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

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Property Address:	<b>2434 16<sup>th</sup> Street, NW</b>	<b>X</b>	Agenda
Landmark/District:	<b>Meridian Hill Historic District</b>		Consent Calendar
Meeting Date:	<b>July 23, 2015</b>	<b>X</b>	Concept Review
H.P.A. Number:	<b>15-479</b>		Alteration
Staff Reviewer:	<b>Kim Williams</b>	<b>X</b>	New Construction
			Demolition

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Contract purchaser Hartford Venture Capital, with plans prepared by architect Ron Schneck (Square 134 Architects), seeks concept design review for construction of a two-story addition to the three-story apartment building at 2434 16<sup>th</sup> Street, a contributing resource in the Meridian Hill Historic District. The applicants are seeking concept approval and comments from the Board on two proposed schemes.

### **Background History**

The apartment building at 2434 16<sup>th</sup> Street NW is a three-story pared-down Colonial Revival-style brick building constructed in 1937 directly across from the upper esplanade of Meridian Hill Park. The building was constructed on a parcel of land that had been owned by Mary Henderson before her death in 1931, and that was purchased upon settlement of her estate after the Depression by local developer/builder H. Lindner who hired architect William Crusemire to design an apartment building for 10 families. During the period between 1936 and 1949, 14 other apartment buildings were constructed on Meridian Hill on land historically owned by Mary Henderson. These apartment buildings, constructed on lots between the private mansions and embassy buildings, range in architectural style from the Colonial Revival to Art Deco to International style. In many cases, the developers of the apartment buildings capitalized on the elite character of Meridian Hill and advertised “luxury-style” apartment buildings. However, the apartment building at 2434 16<sup>th</sup> Street was an exception in that it is a more modest-scaled building that was clearly intended for a more moderate-income resident.

The apartment building was listed as a contributing building in the Meridian Hill Historic District because it was constructed within the period of significance (1888-1949) and because it is consistent with the historical developmental trend of apartment buildings being constructed on Meridian Hill after Mary Henderson’s death and the Depression. Architecturally, the building is typical of modest, Colonial Revival-style apartments from the period in the city, but lacks the stylistic and material qualities that are characteristic of other buildings on Meridian Hill.

### **Proposed Project**

#### *New Construction*

The proposed project offers two options for a two-story brick addition atop the existing three-story building. The first option, PT01, proposes that a fourth story continue flush with the

façade of the existing building and that the fifth story be recessed slightly from it. Both floors of the addition would reflect the five-bay wide symmetry of the contributing building, and both would be clad in brick, like the historic building. The concept proposes that a lighter shade of brick be used to differentiate the addition from the historic building, and that on the fourth story, windows be set into slightly recessed brick panels to further differentiate old from new.

The second option, PT02, proposes a two-story, five-bay addition whereby the center three bays are recessed and the two end bays are flush with the existing façade. Again, in this proposal, windows would be paired and symmetrical with the windows of the historic building, while the brick would be lighter in color to differentiate it from the brick of the historic building.

## **Evaluation**

According to the Board's Guidelines for Additions to Historic Property:

*"Adding on top of a building is usually not compatible as such additions typically alter significant features of a building, such as its roofline, height, design composition, relationship with surrounding buildings, overall form and mass.*

*In rare cases, a visible roof top addition may be acceptable if it does not fundamentally alter the character of the building and is designed to be compatible with the building and context."*

Additionally, the Meridian Hill Historic District Design Guidelines note:

*"additions should be designed to be compatible with the character of the original building and its context in terms of siting, massing, size, scale and materials."*

The HPO believes this is one of the relatively rare instances in which a visible roof addition could be compatible with the building and the character of the historic district. While falling within the period of significance, the building is not characteristic of the district, and a roof addition could be achieved in a way that would not fundamentally alter the character of the building or its context. The three-story brick building is presently sandwiched between two much larger and taller apartment buildings and is the shortest apartment building on the street. The property is not adjoining any of the mansions, and because it is on a small lot between two larger buildings, adding to the roof of this building would not detract from the overall character of the district or the streetscape. With an addition to the roof, appropriately designed and scaled, the building would be compatible with the massing, size, scale and materials of its context.

Based upon the two proposed options, Option 1 appears to be the most compatible. The fourth story addition is a relatively seamless extrusion of the existing building and could be read as an attic level to the building. Precedents exist for buildings from this period with contemporaneous attic levels above the cornice line that are flush with the wall surface, and so this approach seems appropriate. In order to emphasize this fifth story as an attic level, it would be appropriate to have the brick continue in the same color as the historic building and for the

fenestration to continue in the same general character to tie the floors together into a unified composition.

To have two stories above the cornice line does not have historic precedents for a building of this small size and would be proportionally awkward, so recessing the fifth story from the fourth story is the only way that a fifth story could be accommodated. Some subtle differentiation of this penthouse floor from the underlying floors – in brick color, fenestration, or other features – could be compatibly accommodated, as it would not be located in the same plane as the façade.

Option 2 as presented is not compatible to the building. The two-story height of the addition proportionally overwhelms the three-story building. The idea of recessing the central bays was intended to give greater emphasis to the three principal bays of the historic building, which in theory is a good idea, but practically, as designed, is not successful in overcoming the proportional problems that result. If the roof addition was limited to one story, this approach might be more successful.

If the Board finds the concept of a roof addition compatible, such a roof addition would also need to respond to the specific guidance provided in the Meridian Hill Historic District Guidelines. Of particular note in these Guidelines is the principle regarding views to and from Meridian Hill Park:

*Meridian Hill Park is the centerpiece of the neighborhood. Its physical and visual centrality necessitates that alterations to surrounding buildings take into consideration views to and from this nationally significant urban garden.*

In this case, any roof addition to 2434 16<sup>th</sup> Street would have to be implemented in such a way that views from Meridian Hill Park are not diminished by un-designed roof appurtenances and mechanical features associated with the new building. Any mechanical equipment should be incorporated within the new addition and not added on top of it.

### **Recommendation**

*The HPO recommends that the Board find the conceptual design for a roof addition as outlined in Option 1 to be generally compatible for this building and the Meridian Hill Historic District, that the proposal continue to be developed in consultation with HPO, and that final approval be delegated to staff.*