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

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Landmark/District:	<b>Mount Pleasant Historic District</b>	(x) Agenda
Address:	<b>3305 and 3307 18<sup>th</sup> Street NW (rear)</b>	
Meeting Date:	<b>March 22, 2018</b>	(x) Raze
Case Number:	<b>17-659</b>	(x) New construction
		(x) Concept

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The applicants, property owners Michael Cummings, Karen Hyun, Claudia Schlosberg and Wayne Kahn, request the Board's review of a concept to raze a two-story frame carriage house/garage and to replace it with a larger one, similar in design, but with several dormers and set four feet in from the alley.

**Background**

The carriage house is shared between two semi-detached houses, 3305 and 3307 18<sup>th</sup> Street, which were constructed in 1905-1906 by property owners Charles and Edward Murray to a design by the architecture firm of Clarence Harding and Frank Upman. At the same time, the architects also built for the brothers the semi-detached houses that once stood at 1842-1844 Monroe Street. This carriage house was first erected in late 1905 behind the Monroe Street houses and then relocated to 18<sup>th</sup> Street a few months later. Lower shed additions were built at the north and south ends of the building in the early or middle 1920s, with all four sections of the whole labelled as automobile storage on the 1927 Baist map. One-story sheds were later added to the west side of the original sections, to accommodate cars.

**Evaluation**

The Board has now received the reports of two structural engineers. These were submitted as condition assessments to support a contention that the carriage house now lacks sufficient historic integrity to be classified as a building contributing to the character of the Mount Pleasant Historic District. The issues of historic significance and historic integrity are central to the Board's consideration of the proposed project.

HPO staff has visited the property and inspected the interior. In its opinion, the building remains a contributing structure, because it is associated and contemporaneous with the houses at 3305-3307 18<sup>th</sup>, which date to the middle of the historic district's period of significance, and because it is mostly still present. That is, it retains sufficient physical and historic integrity and character to convey its significance. There are several two-story carriage houses and carriage house/garages from the same period around 18<sup>th</sup> Street and Park Road, associated with some of the larger houses. But while there are several, they are rare in Mount Pleasant overall and important remnants of an early, suburban phase of development of the neighborhood. Relatively few residents could afford a carriage and team or an automobile—and a place to store them—just after the turn of the century. Simpler, more numerous garages have been often treated as subject

to demolition in all historic districts, but the scarcer carriage houses have been considered contributing, not only for their rarity, but for their more notable architecture and their representation of an era long past.

#### 2016 structural engineer's report

An August 2016 structural engineer's report concluded that the carriage house "needs to be rebuilt from the ground up." In summary, the report observed that:

- the roof framing is adequate, but the roofing requires replacement;
- there is rotted siding and trim;
- the concrete slabs are cracked; and
- the wall framing needs reinforcement and much replacement and needs to bear on proper footings.

This report does not address the floor framing of the loft, which suggests that the engineer did not find substantial deficiencies there. Some of the deficiencies cited are within the later shed additions.<sup>1</sup>

The condition of the concrete slabs is not essential to the inquiry, as it is the superstructure of the building that is of particular significance and character. The interior floor at grade is not character-defining. These slabs could be replaced, or they could be parked upon indefinitely in their present condition.

The principal roof appears to be original, more than a century old, and is in need of roofing replacement. The slates are mostly present and generally in good condition but, as often happens, the nails have corroded so that many of the slates have come loose. The ridge and valley flashing has also come away in several places. These have allowed water to enter the building, mainly at the sides of the alley-facing dormer, but also at the ridge. Still, the report overstates the degree of rot in the roof sheathing; it appears that most on the principal roof could be retained in place and reused.

The 2016 report illustrates the condition of some of the siding and trim, mostly at the south end of the building, but concludes that all of the siding would have to be removed. It is true that the siding is in the worst condition on the south wall, where it has not been repainted for many years. Yet, it is not all shot; the condition is worse on the lower two thirds, where most is unsalvageable because of rot. On the east wall, the siding has already been replaced with new. The north wall has little siding exposed, and it is sheltered by an eave. The greatest expanse of original siding, on the west wall, has been protected under wide-exposure Masonite-asphalt or asbestos-asphalt composite shingles.

In any case, the siding can be replaced, as necessary, without greatly diminishing the property's character. Such replacements do diminish the integrity of original materials and workmanship, but they retain the integrity of location, design and setting and would actually restore some of the integrity of feeling and association if they return the building nearer its original condition. Replacement of parts in kind as necessary is consistent with the District of Columbia's preservation design guidelines.

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<sup>1</sup> For instance, the photo on page 8 intended to illustrate "Rotten roof sheathing *throughout*" is taken within the north shed addition, as is the north wall shown on page 4.

The building stands today and is used regularly, despite being hit by a car and a mild earthquake, so most of its framing must be present. The 2016 engineer's report is correct both in that most of the framing of the lower floor must be replaced, largely because a substantial amount has already been removed to make additional openings. As the engineer suggests, the roof framing generally looks adequate, except for some damage, especially around the leaking dormer.

This report does not address the loft flooring, but that, too, looks generally adequate, if uneven because of structural issues below. The loft floor is higher in the center, because it is largely supported by the central partition which splits the space between the properties. Meanwhile, the walls north and south have settled because of decay in some posts and the fact that the south loft floor joists are partly held by a steel angle that is not itself adequately supported. The report correctly points out the inadvisability of having untreated wood framing in contact with the slabs. Remarkably, not all of those posts are shot, but most have to be replaced wholly or partially, and additional support and reinforcing ties are necessary.

