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

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Property Address: **513 Florida Avenue NW**  
Landmark/District: **LeDroit Park Historic District**

Meeting Date: **December 20, 2018**  
H.P.A. Number: **19-039**  
Staff Reviewer: **Brendan Meyer**

- Agenda
  - Consent Calendar
  - Denial Calendar
  - Concept Review
  - Alteration
  - New Construction
  - Demolition
  - Subdivision
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The applicant, owner Minh Trinh, seeks concept review for a third-story addition on top of a two-story rowhouse at 513 Florida Avenue NW in the LeDroit Park Historic District. Plans were prepared by Scott W. Sterl, AIA.



*513 Florida Ave NW, white house at center, view from 5<sup>th</sup> Street.*

**Property Description and Context**

The two-story brick rowhouse at 513 Florida Avenue NW sits at the head of 5<sup>th</sup> Street where it terminates at Florida Avenue. The house is typical of the two-story rowhouses on this block and much of the historic district. It was built in 1892 and displays common rowhouse forms: projecting bay, slate turret, brick corbelled cornice and raised basement. The back side of the turret roof

engages a false mansard roof that runs across the width of the house and generally aligns with the other cornices and turret roofs of the row. The raised basement is uncommonly tall and provides comfortable dimensions for an existing basement entrance. A two-story rear wing, one-room deep, fills most of the small rear yard.

### **Proposal**

The applicant proposes to demolish the existing roof and build a third floor addition on top of the rowhouse with no change to the footprint of the building. The 28 foot long and 13 foot wide addition would have a flat roof and bridge the rear wing and main block of the house. It would set back 5 feet from the rear wall of the wing to allow for a balcony. The remaining roof space of the historic house would be spanned by new pitched roofs taking off from the east party wall and base of the front mansard. The addition would be clad in vinyl siding.

### **Evaluation**

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 usually consist of diminishing additions, wings, and/or porches. 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. For an addition to be compatible it should conform to this historic pattern of massing and hierarchy, and--by its scale, dimensions and location--be secondary or at least not overshadow the main part of the house. The common belief that additions only need to be not visible from the street is a secondary understanding of the primary preservation interest that additions be compatible with the architectural character and form of the historic building.

These principles are especially important as they are applied to the houses of LeDroit Park because no precedent of permitted taller rear additions or roof additions on top of houses has been identified.<sup>1</sup> The Board has regularly confirmed this principle by declining to approve taller rear additions and roof top additions in order to preserve this characteristic of LeDroit Park.<sup>2</sup>

The burden is on the applicant to show that an exception to the Board's standards is appropriate in this case.<sup>3</sup> The submitted design is not conceptually different than applications regularly declined by the Board, because an addition taller than the main part of the house inverts the hierarchy of the house and produces a massing incompatible with the historic district.

Second, in terms of visibility, the addition is designed to fit under a sight line drawn from an observer standing on the sidewalk directly across from 513 Florida Avenue. The subsequent angle defines the unusual pitch of the roof on the south and east sides of the addition. The front roof ridge of the flat roof is also derived from this sight line. However, the house sits at the head of 5<sup>th</sup> Street which subjects it to a longer, flatter line of sight that would show the addition as visible above the cornices and roof lines of the row of houses.

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<sup>1</sup> The few roof top structures that exist in LeDroit park, like the shed and deck visible on top of 503 Florida Avenue NW either predate the historic district or were built at an unknown date without Board review.

<sup>2</sup> 324 U St NW (HPA 15-490) July 2015, the Board did not approve a three-story rear addition on a two-story house. 1852 3<sup>rd</sup> St NW (HPA 14-246) May 2014, the Board did not approve a three-story rear addition on a two-story house. 320 U St NW (HPA 14-292) April 2014, the Board approved raising the height of the rear roof on the condition that it not be taller than the main block of the rowhouse.

<sup>3</sup> DCMR 10C, 2001.3

**Recommendation**

*The HPO recommends that the Review Board not find the concept for a third-story addition on the two-story rowhouse at 513 Florida Avenue NW to be compatible with the character of the LeDroit Park Historic District or consistent with the purpose of the preservation act.*

*Staff contact: Brendan Meyer*