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

Property Address:	1223 4th Street NW	() Agenda
Landmark/District:	Mount Vernon Square Historic District	() Consent Calendar
ANC:	6E	(x) Denial Calendar
		(x) Permit review
Meeting Date:	April 23, 2015	() Revision
H.P.A. Number:	#15-296	() New Construction
Staff Reviewer:	Brendan Meyer	() Demolition
		() Subdivision

Owner, Erin Stevens, seeks permit approval after-the-fact for a front window reconfiguration already constructed at 1223 4th Street NW, a non-contributing rowhouse in the Mount Vernon Square Historic District. A Notice of Violation was issued October 24, 2014.

Context

The row of six two-story, flat-fronted frame houses from 1221-1231 4th Street, NW were originally built by James Naylor between 1867-1870.¹ The end unit of the historic row – the slightly taller, three-bay wide house at 1233 – was built in 1872. While once common throughout the city, frame buildings are increasingly rare, having been demolished since the late 19th century for more permanent masonry construction. Today, the frame houses are found concentrated primarily in the Capitol Hill, Georgetown and Mount Vernon Square Historic Districts.

The Board heard cases for 1221 and 1223 4th Street in 2006. At that time, both properties had suffered over a decade of abandonment and structural decomposition. A new owner applied to demolish the buildings and reconstruct them on the grounds that they had lost their structural integrity and could not be restored.² As part of the demolition request, the applicant proposed to salvage original façade components from both buildings and reuse them to recreate the two-story frame facades, albeit with new third floors at the rear. The Board approved this course. This course was re-emphasized at a later Board meeting when the Board advised the concept design be modified to more precisely replicate the demolished historic buildings.³ The recreated facades include the door hood and building cornice salvaged from the original buildings.

In December 2011, the Board approved a concept design for a new two-story rowhouse with mansard third floor at the vacant lot at 1235 4th Street NW (HPA #12-038).

¹ All six houses are frame and were originally clad in clapboard. Two of the houses were reclad with brick in the early 20th century; two others have been clad in stucco.

² HPA #06-374 and #06-375, July 27, 2006, “HPO staff has toured the interior of the buildings and agrees with the assessment and conclusions made by [the applicant’s engineer]. Through neglect and abandonment by the previous owner, the buildings have been allowed to deteriorate to the point at which they no longer retain structural integrity and are not salvageable.”

³ HPA #06-374 and #06-375, October 26, 2006, Staff recommendation adopted by the Board, “The façade design of each house should be based on an accurate reconstruction of the existing structures, including their materials, and should incorporate the salvaged architectural features from the existing houses.”

Evaluation

Staff regrets that a third window was inserted between the two second floor windows on the front façade without a building permit. If the owner had applied for the building permit required to make this alteration, Staff would have advised of the significance of the recreated façade. Also applicable are the guidelines adopted by the Board. In *Windows and Doors for Historic Buildings*, “Altering the existing window pattern, either by changing their location or adding new windows to a façade, is strongly discouraged or should only be done after carefully considering the effect of the change on the overall character of a building and consultation with the Historic Preservation Office.” In, *New Construction in Historic Districts*, “The spacing of repetitive facade elements, such as projecting bays, storefronts, windows, doors, belt courses and the like, give an elevation its rhythm. A new building should respect the rhythm of its neighbors as well as that of the street.”

These guidelines, taken together, apply to this permit application and advise the same thing whether the building is considered a historic building or a new building. Frame rowhouses from the mid-19th century—as exhibited by this row—show a near uniform character of fenestration rhythm and dimensions. Individual window units are spaced equally along the façade and across multiple facades when in a row. Only in later building styles were paired (Victorian) and ganged (Modern) windows common. The simple regular spacing of windows on vernacular 19th century frame buildings, such as those found on this part of 4th Street, is a character defining feature of this building type which makes up a significant portion of the buildings in this historic district.

If the Board adopts the staff recommendation, staff can work with the applicant to reverse the unpermitted work back to its original two window configuration. Assuming time to contract the work and order materials, staff believes the corrective work can be permitted and completed within 120 days. This date is flexible depending on the applicant’s good-faith effort to correct the work moving forward.

Recommendation

The staff recommends that the Board advise the Mayor’s Agent that the constructed alteration is not consistent with the purposes of the preservation law, because it is not compatible with the character of the historic district.

The purposes of the Act are:

(1) With respect to properties in historic districts:

- (A) To retain and enhance those properties which contribute to the character of the historic district and to encourage their adaptation for current use;*
- (B) To assure that alterations of existing structures are compatible with the character of the historic district; and*
- (C) To assure that new construction and subdivision of lots in an historic district are compatible with the character of the historic district;*