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

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Property Address:	<b>1110 6<sup>th</sup> Street, NW</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agenda
Landmark/District:	<b>Mount Vernon Square Historic District</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Consent Calendar
		<input type="checkbox"/> Denial Calendar
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Concept Review
Meeting Date:	<b>May 28, 2015</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Alteration
H.P.A. Number:	<b>#15-321</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> New Construction
Staff Reviewer:	<b>Brendan Meyer</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Demolition
		<input type="checkbox"/> Subdivision

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The applicant, owner Ronald Bonfilio, seeks concept review for a three-story plus basement rear addition and partial fourth floor addition to a three story contributing rowhouse in the Mount Vernon Square Historic district. Plans were prepared by RAM Design LLC.

### **Property Description and Context**

1110 6<sup>th</sup> Street is the last survivor of a row of three attached houses built in 1873 by owner G.W. Cissell. The house displays several characteristics of postbellum architecture including grandly proportioned windows on a flat façade and a wood cornice consisting of Greek Revival flourishes like the palmette in the plancier at the cornice return. Other Greek details include a set of sandstone front steps, the leaf and dart window hoods and a robust door surround with large consoles. These rich flourishes should not be unexpected since G.W. Cissell was a prominent entrepreneur of the period and his construction of 1110 6<sup>th</sup> Street coincided with a period heavy investment and residential speculation in the Mount Vernon Square area that targeted the professional class.<sup>1</sup>

The first floor sits above a raised basement with uncharacteristically large windows. A cellar exists below the basement. There has never been a rear wing on the house and the current rear elevation shows a disconcerting degree of bulging out of plumb.

### **Proposal**

The applicant proposes to demolish the existing rear wall and slightly sloped flat roof in order to accommodate a new 4-story rear wing (28 x 12 feet) and flat roof decks. The rear wing width would create a dog leg court 5 feet wide which would be occupied by a basement areaway stair, a prefabricated metal stair from grade to roof, and be covered at the roof level with an open wood trellis members. The rear elevation calls for brick; the side wall materials are not indicated.

On top of both the historic building and the rear addition would be a partial fourth floor addition of irregular plan and the full width of the house. This addition contains a bedroom suite and provides access to roof decks at both the front and back of the house.

The existing basement entrance under the front main steps would be replaced with a new areaway running the full width of the house. The areaway would project almost 6 feet from the

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<sup>1</sup> Among other businesses and investments, G.W. Cissell incorporated a gas company, a mill in Georgetown, and the Farmers & Mechanics Bank. At the time of his death in 1904, he still owned 1106 and 1108 6<sup>th</sup> Street NW, the two other houses in the original row of three that included 1110.

front of the house in order to accommodate a switch-back run of stairs going 15 feet below grade to provide front entrances to both basement and cellar levels.

### **Evaluation**

With some essential revisions the proposed concept could be compatible with the historic district.

Demolition of the rear wall and roof together constitute demolition under the preservation regulations.<sup>2</sup> However, the threshold for demolition can be avoided by retaining the roof of the existing house. This would preclude changing the archetypal character of the rowhouse profile which otherwise would be flattened in order to accommodate a new deck. While this profile may soon be attached to an adjacent project and made not visible, removing the front deck from the scope of the project is the proper assurance that no addition to the building will be perceived from the 6<sup>th</sup> Street right-of-way.

The partial fourth floor addition as proposed will be a large roof element substantially visible from L Street. Roof additions of this type are a modern convention that, when visible, are rarely compatible with the simple block & wing massing of a 19<sup>th</sup> century rowhouse or cornice lines of a 19<sup>th</sup> century residential streetscape. For this reason, the Board has established that compatible roof top additions should not be visible from public street view. Until the current sight lines change, the view of 1110 6<sup>th</sup> Street from L Street should be treated with the same consideration as 6<sup>th</sup> Street. The impact of rooftop alterations only increases when further considering the prefabricated steel stairs slated for the new dog-leg court and the railings for a deck on top of the rear addition.

Front alterations proposed should be revised to be more consistent with the Board's guidelines for basement entrances.<sup>3</sup> The extent of excavation for the multi-level areaway stairs would incompatibly alter the relationship of the building to grade (3.3) which in this case is level with the sidewalk. The shallow depth of the front yard and the railings that would be required around the areaway accentuate the prominence of this alteration. A compatible concept would reuse the existing basement entrance and relocate stairs to the cellar to the interior of the building.

### **Recommendation**

*The HPO recommends that the Board find the concept design to be consistent with the preservation act on the conditions that:*

- 1. the partial fourth floor be removed;*
- 2. the front roof deck be removed; and*
- 3. the multi-level front basement entrance be removed.*

*The HPO recommends that final approval be delegated to staff.*

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<sup>2</sup> "Work considered demolition under the Act shall include, but is not limited to, any of the following, as determined by the Mayor's Agent: ...the removal or destruction of all or a substantial portion of the roof along with all or substantially all of one or more exterior walls." DCMR 10C, 305.1(c).

<sup>3</sup> Preservation and Design Guidelines for Basement Entrances and Windows (2011)