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

Property Address: **1922 3rd Street NW**
Landmark/District: **LeDroit Park Historic District**
ANC: **1B**

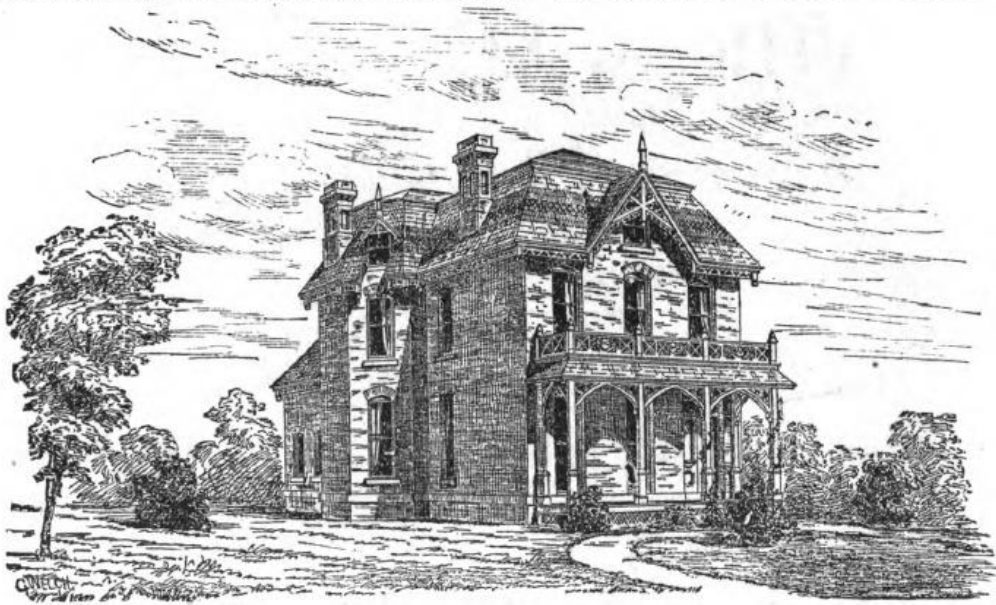
Meeting Date: **April 28, 2016**
H.P.A. Number: **16-142**
Staff Reviewer: **Brendan Meyer**

Agenda
 Consent Calendar
 Denial Calendar
 Concept Review
 Alteration
 New Construction
 Demolition
 Subdivision

Owner Michael Gottlieb seeks concept review for a basement addition and landscape alterations to the front, side and rear of a two-story freestanding house at 1922 3rd Street NW in the LeDroit Park Historic District. Plans were prepared by Theresa Pangelinan.

Published by JAMES H. MCGILL, Architect, Le Droit Building, Washington D. C.

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PERSPECTIVE VIEW.

