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

Property Address:	605 & 607 New York Avenue NW	<input type="checkbox"/> Agenda
Landmark/District:	Mount Vernon Square Historic District	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Consent Calendar
ANC:	6E	<input type="checkbox"/> Denial Calendar
		<input type="checkbox"/> Permit Review
Meeting Date:	March 24, 2015	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Alteration
H.P.A. Number:	#16-240	<input type="checkbox"/> New Construction
Staff Reviewer:	Brendan Meyer	<input type="checkbox"/> Demolition
		<input type="checkbox"/> Subdivision

Douglas Development Corporation, represented by architect Shalom Baranes Associates, seeks revision of an approved concept to move two contributing buildings in the Mount Vernon Square Historic District (#15-299, July 2015). The applicant now seeks approval to dismantle and reconstruct both buildings rather than moving them intact. A structural engineer's report has been prepared by KCE Structural Engineers, PC and a historic materials condition assessment was prepared by AEON Preservation Services, LLC.

Property History and Project Status

In July 2015 the Board approved moving 605 and 607 New York Avenue NW as part of the larger conceptual plan to develop the eastern portion of Square 450 by moving small contributing buildings, demolishing non-contributing buildings and in-filling the remainder of the square with a new multi-story commercial building. 605 and 607 New York are adjacent 19th buildings destined to be moved 4 lots to the west and adjacent to the livery stable building at 621-625 New York Avenue. 605 New York was permitted and built as a 2 story residence on a raised basement in 1887. 607 was built ten years later as a three story residence. 605 is the more altered and fragile of the pair. In the 1920s, its first floor framing was removed, the basement filled in half-high to grade, and the front entrance lowered to the sidewalk. The original framing and entrance threshold once aligned with the beltcourse now evident five feet above grade. The first floor windows were blocked in and replaced by a tall show window. The transom and sashes of the show window were discovered from the interior when plaster was removed.

In preparation of the move the formstone facades installed on both buildings in the 1950s was removed which revealed the original facades. Original ornamental brick had been chiseled flush to facilitate the formstone installation. The metal fasteners used to install the formstone lath are countless and attempts to remove them without damaging the brick have failed. Most fasteners remain in place for now. The aggregate effect of the fasteners and formstone is that mortar deterioration is extensive and brick is displaced and settled in several places. Penetration tests of the side walls show the walls are 13" wide at the base and 9" wide above that. The diminution roughly corresponds to the original above grade first floor. Tests also show that the collar joints that run between wythes of brick from grade to roof are unmortarted with few header courses which is a significant deficiency in terms of the walls being monolithic and stable enough to move intact. Joists run the width of the buildings and, except for the first floor joists of 605 which were removed when the original front entrance was lowered to grade, are deteriorated, rotted, deflected, unsupported at mid-span, and loosely bearing in their wall pockets.

Proposal

Based on the revealed structural conditions of the buildings, the engineers report recommends that the buildings are too unstable to survive the move. More than that, the structural conditions are so poor

that their ability to withstand wind and seismic loads in their current location is questionable. To leave them in place and build the rest of the project under and around them would be “difficult, if not impossible.” Alternatively, the applicant now proposes to accomplish the move of the buildings by dismantling and reconstructing them in their previously approved locations.

Evaluation

Moving contributing buildings would be the least preferred preservation option if not for deconstruction/reconstruction being preferred even less.

When the concept for the overall project at Square 450 was reviewed in 2015 the appropriateness of moving contributing buildings was discussed: “Relocating historic buildings is not standard preservation practice and is generally discouraged by Federal preservation standards. However, while not frequently proposed, the Board has acknowledged and approved relocation as an appropriate treatment in limited instances, particularly when a resource is isolated and where the relocation could improve its historic context.” The Board adopted the recommendation that in this context it was consistent with the preservation act. While not preferred, at least moving buildings intact preserves a building’s craftsmanship and materials. Reconstruction risks losing these attributes, and perhaps even scale and dimension, if the reconstruction is not performed with the highest workmanship available today.

The engineer report gives a cursory description of what would be necessary to stabilize the buildings to make them safe enough to survive a move or even just adjacent excavation and construction. The buildings could be made stiffer by reinstalling the first floor joists at 605, sistering existing joists, repointing the masonry before the move, and by turning the walls into “stressed skin panels” by adding a skin of plywood sheathing to each side of the load-bearing brick walls. Although not included in the report, the Board might want to also consider injection grouting to fill the collar joints and stiffen the joist/wall connections with metal rod anchors.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Review Board find the concept plan to dismantle and reconstruct 605 and 607 New York Avenue, NW to be consistent with the preservation act in light of the structural integrity deficiencies documented by the engineers report.