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

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Landmark/District: **Kingman Park Historic District** (x) Agenda  
Address: **2419 Benning Road NE**

Meeting Date: **December 20, 2018** (x) Concept  
Case Number: **HPA 19-101** (x) Alteration

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Hyojin Lee (YLee Architects), architect and agent for property owners Alexander Messmer and Zewdi Solomon, requests review of a concept for a third-story addition and other alterations to a two-story rowhouse, in order to convert the property to four units.

**Property Description**

The subject property is one of a group of five attached buff-brick buildings constructed in 1929 by Kingman Park developer Charles Sager. This row, an abutting row, and a corner building by Sager, were designed by prolific architect George Santmyers. Except for the adjacent 2417 Benning Road—renovated and added to months before the historic district designation—the buildings retain their original two-story height. This row has other notable alterations such as missing or altered porches and added storefronts and basement entries, but it generally retains the character-defining false-mansard roofs with their overhanging eaves and dormers.

**Proposal**

The plans call for a one-story addition to the roof to create a third story; alteration of the front porch to accommodate a new basement entrance; and alterations to the rear of the building.

Currently, there is a basement entry through an enclosed wooden vestibule that projects from the open porch. The new plans will remove that enclosure and create new stairs that will descend more appropriately from the sidewalk and under the porch to a new basement door. In order to accommodate the necessary head height to gain access to the basement entry, the porch floor will be re-built with a somewhat narrower width. The floor will be set just inside of the porch supports which will remain intact and in place, along with the porch roof.

The rear of the building will be altered by the addition of porches on all three floors, with a spiral stair providing access to all floors. New siding, windows and doors will be installed.

The applicants have looked at several options for the roof addition. The applicant's preferred option has a mansard roof set nine feet back from the façade, sloping back to a point twelve feet back, where it reaches its full height ten feet above the present roof. Alternates offered are: Option A, which consists of a nine-foot setback with a flat roof, an addition which is prominently visible from Benning Road; Option B, a ten-foot setback with a shed roof which is somewhat less visible

from Benning; and Option C, a sixteen-foot setback which is not visible from Benning (see pages 20-21 in drawings set).

### **Evaluation**

The new approach to a basement entrance is an improvement on the present one, as it removes the wood enclosure. The repairs of the dormer windows and brick porch supports, the replacement of the roof shingles, and the installation of new windows that will improve the visual urban and design qualities along this block of Benning Road. These changes are consistent with the recently adopted Kingman Park design guidelines, which allow great flexibility on rear elevations: “Rear elevations do not contribute to the historic character of the neighborhood and many have been changed over time. Rear elevations may be re-clad or rebuilt in siding, stucco, or masonry.”

The applicant’s preferred roof addition option was explored at the recommendation of staff. Although visible from Benning Road, it accommodates the programmatic desires of the applicant and, with its sloped roof and shingled cladding, is more architecturally compatible with the character of the historic district.

This is the first roof addition in Kingman Park since its designation as a historic district. Consistent with the treatment of additions in other historic districts, the design guidelines for Kingman Park state that:

- 6.4 Rooftop additions are allowed if they are set back sufficiently to the rear portion of the roof so that they are not seen rising above a primary building elevation; and
- 6.5 Rooftop additions should not alter or result in removal of decorative roof elements.

The rooftop addition does not alter or result in the removal of decorative roof elements. However, with the exception of Option C, the alternatives, including the preferred option, would be visible from broad Benning Road. As the guidelines indicate, these setbacks would be considered insufficient and incompatible for a dwelling off the commercial corridor. Yet, the guidelines take into consideration the unique character of Benning, with its mix of small-scale, but often greatly altered contributing structures, and larger, out-of-period buildings—including anticipated new construction on the numerous vacant lots. *Some* level of visibility of rooftop additions on the heterogeneous Benning Road streetscape is permissible, where there has been a legitimate effort to minimize it, and where there is presently some variability in building heights and rooflines. However, the present case should not be seen as precedent-setting for the more uniform and narrower streets off the corridor, where a setback as great as that proposed would likely render such an addition invisible, as required by the guidelines.

### **Recommendation**

*The HPO recommends that the Board approve the concept and delegate further review to staff as the project sufficiently retains the character of the contributing property and is compatible with the character of the historic district and particularly its Benning Road context.*

*HPO Contact: Kim Williams*