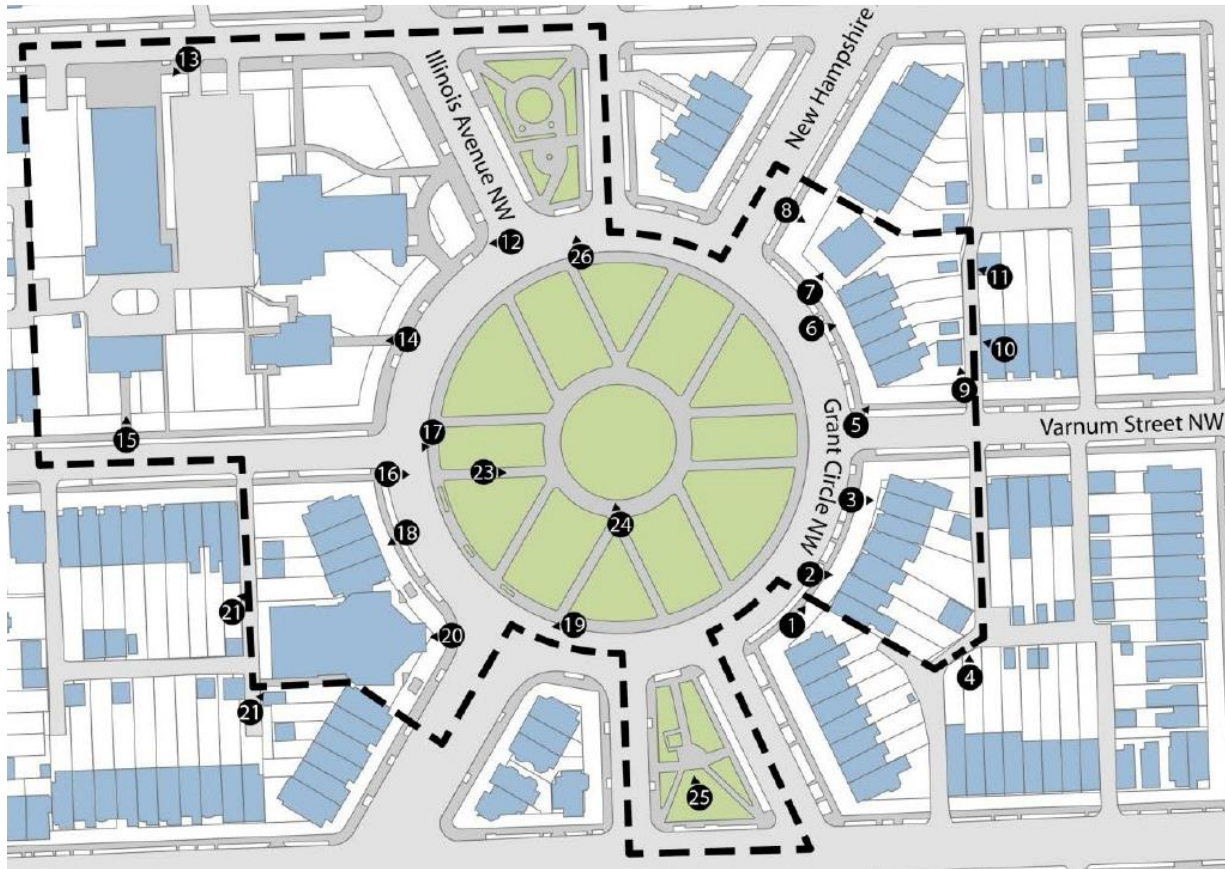

HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION

Property Address: **16 Grant Circle NW**
Landmark/District: **Grant Circle Historic District**
ANC: **4C**

Meeting Date: **June 25, 2015**
H.P.A. Number: **#15-417**
Staff Reviewer: **Brendan Meyer**

☒ Agenda
☐ Consent Calendar
☐ Denial Calendar
☒ Permit Review
☐ Alteration
☐ New Construction
☐ Demolition
☒ Subdivision
☐ Archaeology

The applicant, Job Woodill on behalf of owner 16 Grant Circle NW LLC, seeks approval of a subdivision in Square 3244 of Lot 801 (16 Grant Circle NW) to divide the lot into three new lots. Supporting documentation and a site analysis were prepared by the R. Michael Cross Design Group.



Property Description and Context

The Board reviewed a landmark application for a free-standing house on this site in March 2015; the house was found not to meet the designation criteria and it has subsequently been razed. In April 2015 the Board approved the Grant Circle Historic District and Lot 801 (now vacant) is located within the district.

The Grant Circle Historic District, consisting of landscaped triangles and the circle, 16 rowhouses and two religious properties, represents a striking urban space in a suburban residential neighborhood and embodies distinguishing characteristics of urban planning and design. The circle is a major urban and

visual feature of the Petworth neighborhood and a significant element in the layout of the city's streets beyond the original Federal City (L'Enfant Plan). The houses follow a traditional rowhouse form of early-twentieth-century Washington. They are two-story brick dwellings set upon raised basements and covered with false mansard roofs with dormer windows. They all feature single-story porches that span the facades, and offer decorative details that are derivative of the Colonial Revival and Italian Renaissance Revival styles.

Lot 801 is the east corner lot where New Hampshire Avenue intersects the north half of Grant Circle (labeled #7 on the included map).

Proposal

The proposed subdivision would divide Lot 801 into three new lots each with approximately 20 feet of frontage along New Hampshire Avenue. The southernmost new lot would have frontage along the circle and would be a type of corner lot in the same way that 4306 New Hampshire, 4209 New Hampshire and 4215 Illinois currently exist on the circle.

Evaluation

One of the purposes of the preservation act is to ensure that the subdivision of lots is compatible with the character of the historic district. In a small historic district like Grant Circle, where the geometry, scale and hierarchy of the circle is the most significant feature of the district, the size and orientation of building lots to the circle is clearly an important consideration.

The applicant has submitted a detailed and persuasive analysis that shows the proposed subdivision to be compatible with the historic district. This analysis, which includes the building lots on Grant Circle and its radiating streets and avenues, shows a clear pattern. Rowhouse lots on the circle with only one frontage are oriented to the circle. Lots with frontages on both the circle and a street (Varnum or 5th) have short frontages along the circle and longer frontages along the street. Lots with frontages on both the circle and an avenue (New Hampshire or Illinois) have short frontages oriented to the avenue and wide frontages along the circle. The applicant's proposal follows this pattern, with short frontages oriented to the avenue and the long frontage of the southern-most lot facing the circle.

The former free-standing house on Lot 801, while it had been the oldest structure on the circle, was described by staff during the historic district nomination process as an anomaly amongst the rowhouses of the neighborhood. In a similar fashion, the current dimensions and configuration of Lot 801 are unlike any other rowhouse lot and is not characteristic or typical of the historic district. While the demolition of 16 Grant Circle was regrettable for the historic district, the proposed subdivision of its lot for rowhouse construction is not inappropriate or incompatible. Arranging the lots in anticipation of front facades facing New Hampshire Avenue is consistent with other houses along the avenues of the historic district, and the proposed width of approximately 20 feet is within the range of widths of surrounding lots which vary between 18 and 24 feet.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Board find the subdivision of Lot 801, Square 3244 into three lots oriented to face New Hampshire Avenue to be compatible with the character of the historic district.