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

Landmark/District: **Mount Pleasant Historic District** (x) Consent
Address: **1853 Irving Street NW**
Meeting Date: **March 28, 2019** (x) Raze
Case Number: **19-181** (x) Alterations
(x) Concept

The applicant, property owner Kevin Wells, requests the Board’s review of a concept to demolish the one-story garage at the rear of the property and to replace it with a brick patio and, at the rear lot line, a wood fence and gates.¹

Background

The applicant had initially proposed a deck on the garage roof and received permit clearances for that from the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts and the Historic Preservation Office. But according to the zoning regulations, a rooftop deck must be set inward from the edges of the roof a distance equivalent to the height of the railing—which must be at least 42 inches. As the garage measures 17 by 19 feet, that would reduce the deck to maybe 9 by 11, accounting for the widths of the rails, which is not infeasible, but apparently undesirable in this instance.



¹ The drawings indicate that one wall of the garage would be retained—which is still a raze—but it seems likely to be removed, too, given that it would be a ten-foot-tall freestanding masonry wall and would offer little in terms of function.

Evaluation

The patio and the six-foot-tall fence and swing gates for a vehicle are compatible with the character of most of the historic district's alleyscapes. It is the demolition of the garage that raises a larger preservation issue.

The one-story, brick garage was constructed in 1916, shortly after the rowhouse was completed. The garage is similar to others in the historic district, although is perhaps slightly more interesting than most, with the corbeling at the parapets. The structure has been painted, however.

The preservation regulations (10C DCMR §305.3) state that “[t]he filing of an application for a demolition permit shall be considered to incorporate a request for determination whether the property contributes to the character of a historic landmark or district...” with the implication that the demolition of a contributing building would be contrary to the purposes of the law. When the Mount Pleasant Historic District was designated in 1986, no list of contributing and noncontributing structures was required; then as now, formally listed or not, contributing structures are those that date to within the district's period of significance (1851-1949) and retain sufficient integrity. The early garages of Mount Pleasant fit this category, but without their specific listing and often lacking much architectural character, the Board has effectively classed them as secondary in historic significance—lesser than the neighborhood's primary buildings such as houses, apartment buildings, commercial buildings, and the carriage houses that are the more important accessory buildings. The Board has therefore treated these as subject to demolition.

This suggests a future problem of losing so many garages that the scarcity of those remaining calls for a re-evaluation of their significance and a reversal of this position.

Recommendation

HPO recommends that the Board approve the concept and delegate to staff the historic preservation clearance of applications to raze the garage and to construct the fence and patio.