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

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Landmark/District: **Mount Pleasant Historic District** (x) Agenda  
Address: **1644 Park Road NW**

Meeting Date: **February 23, 2023** (x) Alteration  
Case Number: **23-173** (x) Permit

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The applicant, Matthew W. Lee, agent and architect (with R. Michael Cross Design Group) for property owner 1644 Park Road NW LLC, requests Board review of a permit application to construct a two-story rear addition to a three-story semidetached house and make other alterations.

The subject house is one of a row of six pair on the block designed by the prominent Washington architect Appleton P. Clark Jr. for the builders Osterman and Butler in 1906. The easternmost pair was demolished two decades later, for the construction of the apartment building at 1630 Park. The rear wings of the remaining buildings remain largely intact.

The proposal would demolish the one- and two-story wing of the subject house and the one-story garage, to replace them with a two-story, 42-foot-deep addition, a depth equal to that of the main block, with balconies and open-air parking beyond that. The house's net additional depth would be sixteen feet, but the new construction would equal the width of the main block, and with the added height, it would be roughly twice the bulk of the historic wing.

The best feature of the addition is that it steps down from the main block, leaving the mansard roof exposed. It would have a small roof deck and a green roof to make up for the extensive hardscape. A rear dormer window would be altered to provide access to the deck.

A brick-faced addition would be more consistent with the context of the row and the adjacent apartments and commercial buildings. A large mass with siding can look barn-like. This addition is about the maximum size at which siding would be acceptable. Its exposure should not exceed six inches, both to be consistent with exposures common in 1906, and to give the boxy structure more texture. Unfortunately, the siding is not specified as to material; it should be fiber-cement and not vinyl. Nor are the deck and balcony materials or the windows specified.

**Demolition**

Demolition of the garage is no issue, as it is a nondescript, mid-to-late-twentieth-century concrete-block structure. Demolition of the rear wing, although substantial, is consistent with what the Board has previously supported for addition projects, balancing the law's purposes to retain and to adapt historic properties. The wing, although original, constitutes a relatively small proportion of the mass and the character-defining features of the historic house.

The demolition within the main block, however, is problematic. The plans indicate the removal of all interior walls, and the sections show that the floor assemblies would be replaced entirely, leaving a shell. Coupled with the removal of the wing, this constitutes demolition of the historic building in significant part. It involves two types of work that qualify as demolition, rather than mere alteration: the removal of a substantial portion of the structural components of the building, and the removal of an entire wing (10C DCMR 305.1).

The floors should instead be largely retained, or the matter should be referred to the Mayor's Agent.

### **Other repairs/replacements**

The walk and steps around the east side of the house would be replaced and two parking spaces would be provided on a slab at rear.

Also proposed is the introduction of new window openings and the alteration of nearly all the existing openings on the east elevation. Although this side is not prominent, because of its proximity to the apartment building, it would be more compatible and surely less costly, to take a more conservative approach. Perhaps not every opening needs to be shifted or at least partly filled. There are presently no openings forward of the chimney. The proposed double-ganged windows get pretty close to the corner of the building, especially behind the mansard at the third floor. It is recommended at least that the northernmost window on the third floor be eliminated. This would also relieve the repetition of double-ganged windows.

The drawings should have been filed as a concept, as there are several details to be worked out, in addition to specification of the material of the addition's siding, windows and railings. The following items are noted as being repaired or repaired/replaced "as req[ui]red": the front fence, the front concrete lead walk and stairs, the front porch and stairs, the mansard roof and dormers, and the chimney. As with most renovation projects, the windows will probably be replaced as a matter of course, whatever their condition, especially because new windows will be purchased for the addition and for the side elevation. The windows depicted on the façade do not match the historic nine-over-one and six-over-one configurations of the row.

Some repairs are exempt from permit requirements, while most replacements are not. It is unclear who or what decides which repairs and replacements are required if they have not been identified by the time of permit application. Had any one of the items been the subject of its own permit application, staff would not clear it without asking the same questions.

The principal questions for the Board are the level of demolition and the nature of the addition.

### **Recommendation**

*As the drawings are still at a conceptual stage, HPO recommends that the Board approve the project conceptually, with a delegation to staff of further review, but only with the conditions that: the floor framing be mostly retained; compatible exterior repairs and replacements be specified, including windows; compatible siding, windows and railings for the addition be specified; and the new openings be revised as discussed above. Alternatively, if the applicant wishes to proceed with a permit application for the level of demolition now proposed, the applicant may request a hearing of the Mayor's Agent.*