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

Landmark/District:	Georgetown Historic District	(x) Agenda
Address:	1728 Wisconsin Avenue NW	
Meeting Date:	October 5, 2017	(x) Addition
Case Number:	17-446	(x) Demolition
Staff Reviewer:	Tim Dennée	(x) Permit

The applicant, George Gordon, architect and agent for property owner 1728 Wisconsin Avenue LLC (with INLE Development), requests permit review for construction of third-floor and rear additions to this two-story building. The project calls for the demolition of most of the building except for the front and the party walls. A section on sheet A011 suggests that a little bit of the first floor and roof may be retained, and somewhat more of the second-floor framing.

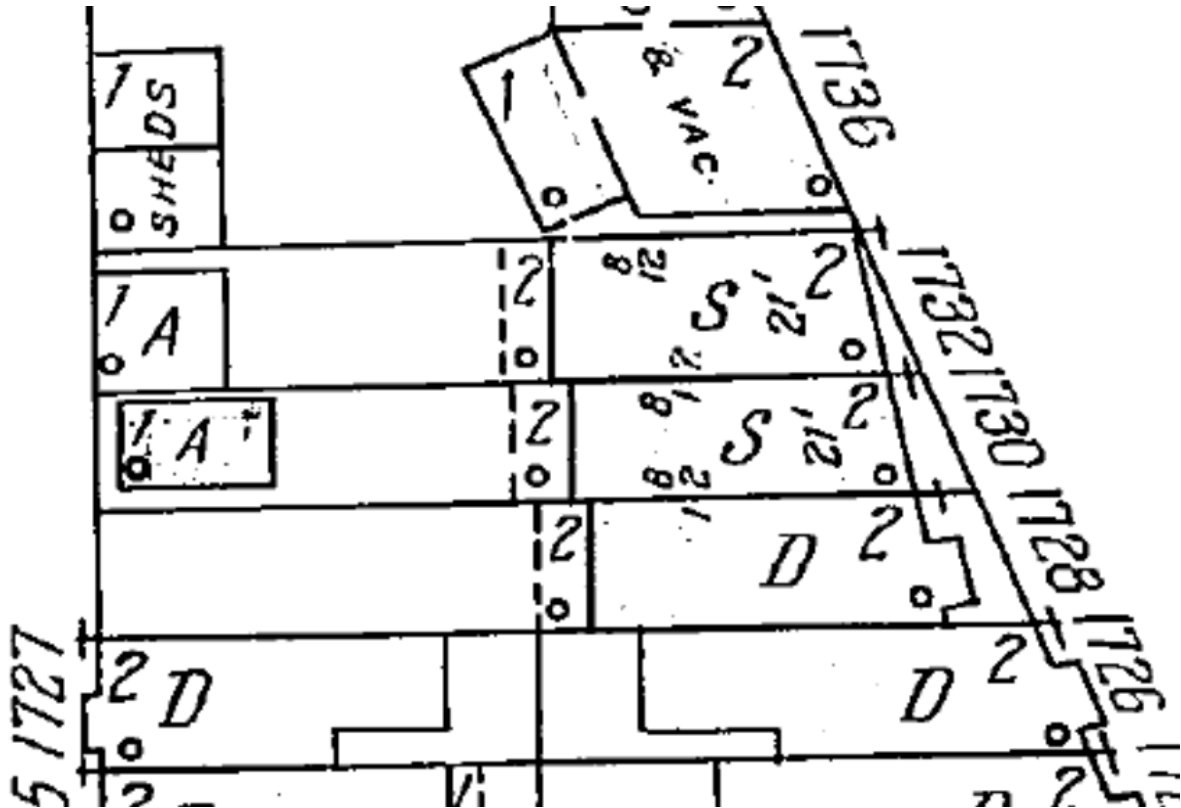
The remnant of a small row of houses, the building was designed by T. Franklin Schneider and erected by F.H. Duchay in 1899 for Mrs. S.P. Okie, a small-time developer of attached homes in Georgetown and Dupont Circle who apparently rented them out. This building remained principally a dwelling until the late 1950s, about which time the one-story shopfront was erected to accommodate National Business Systems, Inc., a dealer in German miniature tape recorders. In 1965 it served as a branch of D.C. National Bank while a new branch was being constructed across the street, then was again a seller of audiotape equipment until the early 1980s.

As a Georgetown project, the concept was first reviewed by the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts in late 2014, but the Commission did not make a recommendation after requesting revisions. Those revisions were addressed this past year in a new concept application, and the Commission has just recommended in favor of a permit. HPO has commented at each review, objecting to a couple of salient issues, the amount of demolition proposed and the character and prominence of the upward addition.

