefully protected, then development demand would better be directed to the commercial corridor where three stories is not unusual. And this addition steps down to the rear, squeezing the ceiling heights and sinking the lowest level below grade so that its three levels are equivalent to the height of the two-story addition at 1511 (see Sheets A4.3 and A4.4).

Accepting the present size and massing, there are still ways the addition could be improved from a preservation perspective. While not demolishing most of the rear wing, the addition so seamlessly adds to it that the original episode of construction is lost within it. It would be better to have some visual break at the third story and at the rear of the wing. Toward the same end of

⁶ The rear wing of 1511 reaches a point taller than the present height of the roof of 1513 abutting it, meaning that it will screen a few feet of the addition even in elevation, before one takes into account the angle of ground-level views. The rear addition at 1511 would cut off views farther back.

retaining the old and distinguishing it from the new, the design would be improved if the original rear wall of the wing were not wholly demolished (see Sheet A3.1.1). It would also be improved with the elimination of the “pergolas” over the side yards or courts, but short of a variance, that zoning gimmick is necessary to avoid the wing’s side walls being relocated, i.e., demolished, in order to satisfy side-yard requirements. Of course, it should be noted that little of the side walls of the wing and additions would be visible from any vantage point beyond the narrow courts on either side. And on their own, such suggestions do not necessitate the Board taking up the matter.

There is at least one revision not shown in the drawings, made at the time of the latest Old Georgetown Board review: the canopy along the north side wall, forward of the entrance canopy on that side (see Sheet A4.1.1), will be eliminated.

Recommendation

If the Board determines that a duplicate review is appropriate in this matter, the HPO recommends that the Board:

- *recommend approval of the concept as compatible and therefore consistent with the purposes of the preservation law;*
- *consider the HPO recommendations above as possible conditions of that approval; and*
- *refer further review to the Commission of Fine Arts and staff.*