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

Landmark/District:	Georgetown Historic District	() Agenda
Address:	1662 34th Street NW	(x) Consent
Meeting Date:	October 27, 2016	(x) Addition
Case Number:	16-617	(x) Alterations
Staff Reviewer:	Tim Dennée	(x) Permit

The applicant, Robert M. Gurney, architect and agent for property owners Jeffery and Kristin Sharp, requests the Board's review of a permit application to construct a two-story rear addition, garden walls, a narrow pool and a patio at the rear of this two-story, brick, circa 1850 house.

Background

As the work would not be visible from a public thoroughfare, it is not subject to review by the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts. An earlier version of the project had been reviewed by the CFA in concept, but it was revised to retain the old chimneys, which were presumably the only publicly visible elements. The CFA had recommended that the height of the addition be reduced to be subordinate to the massing of the historic main block.

Of a footprint more than 300 square feet, the addition is too large to be delegated to HPO staff review.

Advisory Neighborhood Commission 2E had the opportunity to review the project at its October meeting and voted not to adopt a resolution on the matter. The Board has received letters of support from three other property owners on the block, although none are immediate neighbors. The Board has received no objections to the project.

Proposal

There would be no work at the front of the house. The interior would be largely gutted, although most of the floor framing would remain. Most of the rear wall of the main block would be removed, although it has been somewhat altered previously. A basement-level ell, not original to the house, would be demolished as well.

The two-story rear addition would be thoroughly contemporary, rectilinear, with black corrugated-metal siding and a nearly all-glass rear elevation. The gross enclosed area would be about 300 square feet, but the walls and roof would project two and a half feet beyond that elevation, principally for sunlight control. The addition would pop up about three feet above the house's eave, for an eleven-foot floor-to-ceiling height in the master bedroom. For this reason, it would be joined to the historic house by a hyphen that meets the latter at the eave. New mechanical equipment would be tucked behind this upward extension.

The rear yard would be bounded by a six-foot-tall brick wall. A bluestone patio behind the house would give way to a narrow pool (six by 33 feet), lawn, and perimeter plantings.

Evaluation

A six-foot-tall garden wall is compatible with the context and would screen the other landscape elements, which are themselves typical of Georgetown's rear yards today. The application could use additional specifics about these hardscape elements, however, particularly the wall.

The addition is plainly contemporary, although it generally follows a typical nineteenth-century pattern of a long, narrow rear wing, which would leave exposed some of the main block's rear wall. The nearly flat roof is not all that different from low-pitched, side-shedding roofs on many ells, which are often perceptible only on the rear elevation.

The addition is lower than the maximum height of the main block's roof. While it would be more compatible if more subordinate—lowered to the house's eave height—the juxtaposition of the two masses is not really uncomfortable because of the hyphen and the limited vantage points.

Although it has an unusually deep lot, the house's depth would be comparable to that of the house at 1664 34th, next door, and the whole is smaller than the unusual L-shaped plan of 1660 34th, on the opposite side, which has been added to multiple times.

The exterior materials are less compatible than usual for a Georgetown addition, but the design guidelines do not discourage contemporary expressions and allow for a "wider range of materials... if an addition is located on a rear elevation, and not visible from a public street." The fenestration, too, is unusual.

Overall, the project is on the borderline of compatibility, but its location on a narrow lot between comparably sized homes allows it little impact the character of the neighborhood.

Recommendation

HPO recommends that the Board approve the permit as sufficiently compatible with the character of the historic district, with the conditions that the main block is not further demolished and that more information is furnished about the rear-yard hardscape elements.