1922 3rd Street, James H. McGill's Architectural Advertiser, 1880

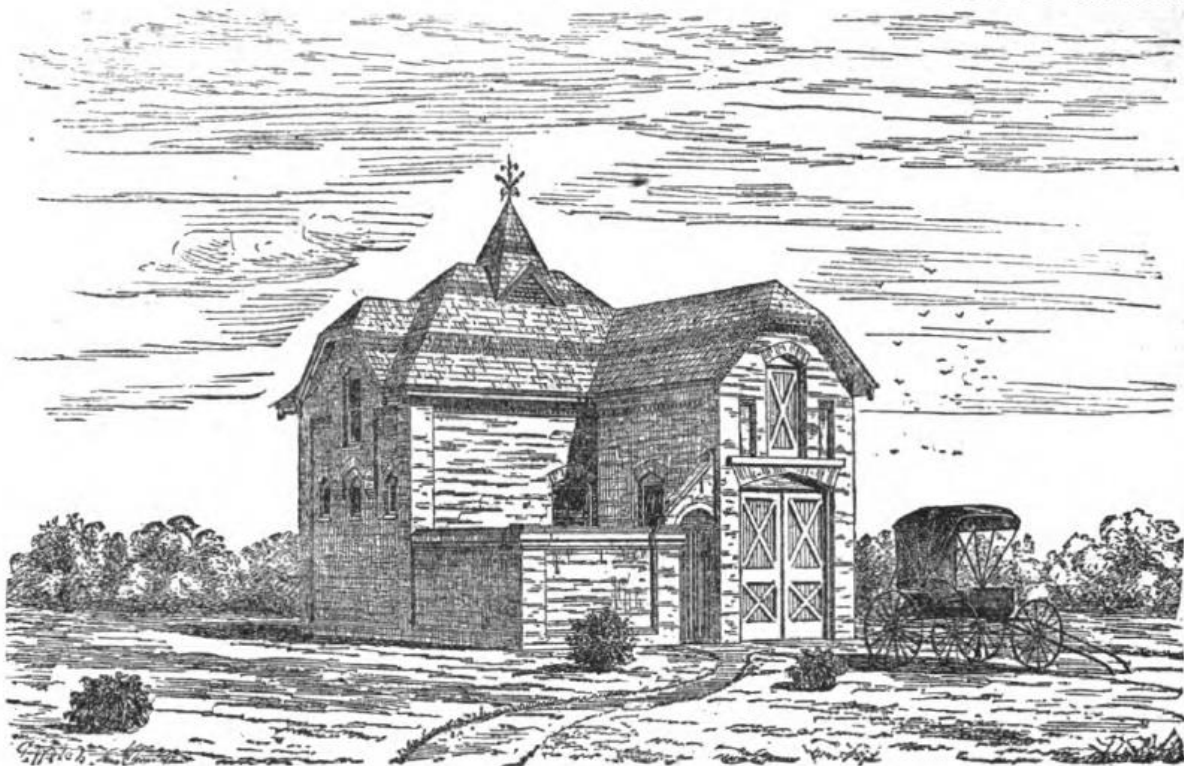
Property Description and Context

The subject property includes a brick gothic revival house and a matching free-standing brick carriage house of the same style. The house sits close to the north edge of the property leaving the south half of the lot an open side yard. Both house and carriage house were designed by architect James H. McGill as part of the original 1870s LeDroit Park development. Architectural renderings of both appear in the contemporary literature that promoted this early suburban

development just outside the edge of then-Washington City. The lot is very notably one of the few original McGill-improved lots to remain largely intact. No portion of it has been divided off for the creation of smaller building lots, and it still exhibits an open landscape of grass and bushes though much of the southwest corner of the grounds is occupied by overgrown fill and debris left over from a 2011 restoration and rear addition project.

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PERSPECTIVE VIEW.

1922 3rd Street carriage house, James H. McGill's Architectural Advertiser, 1880

LeDroit Park saw two distinct phases of development. The first wave consisted of large, detached and semi-detached cottages and villas on large lots laid out by McGill as a suburban variation of the rural landscaped estates of A.J. Downing. The goal was to layout an exclusive enclave of villas arranged in a park-like setting with an open ornamental landscape of lawns, gardens and ornamental plantings. Surviving examples from this period are concentrated on T and U Streets, between 4th and 6th Streets.

A second wave of development followed the era of McGill villas and introduced the more common Washington rowhouse to LeDroit Park. The historic district's almost singular character

is exhibited by the intersection of these two distinct development types. Although the circa 1900 rowhouses imparted a measure of density not originally envisioned by LeDroit Park's creators, the early detached houses to a large extent have still managed to retain their most important defining characteristic: *space*. Whether or not the grounds remained open lawns or became cultivated gardens, the extent of green space around these homes is fundamental to their character and setting.

