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

Landmark/District: **Georgetown Historic District** () Agenda
Address: **3241-3245 M Street NW** (x) Consent

Meeting Date: **September 22, 2016** (x) Subdivision
Case Number: **16-559**

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

The applicant, Matthew Wexler, agent for property owner 2441 Bond Street Equities LLC, requests the Board's review of a subdivision application to combine two lots in order to combine internally the two commercial buildings thereon.

The building at 3145 M was likely constructed during the second quarter of the nineteenth century, and it may have had mixed commercial and residential uses from the beginning. It received a new façade in 1900, however, when a two-story commercial building with matching façade, 3241 M, was constructed immediately to its east.

The Board reviews subdivisions to consolidate lots in anticipation of their potential consequences. One pertinent question is, does the subdivision allow more development potential putting pressure on the historic buildings? In this case, the potential increase in bulk contemplated by the zoning regulations for the combined properties would appear to be equal to the sum of that for each of the two constituent lots.¹ Given their contributing status within a National Historic Landmark district, it is very unlikely that either or both would be approved for large additions in any case.

The other important considerations here are, how much demolition must or will occur in order to combine the buildings functionally, and how much alteration happens to the exterior when two buildings effectively become one? In the past, the Board and staff have tried to minimize the demolition of party walls and connected structure, and have striven to maintain the buildings' separate identities as read from the exterior. In this instance, the exterior is again to have two similar, if not quite matching storefronts (under review by the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts), the masonry facades will not be touched, and the gable roof and dormers will remain at 3245.

With regard to demolition, it is unclear when exactly the party or abutting wall at the ground floor disappeared. A 20-year-old Sanborn insurance map indicates that the two commercial spaces were at least connected then. A recent permit application for interior work suggested that the space had previously been divided by partitions sandwiching steel columns.

¹ There are economies and efficiencies to redevelopment on a larger footprint, however, a fact that could promote more intensive redevelopment of two buildings joined.

Without new structural demolition or dramatic exterior changes anticipated or likely, the combination of the two lots and buildings is sufficiently compatible with the historic character of the properties and of the historic district, as long as the party wall at the second story is mostly retained.

Recommendation

HPO recommends that the Board approve the subdivision to combine the two lots as compatible with the character of the historic district and consistent with the purposes of the Act.