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

Landmark/District: **Mount Pleasant Historic District** (x) Agenda
Address: **3118-3120 16th Street NW**

Meeting Date: **November 19, 2015** (x) Addition
Case Number: **16-054** (x) Alteration
(x) Subdivision
Staff Reviewer: **Tim Dennée** (x) Concept

The applicant, Jennifer Birks (R. Michael Cross Design Group), architect and agent for the contract purchaser, Pleasant 16th LLC, and with the consent of the property owner, Neighbors Consejo, requests the Board’s review of a concept to combine two buildings—which will require a subdivision—and to construct roof and rear additions and undertake some demolition toward those ends.

The green-tile-roofed three-story brick residence at 3118 16th Street was built in 1913 for the family of Ernest N. Janson, a Swedish-born naval architect and marine engineer employed at the Washington Navy Yard since the 1890s. The home’s designer was architect B. Frank Meyers, who specialized in single-family residential, but also designed flats, apartments, stores, movie theaters, churches, offices and industrial buildings. The more retardataire Free Classic Revival house at 3120 is eight years older, built for German confectioner Leon H. Herbert. Frank H. Jackson—neither as prolific nor well-known as Meyers, but with a similar profile of commissions—was its architect.





Subdivision

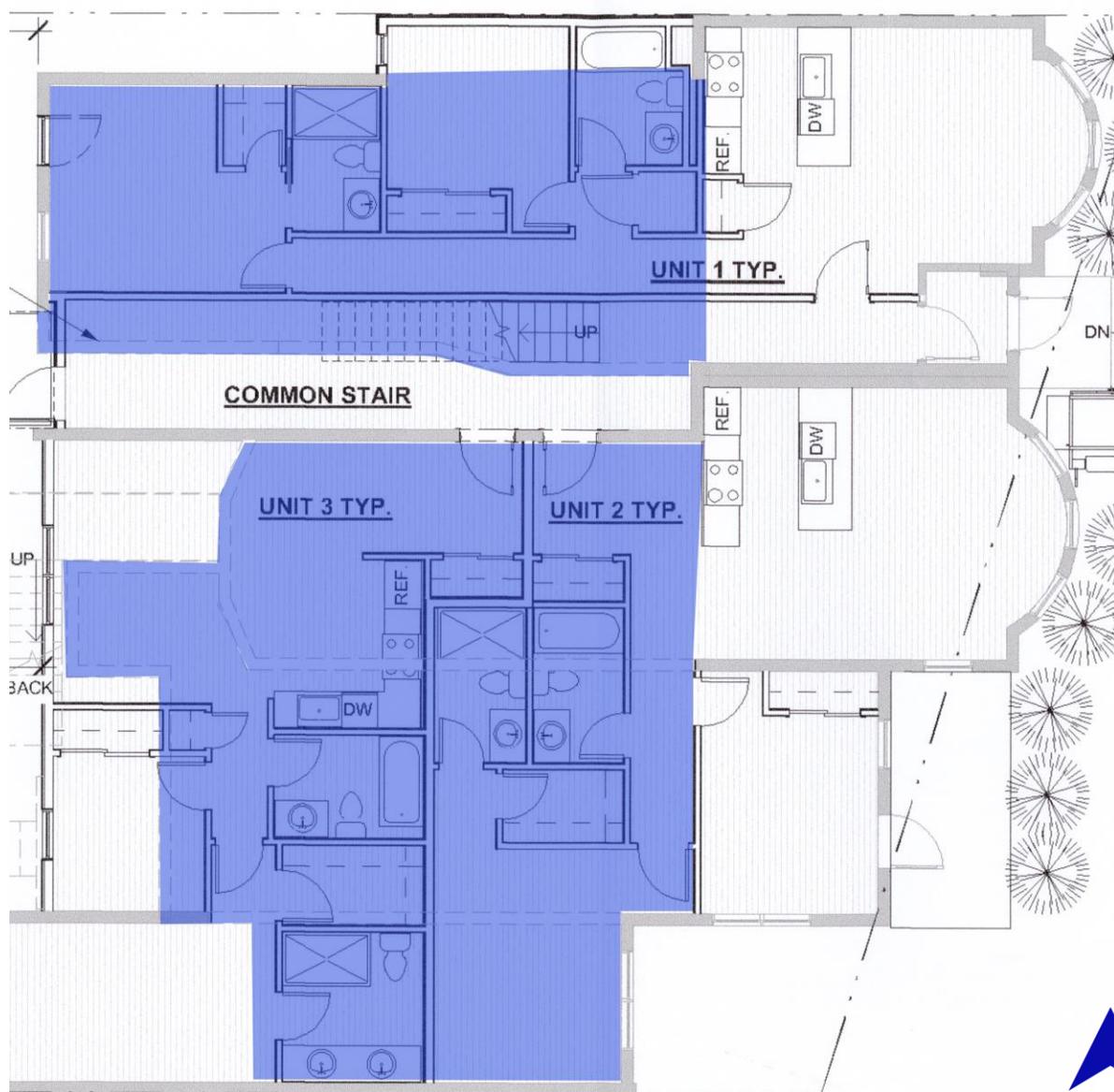
Subdivision to consolidate the two lots would be necessary to connect the houses, as well as to create a lot of record. The compatibility of the subdivision of the lots depends upon the compatibility of the projects it makes possible. With the two houses present, there remains little additional developable area, whether they are connected or remain separate. As always, if the amount and character of the demolition necessary to achieve the connection is reasonable, then the combination itself could be found compatible.