Proposal

The applicant proposes an extensive basement addition and associated landscape alterations. The basement addition would extend 75 feet from the south side of the house to the south property line and 37 feet from the original west wall of the house to the east edge of the driveway at the rear of the lot. The underground rooms would generally align with the bay projection on the south elevation of the house and the north elevation of the rear wing. Adjacent to the basement addition at the front would be a subterranean open court measuring 25 feet wide by 30 feet long. The forward 12 feet of the court would consist of a series of tiered levels to meet the existing grade of the front yard. The tiers would be next to the front porch of the house and meet grade 7 feet forward of the porch. A new wall to enclose the basement addition at the subterranean court would be brick and include an 18 foot span of glass doors. Railings would be required on top of this new basement wall and the north and south edges of the court. No railing would be necessary across the front of the court because of the tiers. The existing line of hedges in the front yard is intended to screen the visibility of the court and basement wall.

Above the basement addition in the side yard opposite the projecting bay on the south elevation of the house, the grade would be paved with a pool patio of Azek pavers set in a concrete slab. A 38 x 16 foot swimming pool would abut the south property line.

At the rear yard a small landing would be built at the rear entrance and an 8 foot wide walk of stepping pavers would lead to the pool patio in the side yard. The driveway would also be widened 8 feet without a change to the dimension of the existing curb cut, and a 4 foot tall garden wall would be built along the driveway's new east edge. This garden wall would engage, and be the same type as, the one that exists at the carriage house.

Evaluation and Recommendation

The McGill designed villa at 1922 3rd Street is in close to original condition and exhibits many character-defining features. Setting free-standing villas on large parcels of cultivated grounds was fundamental to McGill's design approach for LeDroit Park. In this way the new subdivision set itself apart from the narrow and attached rowhouses then available in the older parts of the city. To market his real estate development, McGill published a book of plates showing house designs available in LeDroit Park. It is fortunate to have a primary reference like this available, because it essentially eliminates the need for a deep exploration of architectural theory or history. Its renderings uniformly show simple, cultivated grounds of lawns, trees and shrubs. The only man-made improvements illustrated are walks, drives and an occasional ornamental fountain. The only man-made structures are the villas and occasionally, like at this property, a matching carriage house. The grounds surrounding 1922 3rd, though in disrepair, materially characterize

the vision of the architect and the history of the property.¹ As an important character defining feature, the grounds should not be destroyed, and alterations to it should be compatible with its character.²

The scope of the proposed alteration, by its size and prominence, will destroy the cultivated side yard as a character defining feature. The most out of character component of the concept—the subterranean court—is located in the most primary and important part of the landscape. The top two-thirds of exterior wall between the basement addition and the subterranean court and the railing across its top will be visible from 3rd Street and run nearly the full width of the side yard. This wall along with the swimming pool and patio would result in a large new architectural feature essentially attaching the house to the row of houses to the south.

The Board has reviewed few basement additions for a single-family dwelling this extensive. Though unfamiliar, there would be few, if any, tangible effects on the historic district if the addition were completely below grade. A basement addition without the visible east wall and that could support a living cultivated landscape on the surface would in fact be invisible to the historic district.

The property is large enough that it should be possible to improve a portion of the grounds with much of the desired program without destroying the character of its open space. To this purpose, it is recommended that the subterranean court be deleted from the concept, the pool and patio be reduced in size and relocated such that it does not project directly across from the projecting bay on the south elevation of the house or beyond it towards 3rd Street. As it is furthest from public view and from the house, the southwest corner of the lot would be the best area to compatibly absorb additional program.

The alterations to the rear yard (walk of stepping stones, landing, low brick garden wall) are compatible with the site in terms of their size and materials, though reducing the width of the walk would be a positive revision.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Board find the concept incompatible with the character of this property and the historic district and inconsistent with the purposes of the preservation act.

¹ “Character-Defining Feature: The form and detailing of those architectural materials and features that are important in defining a building’s historic character and whose retention will preserve that character... (d) The site and setting of a historic property may be defined by features such as views to and from the property, landscaping, walls, and fencing, and materials such as stone and vegetation.” (DCMR 10 Historic Preservation Regulations, Section 9901)

² “Deteriorated historic features shall be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature shall match the old in design, color, texture, and other visual qualities, and where possible, materials. Replacement of missing features shall be substantiated by documentary, physical, or pictorial evidence.” (DCMR 10 Historic Preservation Regulations, Section 2003.4(f))