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

Landmark/District:	Mount Pleasant Historic District	(x) Agenda
Address:	3215 Mount Pleasant Street NW	
Meeting Date:	October 27, 2022	(x) Addition
Case Number:	20-118	(x) Concept extension

The applicant, Kevin C. Sperry, architect (KASA) and agent for property owner 3215 MP Partners LLC (Velocity Property Management), returns with a request for a two-year extension of a June 4, 2020 concept approval (original staff report attached) for the construction of a three-story addition atop a one-story commercial building.

In 2020, the Board determined that the underlying early-twentieth-century building no longer contributes to the character of the historic district because of extensive alterations. After two hearings, the Board unanimously approved as compatible a four-story concept “as presented in the alternate option, with the fourth floor of lighter-colored brick set back from the façade and its forward volume set several feet forward of the interior court. The approval is subject to the condition that the design be further developed and reviewed by staff, including the development of some brick detail on the side of the northwest corner of the fourth floor and a more robust storefront cornice if the present one is to be replaced.”

The historic preservation regulations (10C DCMR § 332.1) state that “The Board’s recommendations on an application, including an application for conceptual design review and preliminary review, remains in effect for a period of two years from the date of the Board’s action granting conceptual approval. Upon expiration of this period, the applicant may return to the Board with a request for an extension of one additional period of two years for good cause shown. The Board is not required to reopen the review of the application, and shall not unreasonably withhold its approval of an extension.”

In this instance, the good cause may be simply that the permit application was opened at the beginning of February, and the prescreening took well more than the next four months, with HPO receiving it only at the end of September. Staff has reviewed the proposed permit drawings and has identified only one issue. A note on the front elevation states that “Retail storefronts and canopy on hold pending tenant lease agreements.” HPO can handle the development of the storefront, and the placeholder is what had been approved in concept. Of course, staff will not be able to leave open the question indefinitely, but it is not sufficient reason to withhold extension of the concept approval.

Recommendation

HPO recommends that the Board approve the concept extension subject to the original conditions.

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Landmark/District:	Mount Pleasant Historic District	(x) Agenda
Address:	3215 Mount Pleasant Street NW	
Meeting Date:	June 4, 2020	(x) Addition
Case Number:	20-118	(x) Revised concept

The applicant, Goulston & Storrs, agent for property owner 3215 MP Partners LLC (i.e., Velocity Property Management, with architect KASA), returns with a revision of a concept application for the construction of a three-story addition atop a one-story commercial building.

At the April hearing, the Board approved the extent of proposed demolition, as it determined that the existing one-story building no longer contributes to the character of the historic district because of the loss of fabric and character-defining elements through alterations. The Board voted to approve the concept for constructing additional stories, but expressed concerns about the compatibility of the fourth floor. The applicant was asked to come back to the Board to show other design solutions for the fourth floor, while developing the storefront and a more robust cornice.

The plans have been revised, with a similar set-back fourth floor now distinguished by a lighter color brick that carries into the rear wing. Some window openings are now shown in the side elevation, and there is a more pronounced cornice shown atop the third floor. Two options are shown for the fourth floor, one similar to last month's approach, with just a terrace in front, and a second with the forward mass shifted and centered on the forward mass of the third floor, providing terraces at its front and back.

The green screen has been eliminated from the façade, and that in the court has been reduced one story, so it does not visually bifurcate the building. The first floor, to remain, still projects relative to the floor above, so that the façade of the upper floors do not extend beyond the façades of the row to the south. The storefront has been reorganized, and the surrounding brick would now be a single color.

Evaluation

Although the immediate context is of three-story buildings and lower, one need not look far for buildings of similar size and height to that proposed. Sixteenth Street, including the zone where it meets Mount Pleasant Street, has much taller apartments. Park Road has several four- and five-story buildings. The most instructive precedents, however, are historic four-story buildings on Mount Pleasant Street that stand next to one- and two-story commercial buildings: 3125, 3145, 3151 and Mount Pleasant (shown below). It is noteworthy that these all stand on the east side of the street, but there is a four-story building on Irving Street, just west of Mount Pleasant, plus those at the Park Road intersection.

The relationships between these buildings and their neighbors is more a variety than a pattern. And some have side courts, like the proposed addition, and some do not. What they have in common is that their brick four stories go straight up—no setbacks—but typically with a distinct base and an expressed attic story. The proposed addition would be simpler and more closely follow this precedent if it did not set back at the fourth floor, making the building look more squat. The setback of the fourth story, while doing little to relieve the bulk of the building as viewed from the south, is effective for its relationship to the building immediately to the north when seen from that direction. It is recommended that the fourth floor not be set back, but if the Board feels that it is important, or the applicant strongly desires it, such a setback is sufficiently compatible.

Lowering the green screen in the court does unify the building, by avoiding visually bisecting it when seen from the south. But it may draw more attention to the upper floor, and it muddies the intelligibility of the composition. Such a treatment is more characteristic of the kind of differentiation sought for an additional floor atop a historic building. While respectful of the Board's concerns about the previous design and the applicant's efforts to address them, HPO believes expressing the building in single color of brick is more compatible with the character of the historic district.

Of the two options for treating the forward mass of the fourth floor, the one that centers it between front and rear terraces is probably preferable as it appears more balanced, although its relative success may be largely a function of playing into the treatment of the floor as a quasi-penthouse.

It is the addition of south-side windows that is the most successful device for breaking down the bulk visible from that direction. And the accentuation of the façade's cornice and reworking of the storefront are other steps in the right direction.

Recommendation

HPO recommends that the Board approve the revised concept that adds a cornice, windows to the south elevation and centers the fourth floor on the forward mass, and delegate to staff further review, with the condition that the exterior brick be one consistent color/product.