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

Property Address:	302-304 Florida Ave NW	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agenda
Landmark/District:	Wardman Flats Historic Landmark	<input type="checkbox"/> Consent Calendar
		<input type="checkbox"/> Denial Calendar
		<input type="checkbox"/> Concept Review
Meeting Date:	June 4, 2020	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Alteration
H.P.A. Number:	#20-235	<input type="checkbox"/> New Construction
		<input type="checkbox"/> Raze
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Subdivision

Owners New City/Joey Yaffe seek concept review to combine 302 and 304 Florida Avenue NW and add a partial third floor and roof deck on top of the rowhouses. Both houses are part of the Wardman Flats Historic Landmark. Plans were prepared by Square 134 Architects.

Property Description and Context

Wardman Flats comprises the rowhouse flat buildings of Square 519 between 3rd Street, R Street, 4th Street and Florida Avenue NW. The flats were built as a single development by Harry Wardman in 1902 and 1903. This was Wardman's first major development project before he went on to become one of Washington's most notable and prolific developers over an almost 40-year career. The Wardman Flats are all two-story, brick buildings distinguished by standard late-Victorian rowhouse forms and detailing, including projecting bays with engaged brick porches and turret roofs, rusticated lintels, and single-entry doors. These entries lead to two separate apartments, with one flat per floor, each organized in a dumbbell plan around an interior semi-hexagonal court. Of the Wardman Flats, those on Florida Avenue are unique because of their staggered pattern of rear elevations which results from the diagonal avenue.

Proposal

The applicant proposes to combine the flats at 302 and 304 via subdivision in order to form a single 14-unit residential building and construct a new partial third-floor, roof deck and rear addition. Concept plans show that the existing rear elevations and roof rafters would be demolished and that the interior courts would be replaced with a stair-well traversing the full width of the combined historic buildings.

The third-floor addition would have an asymmetrically staggered front elevation set back eight and 15 feet from the front property line. It would combine with a rear addition to the first and second floors which would extend the depths of the buildings 8 and 14 feet. The new rear elevation is organized into two halves defined by the widths of the flats and would maintain the staggered rhythm of rear elevations on the row. The brick walls and ganged windows of the lower two stories would be capped by a seamed metal-clad third story. Decks would sit on top of the new third floor.

New basement areaways are called for on front and back. The twin areaways on the front elevation would run across the front bays and occupy all of the shallow public space parking available between the front elevation and sidewalk (7 feet).

Evaluation

The three most important aspects of the concept design to consider when evaluating the compatibility of the proposal are the prominence of the roof top additions, the amount of structural demolition, and the front basement areaways.

Evaluation of the partial third floor addition and roof deck has benefitted from a flag test inspected by Staff. The third floor would have little substantial visibility from the east along Florida Avenue, but the deck and its railing would be degrees more visible and incompatible with the height and roofline of the landmark flats. The incompatible effect of the railing would result regardless of railing material. There is no room for a compatible deck on top of a new third floor. No part of the proposal would be visible from directly across Florida Avenue largely due to the tall mansard and turret roofs which rise substantially above the flat roofs of the landmark buildings. The rear façades of the addition generally achieve compatibility by complementing the brick walls and slate roofs of the landmark with a matching duality of materials with its brick walls and metal clad third floor. The incongruous profile of the third floor would be corrected and leveled by removing the roof deck from the concept.

The preservation regulations define what combinations of work constitute demolition of a historic building. One aspect of the regulation qualifies the substantial removal of load-bearing features (including party walls, floor assemblies and roofs) as demolition. Another combination of work that qualifies as demolition is to remove all of the roof along with one exterior wall.¹ The concept skirts both facets of the regulation very closely. Keeping the floor joists helps offset the extent of loss of other load-bearing features, like the interior courts of the flat buildings. However, the regulation does not include an assessment of the character-defining quality of interior features unless an interior designation is part of the consideration. The interior of the flats are not designated. In the second part, the combined removal of both the rear elevations and roof qualifies as demolition under the act. Revising the concept to keep the existing rear elevations intact as part of the new interior would avoid this qualification.

The Board's guidelines for basement entrances generally discourage prominent basement areaways that take up a substantial portion of the width of a building or its share of the parking in the public space. It seems reasonable however in this case to recognize the commercial nature of the Florida Avenue/U Street corridor as a mitigating factor. The depth of the parking in front of the flats is barely measurable and is paved seamlessly with the adjacent public sidewalk. The benefit of new areaways and their cable railings is that it reestablishes the dimensions of the parking as distinct from the sidewalk and provides horizontal lines complimentary to the horizontality of the brick porch engaged with the bay projection.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Board find the concept to combine lots and for a partial third floor and rear addition at 302 and 304 Florida Avenue NW to be compatible with the historic landmark and consistent with the purposes of the preservation act, and delegate final approval to staff, on the condition that the roof deck be removed from the concept.

Staff contact: Brendan Meyer

¹ DCMR 10C, Section 305.1: "Work considered demolition under the Act shall include, but is not limited to, any of the following, as determined by the Mayor's Agent...(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;..."



Figure 1. Visibility of third floor in yellow. Visibility of roof deck railing in red. From in front of 219 Florida Avenue NW



Figure 2. 302-304 Florida Avenue N, two white facades screened by oak tree.