

---

---

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

---

---

Landmark/District: **Mount Pleasant Historic District** (x) Consent  
Address: **3240 19<sup>th</sup> Street NW**

Meeting Date: **January 22, 2015** (x) Alteration/addition  
Case Number: **15-102**

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

---

---

The applicant, Catarina Ferreira, agent and architect for property owners Elizabeth and Phillip Ash, requests the Board's review of a concept for the construction of an addition and deck atop this 1920 rowhouse, the construction of a rear deck, the creation of new window openings on the east wall, the expansion of one of the front basement window openings, and the re-skinning of the enclosed rear porch. A fuller description and analysis of the alterations follows, with bullets calling out issues that need to be addressed further.

### **Windows**

The applicant would introduce five window openings into the blank east wall that faces the alley. This seems a reasonable and compatible alteration, as the side elevation is not especially character-defining. The openings and the window units would be similar to those of the façade, are consistent with what one might find on an end-unit rowhouse, and are not too numerous or located too far forward. The fence along the alley would also obscure some of the openings.

- These windows need to be further detailed. Although they will probably have simple steel lintels, some thought should be put to the sills which, on the front, are of the field brick. The configurations of the new and replacement windows have been depicted, and are sufficiently compatible, but the materials have not been specified. Any windows in this small contributing building should be consistent with the window regulations for the same.

The opening for one of the front, basement windows would be increased in size and proximity to the basement floor by dropping its sill for an emergency egress from a bedroom. A window well would be constructed outside. While all front windows would ideally remain the same, this sort of alteration has been approved for similarly situated openings when there was a compelling reason. The replacement window is described as a casement, which is acceptable if the six-light configuration of the present hopper or awning window is replicated in the upper portion and the window frame and its depth within the opening are sufficiently close to the existing. The fact that the opening is to be expanded below grade means that the change would be largely obscured from public view, despite the presence of the well being obvious. The applicant intends to mask both window and well with planting.

- Depicted as semicircular, the window well has the problem of being too small to meet the building code for egress purposes. It would have to measure at least three feet square, which we would also consider the maximum compatible size.

### **Re-skinning the rear porch**

What was surely an original, two-story sleeping porch was enclosed years ago. The applicant proposes to replace the present highly textured stucco with a smoother stucco.

### **Rear deck**

The applicant also proposes the construction of a rear deck with a steel rail at the level of the main floor. This would put the deck at least eight feet above the rear-yard grade. At twenty feet, the deck's depth is considerable, but when one considers its narrow wedge shape and the higher neighboring grades supported by retaining walls, this deck fits into its context sufficiently well.

### **Roof addition and roof deck**

The largest alteration would be the demolition of much of the roof and the construction of a small addition and deck behind the tiled front roof. As the Board's guidance on roof additions indicate, the key aim should be to make the addition invisible from 19<sup>th</sup> Street. As this is an end unit, the side of the building and its roof slope are prominent. The applicant has consequently massed the addition toward the west side of the house, away from the alley. The drawings suggest that it would be successful in not being seen from the street, but a stick test would be useful for more confidence of this.

The size of the addition is such that it is technically subject to the delegation for staff review, but the HPO has been procedurally conservative with regard to additions in Mount Pleasant, typically exercising its discretion to put them before the Board, especially when they occur on a roof. The Board has also previously supported a number of additions behind small attics.

- The addition's siding material is not specified.

The applicant proposes to abandon the rearmost of the two chimneys in the side wall, rather than to lengthen it to account for a taller roof height nearby. A new gas fireplace on the first floor would be vented through the houses' rear wall. No mechanical equipment would be placed on the roof.

- The addition is complicated because of the attempt to keep it invisible from 19<sup>th</sup> Street, and it is further complicated by the addition of a skylight and solar panels, which give it just a bit more height. The placement of a bathroom just below and behind the roof ridge raises the possibility that one or more plumbing vent stacks could appear above the roof.<sup>1</sup> The means of roof drainage are not clear, as the roof framing is shown level, except for a couple of depressed and elevated areas. The solar panels would have to be flush-mounted to remain invisible from the street, but flush-mounting is tricky on many kinds

---

<sup>1</sup> The sinks are just below the ridge, but the toilet and shower are toward the rear of the bathroom. There is the possibility of combined the stacks and carrying a combined stack rearward, but flexibility is reduced by the height and other space constraints within the room.

of roofs because of the difficulty of securing to or through the membrane. In fact, such panels are typically slightly above the surface, so water can run beneath. Considering all these variables, it is plausible that the addition will be invisible from the street, but it is equally plausible that it *will* be (and that roof drainage could be a problem for the owners). A stick test is one way to gain confidence in a proposal, but it does not settle the matter, as the measurements on which it is based may be inaccurate, unanticipated conditions may arise, and builders frequently pay little attention to completing such projects exactly within a specified height envelope.

The rail around the deck would be visible above the rear corner of the house, but this is pardonable if it has a light feeling, such the slender steel rail proposed.

### **Recommendation**

*The HPO recommends that the Board approve the concept as consistent with the purposes of the preservation law and delegate to staff further review with the following conditions:*

- 1. that, before clearing a permit application, the staff review a stick test to demonstrate that the roof addition will not be visible from 19<sup>th</sup> Street;*
- 2. that permit clearance shall be conditioned upon the addition and anything on top of it (including but not limited to solar panels, skylights, mechanical equipment, flues and vent stacks) and any fire walls not be visible from the 19<sup>th</sup> Street right-of-way or the intersection, except for some allowance for a vent stack seen only over the east side of the house if necessary;*
- 3. that the front of the roof ridge not be conspicuously modified;*
- 4. that the addition's cladding be a compatible material, to be approved by staff; and*
- 5. that a permit application provide more detailed information on masonry sills for the new openings and on regulation-compliant window products for the new and expanded openings and for any replacements.*