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

Landmark/District: **Mount Pleasant Historic District** (x) Consent
Address: **1745 Harvard Street NW**

Meeting Date: **April 27, 2017** (x) Addition
Case Number: **17-294** (x) Alterations

Staff Reviewer: **Tim Dennée** (x) Concept

The applicant, property owner William Skelton (with architect Robert Gurney), requests the Board’s review of a concept to demolish a one-story enclosed rear porch, to construct a two-story addition in its place, and to perform site work. A skylight would be added to the roof, and a deck would be built at rear, surrounded by a six-foot-tall stained cedar fence. Work at the front of the house includes only the removal of a tree and the replacement of the entry door. The entire exposed rear wall of the house would be demolished.

The 1943 home is one of a row of 31 three-story houses designed by Joseph Abel and erected by Shapiro, Inc. The site topography is such that the house’s second floor is at the rear-yard grade.

Demolition

The building’s rear wall would be demolished, but as the other exterior walls, the floor framing and most of the roof framing would be retained, the amount of demolition is reasonable and consistent with previously approved concepts, and it does not constitute demolition of the rowhouse “in significant part.”¹

Addition

The present one-story porch is thirteen feet deep, and the proposed two-story addition would be fifteen feet deep, with an additional foot for the bay projection. This does not seem out of proportion to the size of the house itself.

Another question is how it relates to the rest of the row. Most of the houses have no additions, although several have one-story ones. Recognizing that it is unlikely that all the property owners would forever forgo expansion of these modest houses, however, and finding the rear elevations not to be especially character-defining, the Board approved a fourteen-foot-deep two-story addition to 1725 Harvard in 2006. Two years later, the Board approved another fifteen-foot-deep two-story concept at 1757 Harvard. The presently proposed depth should be viewed as about the proper limit of depth.

¹ It should be noted that the preservation law expressly balances the strict preservation interest with the interest of adapting properties. Therefore, the same solution—demolition of a rear wall—should not be accepted as compatible in every case, if it is not necessary to accommodate the program. Here, the fact that rooms straddle the present line of the rear wall makes retention more difficult.

The Modernist expression of this row makes it a better candidate than most for a ‘contemporary’ treatment. And the addition is contemporary, with broad expanses of glazing, plus cladding in mahogany and fiber-cement in a rain-screen installation.

The center of the rear elevation would be a projecting bay containing most of the openings and extending above the roofline. The height is probably an unnecessary flourish—capturing some southern light through a forward-facing window—as that could be achieved with a second skylight. Yet it is not incompatible because the roofline of the row is still maintained by retaining the existing heights of the roof and the side walls (extending them rearward) on either side of the bay. However, the bay raises a practical code issue, as there is a chimney within a few feet—and chimneys are required to be at least two feet taller than any portion of a roof within a ten-foot radius. Thus, the bay probably needs to be nearly a foot lower to avoid altering the neighbor’s chimney.

Front door replacement

The present door has a single light at head height within a flush wood door. While most of the row’s doors appear to have been replaced and repainted, there are enough that share similar characteristics to suggest that the originals had been flush wood doors with a single light at head height.² The presently proposed door would thus be more compatible with such a ‘window.’

Fence and deck

The proposed fence would enclose the deck, so the latter’s appearance is not an issue. The fence would be of butted vertical cedar boards with a black stain. A black stain is uncommon, but it is almost certainly preferable in character to the typical unstained pressure-treated planks.

Recommendation

HPO recommends that the Board approve the project in concept as compatible with the character of the historic district, with delegation to staff of further review, including working out a compatible front door and the relationship between the proposed bay and the neighbor’s chimney.

² Period photographs of the finished row do not clearly show the doors, as they were obscured by screen doors.