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

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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>August 2, 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

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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 by the Board.

### **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 two-story projecting bay on the front. Its east wall is a party wall sitting on that property line and its west wall is off that property line three feet. Because neighboring properties also sit off the property lines the cumulative gaps between buildings on either side of the house are 3 feet on the east and 7 feet on the west. The wrap around porch of 515 extends four feet into this gap and up to the property line.

513 U Street 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 houses (like the neighbor to the east) and modern two-story rowhouses (like the neighbors to the west). The modern rowhouses were approved by the Board in 2001 and are an excellent example of contemporary buildings that achieve compatibility by adapting their design to the size, scale, and ornament of the surrounding streetscape. The three-story rear addition to the three-story historic building at 511 U Street was approved by the Board in 2004. The east-west alley at the rear of the house is the northern boundary of the district with the 7-story Howard University Hospital immediately beyond.

### **Proposal**

The project proposes to maintain the use of the house as a single family dwelling and add a three story rear addition. The addition calls for demolition of the back 12 feet of the house where a rear addition 35 feet deep would be built. This would effectively extend the house 23 feet giving it a new total depth of 69 feet. This would place the rear wall of the addition about in line with 511 to the east.

The addition would be 35 tall; 6 feet taller than the front façade due to the front parapet and gradual slope of the flat roof. It 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. A 17' wide basement areaway would front this new elevation. The addition includes extending the basement all the way to the rear property line. The addition is rendered as brick at the first two floors and horizontal siding at the third. The rear fenestration would consist of ganged casement and transom windows.

### **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 need only be not visible from the street is a convenient, but incomplete, synopsis of these principles of compatibility.

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. 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>1</sup> 511 U Street is an example of the Board affirming this principle when it approved that rear addition largely because it would not be taller than the historic part of the house at the front.<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.

In terms of visibility, the addition would be visible from some parts of U Street. It would not be visible from a point-of-view directly in front of the house, but stepping to either side would bring the side elevations and new third floor into clear view through the unattached gaps between houses. Moving the point-of-view 30 feet to the north or south would make the addition not visible again. Where the addition is visible between houses its roofline would be lower than the articulated roof lines at the front of each neighboring house.

Visibility of the addition through the gap on the west side would be most substantial because it would include three floors of addition extended the full width of the lot. This new three-story, three-foot wide wall would be more subtle if it was all brick rather than a combination of brick and siding.

### **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 historic district and not approve the concept design.*

*HPO contact: Brendan Meyer*

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<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> 511 U St NW (HPA 04-447) September 2004. The rear addition is 3 stories primarily because it is attached to a 3-story historic frame house with a gable roof and dormers. It was approved on the basis that it would not be taller than the original house and also that its roof type match that of the original house.

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