The roof framing and loft-floor framing together constitute the greater part of the building's structure, and most of it is original, meaning that most of the building remains. If we overlook the minority of framing that needs to be replaced in the upper story and the minority of framing that can be retained in the lower, one might characterize the overall condition by this shorthand: the first floor needs to be replaced, while the loft and roof can be saved.

This would require shoring and jacking up the building to pour adequate footings and to add new supporting structure. But performing this work and adding reinforcements such as Strong ties does not seem to be a heroic effort for a building of this size.

#### 2018 EHT Traceries report

The conditions assessment and historic significance report offer details about the permit/construction history and concurs that "The structure is a contributing resource to the Mount Pleasant Historic District."

The report holds that this proposed raze is comparable to two Board-approved razes, 2110 16<sup>th</sup> Street SE and 1229 E Street SE. There are at least two important differences: those buildings were in worse condition, and both were taken up by the Board when they were in new ownership that bore no responsibility for their condition. The "shotgun house" at 1229 E Street was perhaps the most notorious case of demolition by neglect, but the former owner had also actively removed much of the framing, leaving little remaining when the property finally turned over.

#### 2018 structural engineer's report

A new structural engineer's report has been submitted to supplement the initial one. It, too, concludes that the building should be demolished. Its findings are summarized as follows:

We estimate that, due to the extensive deterioration and previous modification to the carriage house, the following replacements would be necessary:

- 100% of the first-floor carriage house finishes.
- 75% of the existing framing.
- 50% of the roof sheathing.
- 100% of the roof, flashing, eaves, and gutters.

In addition to the above replacements, 100% of the foundations, which are currently nonexistent, need to be installed.

As discussed above, the roof needs replacement, but the slates themselves are not all shot, and an estimate of 50 percent of new roof sheathing is probably unnecessarily high. Perhaps nearly 100 percent of the siding at the first floor does require replacement, but there is little siding located there; it is nearly all on the neglected south wall. Where the siding remains or has been replaced, at the loft level, it appears to be salvageable. While the report claims that “One hundred percent of the exterior finishes have also sustained significant water and insect damage” (p. 9), it also recommends that “existing finishes may be salvaged and reused as part of the wall reconstruction” (p. 10). The report offers no evidence that the original west siding—under later siding—“has likely suffered similar water and insect damage as the south elevation and salvaging the siding will likely be limited” (p. 13).

The details of the report do not support the conclusion that 75 percent “of the existing framing” requires replacement. The report does not show, for instance, that most of the roof framing or most of the loft-floor framing requires replacement. It estimates only that 50 percent of the knee-wall studs in the attic require repair, of whatever sort, “due to deterioration” (p. 11); that one loft-floor joist requires replacement (p. 19); and that roof rafters and floor joists may be sistered as necessary (pp. 17 and 19). This is the crux of the matter. If most of the bones of the building had to be replaced, HPO would agree that the building is no longer contributing and should be razed. But, based on visual inspection and the engineers’ report, this is not the case. As discussed above, this is more an instance of having to add framing than having to remove it.

This report also anticipates peril from shoring and jacking up the building. Shoring may be characterized as invasive, as it has to touch many points of a building. But in this case, the building is small, light, open, and accessible to shoring. Movement of the building would put stress on connections, but if done carefully, the loft floor should roughly level itself as the exterior walls are lifted.

The report frequently uses the words “restore” and “restoration,” but it is not always clear what is meant. One problem is that the discussion of restoration conflates two different questions. There is no restoration or rehabilitation plan before the Board, but the Board is asked to dismiss rehabilitation. What is before the Board is a proposal for a raze, so alternatives for reuse are not under consideration. The appropriate question is simply, does the building retain sufficient integrity to remain a building contributing the character of the Mount Pleasant Historic District? As discussed above, the answer is, yes.

Considerable effort has been put into repairing the houses, but less so into the garages. The north shed has had new framing sistered in relatively recently. A couple of new posts have been added, one at the south vehicle door where a car struck the building. Fixes to the roofing have been makeshift and temporary.

Wood exposed to the elements can decay rapidly without the regular application of paint. There is no evidence of the repainting of the siding and trim in recent years. Slate roofing can be repaired or replaced, yet the original roofing continues to detach itself slowly. The engineer’s reports refer to damage to the supporting posts from water on the surface of the slab. One might

ask what had been done to correct that condition, to redirect water, to protect the posts or elevate their bases.

HPO staff had previously recommended to the applicants that, rather than building an almost-facsimile of the carriage house, they might retain and reinforce what remains, add dormers to the west and north sides to introduce more light, but limit the removal of roof framing and preserve the most prominent elevations, and reconstruct the one-story shed additions on the west so that large cars can be accommodated. Such work could have been approved administratively and would retain the authentic object.

Expenditures anticipated for demolition and new construction—or, alternatively, for repair—could have been applied to the building earlier, avoiding partial or total replacement.

### **New construction**

The concept drawings are the last section (“Exhibit C”) of the attached materials. If the raze of the existing building were approved, construction of a slightly larger, slate-roofed, wood-sided structure would not be incompatible. The zoning regulations require that new construction be set in farther from the alley than the present building and neighboring accessory structures stand.

### **Recommendation**

*HPO recommends that the Board find the concept of razing the subject building inconsistent with the purposes of the historic preservation law, as it would not retain a building that contributes to the character of the Mount Pleasant Historic District.*