Demolition

The proposed demolition is considerable and constitutes demolition of the buildings “in significant part.” The drawings are less clear on this point than they might be, as the demolition is represented on the proposed floor plan—and it is a single “typical” floor plan at that—rather than on “existing” plans. Still, a comparison of the before and after suggests that the extent of demolition would be as shaded on the plan below. The front portions of the buildings would be retained, and there would be an attempt to portions of walls at rear. The roofs would be almost completely reframed, leaving the front pent roofs and perhaps a bit beyond.

As the rear wing of 3120 constitutes about half that building, it should be substantially retained. The shallow two-story piece at the rear of 3118, the three-story rear tower-like element, and the extensive open stair, could be removed without harming that building's character. But the creation of the new, open stair between the buildings necessitates the removal of the south wall of the rear wing of 3120, which means that the floor and roof framing that it supports likely comes off with it.¹ The same issue appears where the north wall of the wing would be demolished for a small addition on that side.² Similarly, it seems that only about the front third of 3118 would remain, given the loss of the side walls as depicted on Sheet SD02.

If the Board were to support the removal of the south wall of the rear wing of 3120, the floor framing could be retained there by cutting it back to the line of the proposed new wall, but builders are not always so scrupulous about the retention of original framing.



¹ Curiously, the note on SD02 characterizes this as an “interior” wall.

² This demolition is noted only as “REMOVE EXIST[ING] PARAPET WALL” on Sheet SD00, but it would obviously entail the removal of the whole height of that section of wall.

Main roof addition

A roof addition is proposed to straddle the two buildings. As indicated in the perspective drawing on Sheet SD04, it would be plainly visible from the public sidewalk in front of the property, so it would be prominently visible from across 16th Street, which has a 100-foot right of way. As stated in the Board's published guidance to applicants,

Under most circumstances, roof additions that are visible from a public street are not appropriate, as they would alter an historic building's height, mass, design composition, cornice line, roof, and its relationship to surrounding buildings and streetscape—all of which are important character-defining features that are protected for historic property. In rare cases, a visible roof addition may be found acceptable if it does not fundamentally alter the character of the building and is sufficiently designed to be compatible with the building.

The proposed addition would alter the roofline and massing of the buildings, putting a continuous mass above and behind the houses' definite and intentional upward terminations, the tile roof and the conical turret. (The alternate addition with the tile roof would make matters worse by drawing more attention to itself and further visually mashing together the two historic buildings.)

