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

Landmark/District:	Georgetown Historic District	(x) Agenda
Address:	1517 Wisconsin Avenue NW	
Meeting Date:	July 22, 2021	(x) Addition
Case Number:	21-393	(x) Concept

The applicant, Jonathan Eric Gronning, architect and agent for property owner 1517 Wisconsin Avenue LLC, requests the Board's review of a concept to demolish the rear wing and rear additions of this Federal-period building to construct a deep, three-story addition. The project is before the Board, rather than the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts, because the work would not be visible from a public thoroughfare and is thus not within the jurisdiction of the Old Georgetown Act. There will be no work at the front of the building, which would be subject to CFA review.

Demolition

With its mirror twin at 1515 Wisconsin, this building was erected as a single-family house in 1819. Commercial use over many decades has resulted in a significant loss of integrity, with additions, alterations of openings, new finishes, and interior and exterior demolition. According to historic maps, the rear addition postdates 1959, outside the historic district's period of significance. As for the original rear wing, little more than the roof framing and its south party wall remain; much of the rest of its walls, interior partitions, kitchen chimney, and finishes are gone.

While it is conceivable to demolish both the wing and its addition, the utmost care should go toward the retention of what is left of the Federal-period main block. The rear wall at the first floor is gone, but it appears to remain on the second. As important is keeping the rear eave, free of the new addition. Any connection must be below the eave—which the revised drawings indicate. Although this relationship will be obscured by the addition itself, it is an important principle to retain the form and fabric of a two-century-old building.

Addition

The most logical approach would be an addition that mirrors that of the recently reviewed 1515, which is to wrap around the ell and rise behind. But the desire for more bulk has its own logic. This is to be a full three stories, albeit stories with floor-to-floor heights about as low as practical, comparable in size to a recent addition at 1513 Wisconsin. The total height is significantly lower than the roof ridge of the main block; unlike some historic districts, Georgetown has not welcomed taller rear additions and added floors at contributing buildings, even if concealed from public view. These commercial properties back up to residential—two-story houses on a higher grade. A three-story building does not seem out of place in this context, although the addition brings the rear of the subject building nearer the residential.

Both the Board and the Commission of Fine Arts have supported deeper additions on commercial corridors where the zoning allows as much as 100-percent lot occupancy, largely because the commercial uses generated a pattern of deep additions prior to designation of the historic districts. The Board has also been supportive of more bulk when it is not visible from a public street. As the photographs suggest, most of the commercial buildings in this square have been extended well toward the rear lot lines, with 1519 and 1525 Wisconsin nearly maxed out. 1513 Wisconsin received a similar-sized addition in 2016, and next-door 1515 has one, slightly smaller, under review.

The addition terminates in a plain rear elevation, to be clad with brick. No side elevations are depicted. Although most of the addition will ultimately be sandwiched between neighboring additions, the brick should return on the sides to a depth where the material will no longer be visible over the abutting structures. As 1515 Wisconsin is not far along in review, there could be timing issues that affect the treatment of the abutting walls.

Recommendation

HPO recommends that the Board approve the concept and delegate further review to staff, with the conditions that: 1) structural demolition and exterior alterations at the main block be kept to a minimum; 2) the addition attach to the main block below its eave; 3) the exposed walls of the addition be clad in a brick to be approved by staff.