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

Property Address:	513 U Street NW	<input type="checkbox"/> Agenda
Landmark/District:	LeDroit Park Historic District	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Consent Calendar
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Concept Review
		<input type="checkbox"/> Permit Review
Meeting Date:	April 28, 2022	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Alteration
H.P.A. Number:	21-559	<input type="checkbox"/> New Construction
		<input type="checkbox"/> Demolition
		<input type="checkbox"/> Subdivision

Owners Quiton and Ritu Cooper seek concept review for a three-story rear addition and roof deck on a free-standing two-story rowhouse at 513 U Street in the LeDroit Park Historic District. Plans were prepared by Teass\Warren Architects. In July 2018 the applicants presented a different design that was not approved by the Board. The Board began hearing this new design December.

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 shallow two-story projecting bay on the front. Its east wall is a party wall sitting on the 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 has a mix of historic houses (like the neighbor to the east) and modern two-story rowhouses (like the neighbors to the west). The east-west alley at the rear of the house is the northern boundary of the historic district with the 7-story Howard University Hospital immediately behind.

Revised Proposal

Based on testimony at the December meeting, the Board advised the applicant to return to the community groups and complete their design review process. During reengagement with that process the dimensions of the addition were not changed, but its materials and fenestration have been moderately revised.

The applicant proposes to maintain the use of the house as a single-family dwelling and add a rear addition three stories tall. The addition would be built at the end of the existing house and be 22 feet deep while matching the width of the house. This would place the rear wall of the addition about in line with that of its neighbor on the east (511 U Street).

The first and second floors would be brick and the third floor would be clad in standing seam metal and have slightly mansard shape at the rear. The roof material is extended down to grade in a vertical band on the west elevation where new interior stairs are positioned at the junction of the addition and existing house. A metal oriel would project from the second floor of the rear elevation. A package of square and horizontal windows round-out a muted contemporary character for the addition.

The addition and its sight lines remain unchanged from December. It would be 34 feet tall making it and even with the roof ridge of 511 U and six feet taller than the front façade. A shallow roof deck would extend out from the third floor of the addition onto the rear portion of the roof of the existing house.

Alterations to the historic house include removal of the rear façade to accommodate the addition, opening and closing window openings on the west façade, and creating new basement windows and an areaway on the face of the front projecting bay.

Evaluation

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. The easiest way for an addition to be compatible is for it to conform to this historic pattern of massing and hierarchy, and--by its scale, dimensions and location--be secondary to the house or at least not prominent within the historic district. This assessment should be calibrated against its historic context. If the context has a high degree of integrity, an addition might produce a conspicuous change to the character of the historic district and so should be reviewed guardedly. But if the integrity of the context is already eroded by demolition and intrusions, the addition might be able to fit inconspicuously into its already altered surroundings.

The Board should also consider that no precedent for a rear addition taller than the main block of the house has been identified in LeDroit Park.¹ This condition translates into a standard that is easy to apply for the protection and perpetuation of a special historic characteristic. The Board has regularly utilized this standard when declining to approve rear or roof top additions in LeDroit Park that are taller than the main block of the house.²

The setback of the addition from the front greatly minimizes visibility of the addition leaving only a sliver of distant visibility through the gap on the west side of the house. This little amount would be hard to pick out because of the 7-story hospital backdrop to the north. The setback also means the addition will not overlap on top of the rear of the house and would require little demolition.

The dimensions and materials would have no substantial impact on a much constrained and altered corner of the historic district. It aligns with the height and rear face of its larger neighbor on the east. There are no distant views of the rear façade because the alley is the northern border of the historic district and views are constrained by the hospital. The longest view of the addition is from the west, parallel with the alley, and across the rear elevations of the two-story in-fill modern houses. The addition would not change the outlines of this view because it fits within the profile of 511 U Street.

Taken together, these aspects—that the addition is not on top of the historic house, that the site is on the edge of the historic district, that it is not significantly visible from any street, and that because of backdrops on the north and east it does not change any roofscape view--show that an exception to the Board's standard, that no addition in LeDroit Park should be taller than its house, is appropriate in this unique case.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Board find this three-story rear addition to the two-story rowhouse at 513 U Street NW in the LeDroit Park Historic District to be compatible with the character, and exceptional context, of this part of the historic district, approve the concept design, and delegate final approval to Staff.

Staff contact: Brendan Meyer

¹ 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.

² 324 U St NW (HPA 15-490) July 2015, the Board did not approve a three-story rear addition on a two-story house. 1852 3rd St NW (HPA 14-246) May 2014, the Board did not approve a three-story rear addition on a two-story house.