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

Property Address:	513 U Street NW	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Agenda
Landmark/District:	LeDroit Park Historic District	<input type="checkbox"/>	Consent Calendar
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Concept Review
		<input type="checkbox"/>	Permit Review
Meeting Date:	December 16, 2021	<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.

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.

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 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 addition would be 34 feet tall bringing it 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. The rear and two side elevations of the addition would have a contemporary arrangement of windows of mixed sizes, a slightly projected second and third floor, and different patterns of cementitious cladding. The largest windows illuminate the north elevation and side elevations where the addition attaches to the house. The smallest windows are horizontal units on the north and west elevations. The addition includes extending the basement all the way to the rear property line and excavating an entrance in the side yard with steps up to both the front and back of the property.

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 burden is on the applicant to show that an exception to the Board's standards is appropriate in this case.³

This concept is a significant improvement over the previous concept (Figure 1, below). The proposed third story is now setback 47 feet instead of 34 feet and is narrower by matching the width of the house instead of the entire lot. This reduces its visibility from U Street to the extent that it would be hard to pick it out from its 7-story hospital backdrop. The increased setback also means the addition will not overlap on top of the rear of the house and would therefore require less 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. While the addition would not change the outlines of this view because it fits within the profile of 511 U Street, its contemporary arrangement of windows is distinctive among otherwise traditional elevations.

The alterations to the historic building need some consideration. The new windows on the west elevation are numerous, but they are arranged in an informal pattern typical of rowhouse elevations abutting an alleyway, and they are hard to view from U Street because of the narrowness of the side yard. The Board's window standards advise that new basement windows may be appropriate on front facades if they align with historic windows above, but the new areaway should be reduced in size to the minimum dimensions required by code for egress purposes.

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.

³ DCMR 10C, 2001.3

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 condition, of this part of the historic district, approve the concept design, and delegate final approval to Staff.

Staff contact: Brendan Meyer



Figure 1. For comparison purposes only. Previous concept from July 2018, HPA 18-360. Declined by Board, 5-0.