Rear roof addition

Also proposed is a third story atop the rear wing of 3120 16th Street. In itself, the addition is sufficiently compatible, as it would be expressed as distinct from the original construction, but in a complementary material, true stucco. It would stand behind the three-story main block, so it retains a natural, regular and subordinate massing relative to the whole and would not disturb the roofline. However, this addition would only be appropriate if it didn't result in substantial demolition of the underlying structure.

North side addition

The bumping out of a room on each floor on the north side of the rear wing of 3120 16th Street is problematic only for the degree to which it contributes to the total demolition proposed.

South side addition

The house at 3118 16th Street was constructed with a narrow wing on the south side to accommodate a garage and occupiable space above. The applicant requests to construct two additional stories on top of this, set back beyond the point to which the house's primary tile roof returns. Given the position above the garage wing and below the eave, as well as the fact that that space is only about nine feet wide, it would be more successful and appropriate to have a porch-like single story appear over the garage. But the juncture between 3118 and the noncontributing house at 3116½ 16th Street is so messy that inserting something along the lines of the proposed addition may not harm the setting of 3118. The addition would not necessarily even have to be seen as part of 3118.

Roof decks

In addition to the roof additions, the proposal includes roof decks on the principal roofs and atop the original side wing of 3118. These could be compatible if they can be hidden behind the buildings' roofs. As with roof additions, the Board's guidance on roof decks states that,

The Historic Preservation Review Board (HPRB) generally requires that new roof decks not be visible from surrounding streets or public sidewalks so as not to alter the character or appearance of the building or its streetscape. This typically requires a substantial set back, the extent of which depends on the height of the proposed deck and its framing, the height of the building and its parapets, the height of adjacent buildings, the topography of the area, the width of the street, and views from public vantage points surrounding the building.

It may be possible to hide a deck behind the green-tile roof of 3118, but one coming forward to the roof ridge of 3120, as shown on Sheet SD1.1, would be plainly visible. With the main roof addition removed from the project, however, there is plenty of space to situate a deck or decks farther rearward, assuming that the means of access is compatible and also invisible from 16th Street.

Rear stairs

The present fire stairs would be replaced with a set of open stairs tucked between the buildings. As mentioned, this requires a fair amount of demolition. But the stairs themselves would be better placed than they are now. Open stairs of even two stories can be problematic, but this spot hemmed in by buildings diminishes its impact. Without an addition atop the houses' principal roof, the stair would not have to exceed the height of the present buildings.

Windows

The drawings (Sheets SD04 and SD05) depict six-over-six replacement windows throughout the project. But the primary original window configuration for 3118 16th Street appears to be six-over-one, and those at 3120 16th were likely one-over-one, as they are now. Compatible replacements would be those that matched the original windows in all respects, in accordance with the window regulations and design guidelines.

Front porches

With all its verticals, the handrail proposed for 3120 16th steps is too heavy and unnecessary, unless absolutely required by the code official.

Sheet SD04 indicates that the front porch of 3118 would be closed off with a rail, presumably to become a patio for the unit behind it. It is far more compatible *not* to cut off the house's historic entrance and, instead, use it for access to that unit alone.

Lift

Next to the stoop of 3120 16th stands an old accessibility lift. The applicant proposes to replace it. If there is a need for a similar lift, it is an acceptable adaptation.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Board not approve the concept as proposed because it is incompatible with the character of the properties and the historic district and thus inconsistent with the purposes of the preservation law, mainly because of the amount of demolition and the roof addition proposed.

The HPO recommends that the Board generally support the idea of connecting the two buildings as well as construction of a three-story addition on the south side, a one-story addition atop the

rear wing of 3120 16th, and an addition to the north side of the rear wing of 3120, assuming that the project's total demolition does not amount to demolition of the buildings in significant part.

The HPO further recommends that the Board request that the applicant revise the plans to: remove the principal roof addition and significantly reduce demolition; adjust any roof decks so they could not be seen from 16th Street; use compatible window configurations in each building; and keep open the entry porch to 3118 16th Street.