

---

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

---

Property Address:	<b>513 U Street NW</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Agenda
Landmark/District:	<b>LeDroit Park Historic District</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Consent Calendar
ANC:	<b>1B</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Concept Review
		<input type="checkbox"/>	Permit Review
Meeting Date:	<b>May 31, 2018</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Alteration
H.P.A. Number:	<b>18-360</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	New Construction
		<input type="checkbox"/>	Demolition
		<input type="checkbox"/>	Subdivision

---

The applicant, owners Quiton and Ritu Cooper, seek concept review for a three-story rear and roof top addition to a free-standing two-story rowhouse at 513 U Street NW in the LeDroit Park Historic District. Plans were prepared by Advanced Building Design Architects. The applicants were on the agenda for a four-story rear addition in May 2013, but withdrew the application before it was heard.

### **Property Description and Context**

The subject property is a two-story brick rowhouse that contributes to the character of the historic district. It is 18 feet wide and 46 feet deep with a very shallow projecting bay capped only by a flat roof. It is detached on both sides, but only fenestrated on the west side wall. It was built in 1891 as part of a group of six two-story detached and semi-attached rowhouses and is the last remaining remnant of that group. The north side of U Street is two stories in character and is a mix of historic and modern two-story rowhouses. The modern rowhouses built to the west of 513 U Street were approved by the Board in 2001 and are an excellent example how contemporary buildings can achieve compatibility in a historic district by adapting their design to the size and ornament of the surrounding streetscape.

### **Proposal**

The applicant proposes to maintain the use of the house as a single family dwelling and add a rear addition three stories tall. The front yard will be excavated to create a new basement entrance and areaway.

The addition calls for demolition of the back 12 feet of the house. It would be 35 feet deep and, in effect, extend the house 23 feet. The addition would be 35 feet above grade; 6 feet taller than the front façade. The addition would be the full width of the lot (21 feet)—and because the house is setback from its west property line—would produce a new three foot wide façade facing U Street 34 feet back from the street. The addition is rendered in brick except for the front façade of new third story on top of the house which indicates clapboard siding. The rear fenestration would consist of ganged casement and transom windows.

The new basement entrance would be inserted under the existing front door. The existing stairs would be demolished and about half of the 150 square foot front yard excavated for new basement stairs, entrance and window well.

### **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 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 to the main part of the house. The common understanding that additions should not be visible from the street is a convenient, but incomplete, synopsis of these principles.

These principles are especially important as they are applied to the rowhouses of LeDroit Park because no precedent of permitted roof additions on rowhouses has been identified. The Board, through its actions, has regularly reinforced the absence of roof top additions in LeDroit Park and preserved this neighborhood characteristic of the historic district.<sup>1</sup>

The burden is on the applicant to show that an exception to the Board's standards is appropriate.<sup>2</sup> The submitted design is not conceptually different than applications regularly declined by the Board, and its renderings leave important design considerations indeterminable. The drawings do not show that this concept should be the exception to the rule.

The addition would be visible from U Street due to the free-standing, unattached condition on both sides of the house. The addition would be hidden from view in only the head-on view in front of the house, but stepping to either side would bring the side elevations and new third floor into clear view. The impact on visibility would be augmented on the west elevation where the rear addition is wider than the front section of the house. On the rear, the full impact that the addition would have on adjacent properties is hard to understand or evaluate. But what is shown does not make a convincing case for compatibility. Extrapolated from the scaled drawings, the addition would project 30 feet beyond 515 U Street and just past 511 U Street.<sup>3</sup>

In addition to the compatibility issues raised by the proposed rear, those presented by the front basement alterations are also not consistent with the Board's guidelines or past precedents. The existing conditions of 513 U Street match the conditions which the *Preservation and Design Guidelines for Basement Entrances (2011)* warn may not be possible where, "...the first floor is close to grade, here the building is close to the sidewalk, or where the basement stair would be exposed at eye level from the sidewalk. In such instances, the extent of excavation may alter the relationship of the building to grade, overwhelm the site, or become such a prominent element that it detracts from the property's character" (Section 3.3). The impact of the alteration would be improved if the basement windows were reduced to smaller awning type windows without a well since egress requirements would be satisfied by the adjacent basement entrance also proposed.

## **Recommendation**

*The HPO recommends that the Board find a three-story rear addition to the two-story rowhouse at 513 U Street NW incompatible with the character of the LeDroit Park Historic District, and not approve the concept design.*

*Staff contact: Brendan Meyer*

---

<sup>1</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>2</sup> DCMR 10C, 2001.3

<sup>3</sup> 511 U St NW (HPA 04-447) September 2004 is a convenient comparison. It is a 2-1/2 story late 19<sup>th</sup> century frame house with a gable roof and dormers. In 2004 it was approved for a large addition largely on the basis that it not be taller than the original house and that its roof type match the original house.