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

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Landmark/District:	<b>Mullett Rowhouses</b>	(x) Agenda
Address:	<b>2519 and 2525 Pennsylvania Avenue NW</b>	(x) Subdivision
Meeting Date:	<b>April 22, 2021</b>	(x) Addition
Case Number:	<b>21-222</b>	(x) Concept

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The applicant, Patrick Bloomfield (P.T. Blooms LLC), agent for property owner 2525 Penn LLC (and with PGN Architects), requests the Board’s review of a conceptual application to construct an addition at the fifth floor, a penthouse and roof deck, and an addition behind the center and western units of the three-unit, 1889 Mullett Rowhouses, a landmark named for its architect, Alfred B. Mullett, former supervising architect of the Treasury. There would be attendant alterations and repairs. The drawings indicate that the two buildings would be connected at each floor, meaning that a subdivision is required to consolidate the lots.

The upper floors of the subject properties have been vacant for some years, and the interior photographs indicate that some demolition has occurred previously. The ground floors were long ago converted to commercial uses, after the land was graded down in front of the buildings, revealing the basement. The ground floor is proposed as a restaurant space, and the upper floors and additions as residential.

Rear addition

A rear addition is designed as three stories of apartments over a garage. It connects to the historic buildings at the ground floor, where the applicant would demolish the rear masonry wall only at that level. HPO discouraged a large addition attached to the rear of the building, as it would destroy or encapsulate the character-defining hemi-hexagonal brick walls and chimneys. The location of such an addition will require zoning relief.

The landmark’s most significant architectural expression is, of course, at its front. This secondary structure at rear may be seen as a distinct building only incidentally standing behind the landmark (much as the Board has occasionally approved some concepts for *taller* new construction behind contributing buildings), occupying an undistinguished parking area. It need not relate strongly to Mullett’s design, except, to some degree, in material and color. It is subordinate, which is probably sufficient.

Fifth-floor addition

The small attic at the front of the building leaves a logical location behind to add more volume. Especially given the present undistinguished, parged and painted side wall, it is conceivable to take the side wall straight up, even if not a preferred alteration for a landmark. A slight setback retains the original roofline, but even if this new wall is vertical, it would probably be more

compatible clad in a roofing-type material. This would help rationalize the addition's larger openings.

#### Penthouse and roof deck

The most difficult part of the proposal is a penthouse, which is to provide access to and facilities for a roof deck. The deck itself is reasonably set in from the edges of the roof. It may be the intention that the landmark's central tower will obscure the penthouse from public view, but that's not the case. The avenue is too wide, the penthouse too large, and the setback too little to render it invisible. Which means that, from some vantage points, it will compete with the tower. HPO offers no alternative to two egress stairs and an elevator, but the penthouse should be smaller and set back farther. Given a choice, it would be preferable to have the mechanical farther forward than the taller penthouse.

#### Demolition

A good deal of demolition of framing occurred years ago, under previous owners.

This concept proposes demolition of most of the party wall at the ground floor. While this might be objectionable in some circumstances, here, these spaces were originally the basement, an area typically less protected because it was less designed and less prominent. If a more flexible ground-floor plan makes the building more viable for reuse, this demolition should be acceptable. The openings on the floors above are more typical of what is normally cleared in terms of party-wall demolition when buildings are being combined by subdivision.

#### Front and side alterations and repairs

The removal of the present awnings and their replacement with more compatible signage is indicated and welcome.

The drawings depict graphically—but nowhere note—that the stucco or parge would be removed from the exposed side wall of 2525 and the paint from the ground-floor facades of both former houses. If feasible, this should be undertaken to balance the effects of other alterations. But there is a reason these coatings were applied. They likely disguise areas of wall where inferior, non-matching materials were employed, because they were originally concealed by a higher front-yard grade and by an earlier house that once abutted the side. Careful exploration is in order.

As seen at 2525, some effort was made to provide a new base, but the ground floor of 2519 has been treated with less care over the years. It is recommended that the front-door opening at 2525 be retained at its current size, so that it aligns with the window above and no further masonry demolition is necessary. As this is a concept application, no storefront product has yet been proposed, but it would be better to limit such systems to a location where there has been more alteration, 2519. Something more appropriate than a generic mill-finish, rectangular-section system should go there, however. The fixed storefront in the secondary door opening between the units is unsatisfactory; a different means of closing the door—or entirely removing that later vestibule—should be explored.

The front windows appear to be double hungs, with the lower sash pocketing into the wall behind the arched upper sash. If these cannot be repaired, then replacement windows should closely replicate the historic units.

Introduced to the side elevation of 2525, the proposed windows are generally acceptable as not too numerous, nor too close to the front, nor intruding into the attic. All single punched openings would be preferred to double-ganged windows, but if windows are to be ganged, they should have substantial mullions between the frames. The nature of the window arches is not clear; the drawings suggest something applied and projecting, which is discouraged, but segmental structural arches might be intended. It is recommended that the heights and proportions of these windows be closer to those of the front and rear, and that they have single- or double-hung one-over-one sash.

**Recommendation**

*HPO recommends that the Board approve a subdivision to combine the two lots/buildings and support the additions and alterations, with the conditions that: 1) the applicant adequately address the above comments relating to doors, windows and storefront; 2) the stucco be removed from the side wall, if feasible; 3) the paint be removed from the façade, if feasible; and 4) a penthouse be shrunk, and/or relocated to make it substantially less prominent on the roof.*