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

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| Landmark/District: | Mount Pleasant Historic District | (x) Agenda |
| Address: | 3118-3120 16th Street NW | |
| Meeting Date: | May 26, 2016 | (x) Addition |
| Case Number: | 16-312 | (x) Alteration |
| | | (x) Subdivision |
| Staff Reviewer: | Tim Dennée | (x) Concept |

The applicant, Rich Markus, architect and agent for the property owner, Pleasant 16th LLC, requests the Board's further review of a concept to combine two buildings—which will require a subdivision—and to construct rear, roof and side additions. The combined houses would become a condominium apartment building.

Last month, the Board unanimously approved the staff recommendation with additional comments. The Board supported, but has not yet given final concept approval to: consolidate the two lots; connect the two houses; perform the necessary demolition (although less demolition was encouraged); and construct side and rear additions.

The Board requested revision of the proposed side addition so that it appears more like enclosed porches and so that it does not continue the house's tile roof, that the rear of the buildings should be revised to decrease the extent of siding and to maintain a visual distinction between the buildings, and that the rearward projection of the rear stair should also be reconsidered. The Board determined that any roof deck should be made invisible from 16th Street, that the roof addition should be only minimally visible, and that additional drawings showing building sections, the intended mechanical units and the revised side addition (whose lower roof profile would reveal more of an addition above and behind) should be prepared. The applicant was also asked to provide further details of the treatment of the stoop of 3120 16th Street, as well as of the masonry in general, windows, mechanical equipment, meters, etc.

The drawings have been revised in several ways.

Demolition

It appears that the extent of demolition has increased. The north wall at the third floor rear wing of 3118 is now proposed for removal. One may interpret the south side wing of 3118 to be mostly disappearing, too, although the drawings are ambiguous. The question of overall demolition is not settled, because it will ultimately depend on what is to occur in the third dimension, i.e., to the floors. Some of the walls to be removed appear to be bearing the loads of floor joists and rafters. Eventual permit drawings should show these being retained, supported by new structure, because the loss of substantial floor framing or the loss of the south wing or more of the rear could tip the project over into constituting demolition of the buildings "in significant part."



Roof addition

The floor plans are the same as previously presented, other than the above-mentioned demolition changes and a revised rooftop. The roof deck has been pulled off the top of the side addition, in part, to provide a space there for condensing units. But the roof addition has been pulled southward, which would make it more visible from the vantage point pictured on the next page.

The front and side elevations of the roof addition remain undeveloped.

The Historic Preservation Office's guidance to applicants for roof additions states that:

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....

Adding vertically to a historic building is generally discouraged as such additions typically alter significant features, such as its roof line, height, relationship with surrounding buildings, and overall form and mass. Additions on top of a building can sometimes be achieved when they are not visible from street views, do not result in the removal or alteration of important character-defining features of the building or streetscape, and are compatible with their context.

Historic Mount Pleasant’s own design guidelines encourage property owners to “[p]reserve the original roof shape.... Existing roof pitches are to be retained.... Many Mount Pleasant townhouses are two story with a third story front façade [as at 3120 16th Street]. It is acceptable to extend the roof to include a complete or partial third story if the extension... is not visible from the front of the façade and the view from the side of the dwelling is consistent with the original character of the dwelling.”

The perspective drawings suggest that, directly facing the facades, one would see only a little of the addition over 3120. But the actual degree of visibility from that vantage point is going to have to be guesstimated by a flag test. It is more difficult to enforce compliance of an addition allowed to be “a little” visible, than one that is conditioned on not being visible from the street. But the addition is likely to be conspicuous when seen as below, depending on the design of the side addition.

Side addition

The addition atop the little south-side wing of 3118 has been revised in a couple of significant ways. There is more glazing, but it has not quite taken on the character of a side porch. The roof, now a slate-clad hip, is not characteristic of a side porch. When the Board requested that the tile roof not be continued onto the side addition, it was not merely a matter of differentiating new construction from old. Continuing the roof, but in slate, is a jarring incompatibility. The staff understood the Board’s direction to mean that the addition roof should be detached from the main roof, i.e., that it be lower and flatter.

Of course, the effect of lowering the roof in this proposal would be to further expose to view the roof addition and air-conditioning equipment. The present roof is meant principally as a screen.



Rear elevation

The rear egress stairs remain the same. The rear elevation has changed, reflecting the new massing of the side addition and the extended roof addition. The two buildings have been distinguished from each other more. As with its façade, the rear of the side addition to 3118 should better balance integration with and distinction from the main mass. A porch-like front manages to be a part of the larger building, but a clearly subordinate part. The rear of the side addition makes it a thing unto itself.

The extent of fiber-cement siding to be employed – the reconstructed third floor and new fourth story on 3118 -- is unfortunate and not compatible even for a rear addition of such a high style house. While the Board has traditionally given greater flexibility of the treatment of secondary elevations, it should be noted that these buildings are visible from Irving Street through a parking lot shared by the homes to the east (see photo on the next page). Historically, a fairly high-style building might have received a minor, shed-like frame addition. Here, the siding is proportionally too extensive and visually splits 3118 in half. It is also too bad that the brick of 3120 would be painted in order to blend with the siding, because painting brick is typically not the best treatment, and the monolithic color emphasizes the rear wing's narrow verticality. There should be a proportional balance struck on both buildings. Dividing the building horizontally into thirds, with the upper third distinguished materially, is almost certainly the most successful route.



Conclusion

The simple solution to nearly all the issues is to eliminate the roof addition. That would prevent its visibility over the roofline in any direction; allow the roof of the side addition to be lowered and disengaged from the tile roof; permit the rooftop HVAC units to be relocated from the edge of the roof; provide space for a larger roof deck; and improve the proportions of the rear elevation while reducing the extent of siding.

HPO recommends that the Board support the consolidation of the two lots, the connection of the houses with only the necessary demolition, the construction of a two-story side addition (to be further revised and developed) to 3118 16th Street, and the construction of a third story atop the rear wing of 3120 16th Street, but find the proposed roof addition and roof of the side addition to be incompatible with the character of the historic district.