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

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Property Address: **324 U Street NW**  
Landmark/District: **LeDroit Park Historic District**

Meeting Date: **July 23, 2015**  
H.P.A. Number: **15-490**  
Staff Reviewer: **Brendan Meyer**

☒ Agenda  
☐ Consent Calendar  
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☒ Concept Review  
☒ Alteration  
☐ New Construction  
☐ Demolition  
☐ Subdivision

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Applicant KC Price on behalf of owner Brian Ortiz, seeks concept review for a three-story rear addition on a two-story rowhouse at 324 U Street NW, a contributing building in the LeDroit Park Historic District. Plans were prepared by KC/DC Studios.

### **Property Description and Context**

324 U Street is part of a terrace of six rowhouses designed by N.T. Haller in 1890. Typical of Haller's prolific and idiosyncratic Victorian designs, this row is a symmetrical and tightly coordinated grouping. 324 U flanks the pair of taller 3-story rowhouses that prominently centers the composition. 324 U is shorter at two stories and shares an unusual fenestration pattern of five narrow second floor windows with 318 U on the opposite side of the pair of taller houses. The complex roof frontispiece screens a half-height attic space that slopes down gradually to a two story rear wing. The rear of the row visible from the alley consists of traditional massings. The center houses reduce to abutting two-story rear wings, and the flanking houses have alternating two-story wings with dog-leg courts. While alterations that predate the historic district (removal of a front bay at 316) and small rear additions (2-story addition at 326 and roof deck at 320) have been built, the overall character of the Haller's row is substantially retained by its roof forms, massing, and front façade compositions.

### **Proposal**

The applicant proposes to remove the existing 2-story rear wing and add a 3-story rear addition to the 2-story main block of the rowhouse. The new addition would be the full width of the lot and 30 feet deep so that it projected past the rear of any other wing of the row by 8 feet. The front 8 feet of the third floor would sit on top of the existing second story but be set back far enough from the front façade to not be visible from U Street. A 15-foot deck would occupy most of the rest of the historic roof.

### **Evaluation**

In April 2014, applicants for 320 U Street requested an alteration of their rear roof slope in order to occupy their attic story. HPO's evaluation and recommendation stated, "Fundamental to the character of rowhouses is their simple block like massing in the main part of the house, and their rear wing extensions which can be a series of diminishing additions and wings. The massing typical of a historic rowhouse follows a hierarchy where the main block is taller than, or equal to the height to its rear wing. Any alteration to the roof slope of the main block of a rowhouse should not alter this hierarchy."<sup>1</sup> As the proposal respected this hierarchy, with only very

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<sup>1</sup> HPA #14-292

minimal change to the roof, the proposal was found to be compatible and has since been constructed.

Conversely, in May 2014, applicants for another LeDroit Park project at 1852 3<sup>rd</sup> Street requested a third floor addition to the rear two-story wing. HPO's evaluation and recommendation stated, "Rear additions should generally be lower in height and smaller in mass and footprint than the original building. Additions should be subordinate to the original building, allowing the historic structure to remain dominant. This usually means that the mass of the addition should be noticeably smaller than the original building and attached to the rear of the rowhouse, as it is difficult for an addition to be subordinate when it covers the top of the original structure or inverts the hierarchy between the main block of the house and the rear wing."<sup>2</sup> The Board adopted the staff recommendation and the project has since moved forward without a third floor addition.

The principal of rowhouse hierarchy where the rear wing is subordinate to the main block of the house is especially important in LeDroit Park where no permitted precedent for roof additions has been identified.

The proposed rear addition for 324 would be taller and deeper than the other rear wings of this group of rowhouses. As a result it would undermine the compositional hierarchy where the front portions of the rowhouses, and the taller center rowhouses of the group, are the dominant features. While sizing the addition so that it is not visible from U Street is worthwhile, it is not the only standard for determining compatibility. The Board's adopted design guidelines for additions states that rear additions that are visible from a public alley should be compatible with the rear elevation of the existing building.<sup>3</sup> The three story height of the proposed rear addition is the feature most out-of-step with the historic row. Its size and shape would make it the dominant component on the row and undermine the balance of the group. A concept design that eliminated the third story and shrank the depth of the addition to more closely align with the other rear wings of the row would have an improved chance of arriving at a concept compatible with the row and the historic district.

### **Recommendation**

*The HPO recommends that the Review Board not find the concept for a three-story rear addition to be compatible with the two-story rowhouse at 324 U Street NW, to be compatible with the character of the LeDroit Park Historic District, or consistent with the purpose of the preservation act.*

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<sup>2</sup> HPA #14-246

<sup>3</sup> *Additions to Historic Buildings*, 1.4