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

Landmark/District:	Georgetown Historic District	(x) Agenda
Address:	2915 and 2917 Dumbarton Street NW	(x) Subdivision
Meeting Date:	July 28, 2022	(x) Alteration/addition
Case Number:	22-368	(x) Concept

The applicant, Outerbridge Horsey, architect and agent for property owner Marilyn Melkonian, requests Board review of a concept to subdivide to consolidate Lots 827 and 838 in Square 1241 into one lot of record in order to connect the buildings and undertake other alterations. The subject property is a two-unit row built for feed store proprietor David Jackson in 1881.

Relatively few Georgetown projects appear before the Historic Preservation Review Board, because the preservation law does not require projects within the jurisdiction of the Old Georgetown Act to be reviewed both by both the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts and this Board. In this case, however, the Commission has determined that the proposed work would not be visible from a public thoroughfare and, therefore, is not subject to review by the Commission. More important, the project involves a proposed subdivision, and subdivisions do not fall within the purview of the Old Georgetown Act.

There would be no alterations to the front of the buildings, retaining the sense of the two-unit row. A circa-2001 one-story addition would be demolished at the rear of 2917, making way for alterations there. Those alterations would be the creation of very large openings containing French doors and fixed windows, plus the construction of a deck or balcony across the rear elevation of the two buildings. Such a contemporary treatment of openings has been approved at other properties in Georgetown and elsewhere, and having mirror-image openings in each building is consistent with their history of being both separate and united. Even the deck does not too much muddy the distinction between the historic units; it is visually divided by the stair and is analogous to repeating porches at the rear of so many traditional homes.

So, the proposed combination of lots and buildings has few significant consequences for the exterior character. The rear elevation has been altered previously and, with the exception of the loss of the original window openings at the main floor of 2917, the proposal is at least as close to the original design and intent as the present building. The volume actually shrinks, taking the row toward its initial footprint.

The biggest loss is to the party wall. In addition to the loss of some partitions, finishes, stairs and fireplaces outside the Board's typical purview, more than half of this bearing wall would be demolished, partly to create large rooms at the back of the house, and partly to create a central light well beneath a new skylight.

Perhaps the more regrettable loss is the demolition for the sake of more light. Understandable within rowhouses, yes, but it seems it could be achieved without continuing the structural demolition forward of the midpoint of the building(s). It is important that the existing floor framing is supported by new structure, of course, to avoid demolishing the building(s) in significant part.

Recommendation

HPO recommends that the Board approve the concept for the project, including the necessary subdivision, as consistent with the purposes of the historic preservation law, and that the Board delegate to staff further review.