Demolition

Section 305.3 of the historic preservation regulations state that “[t]he filing of an application for a demolition permit shall be considered to incorporate a request for determination whether the property contributes to the character of a historic landmark or district pursuant to § 704 of this title.” We do not have an application expressly for demolition; the demolition is depicted incidentally in an application that is characterized as “Interior remodeling with an addition to the rear and a third story addition.” But the demolition of exterior walls and roof makes unclear what would then constitute the interior, and the rear addition takes the place of an older one, which is to be lost. One may be skeptical of the demolition-section drawings on sheet A011, at least for the reason that the existing roof is not flat, as shown, but slopes rearward, meaning that it cannot serve as the third floor without significant modification. It remains to be seen whether other floor framing indicated for retention will actually be retained.

It is important to make a determination of whether the property is a contributing one. Although it dates to 1899, it has had rear (circa 1930) and front (circa 1958) additions. The former is within the historic district's period of significance and is a typical sort of adaptation. The latter postdates the period of significance and diminished the property's historic integrity by affecting its design, entailing the removal of historic fabric, and affecting the property's integrity of feeling and association by somewhat obscuring its historic use. Yet, the 1899 building is still mostly present, and its façade is still prominent as its principal character-defining feature.



A detail from the 1928 Sanborn insurance atlas depicting 1728 Wisconsin and its neighbors. At that time, the building was still identified as a dwelling. The map indicates that the rear ell is a slightly later addition, as it appears in a 1937 Baist real estate atlas.

According to the historic preservation regulations (§ 305.1), “[w]ork considered demolition under the Act shall include, but is not limited to, any of the following, as determined by the Mayor’s Agent:

- a) The removal or destruction of any façade;
- b) The removal or destruction of all or a substantial portion of the structural components of the building, such as structural walls, floor assemblies, and roofs;
- c) The removal or destruction of all or a substantial portion of the roof along with all or substantially all of one or more exterior walls;
- d) The removal or destruction of all or substantially all of an entire wing or appendage of the building, such as a rear ell, unless the wing lacks physical or historic integrity, or is not a character-defining feature;

- e) The removal or destruction of a substantial portion that includes character-defining features of the building or structure;
- f) The removal or destruction of all or a substantial portion of a designated interior landmark, unless the elements to be removed lack physical or historic integrity, or are not character-defining features; or
- g) Any removal or destruction requiring a partial demolition or raze permit under the D.C. Construction Code, including any demolition of non-bearing walls, interior finishes, or other interior non-bearing elements within a building where an interior space has been designated as a historic landmark.”

The proposed demolition certainly meets the above criteria **b** and **c**. Technically, it also meets criterion **d**, as a wing dating to the period of significance would be removed, but as that structure postdates the construction of the house, its removal may be acceptable within the context of a compatible project.

With regard to demolition, the preservation law directs that “[n]o permit shall be issued unless the Mayor finds that issuance of the permit is necessary in the public interest.” (D.C. Official Code § 6-1104(e)) Among the purposes of the law intended to serve the public interest is the “protection, enhancement and perpetuation of improvements... of [historic] districts” and specifically, while adapting them, the retention and enhancement of “those properties which contribute to the character of the historic district.” (D.C. Official Code § 6-1101) The main block would be at least half gone, with whatever framing shown to remain being questionable. If its adaptation causes a contributing property to be insufficiently protected, retained or enhanced, then the project is contrary to the purposes of the preservation law and should not be permitted.

HPO has requested that the architect take a hard look at retaining more of the structural elements and exterior walls. It should be noted, for instance, that the original rear wall (the rear of the main block) is to be demolished, only to have a new wall constructed in its place. Even piers which help support the façade are to be removed.

Addition

HPO has previously commented on the additional floor, pointing out that it is too prominent and that the mansard lends a false history to the building. With front and rear additions, a third floor nearly completes the swallowing of the historic building. A rooftop addition should be set back farther to minimize its visibility, and the proposed one will be responsible for the demolition of the roof. This project continues a trend of recent upward additions on one- and two-story buildings in the Georgetown commercial district that do not necessarily follow this Board’s guidance.

The Board has the option of deferring to the Commission’s recommendation regarding the addition, in light of the alterations that have already occurred at the modest building and in acknowledgment of the taller buildings on either side, but only if the demolition is reduced.

Recommendation

HPO recommends that the Board recommend against clearance of the permit application, principally because the proposed demolition is too great. The third-story addition is also generally incompatible. As proposed, the work is contrary to the purposes of the preservation law.