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

Property Address:	1227 4th Street NW	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agenda
Landmark/District:	Mount Vernon Square Historic District	<input type="checkbox"/> Consent Calendar
		<input type="checkbox"/> Denial Calendar
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Concept Review
Meeting Date:	January 31, 2019	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Alteration
H.P.A. Number:	19-105	<input type="checkbox"/> New Construction
		<input type="checkbox"/> Demolition
		<input type="checkbox"/> Subdivision

Owners, Jefferson Parke and Arsiné Kailian, seek concept review for a rear and rooftop addition to 1227 4th Street NW, a two-story rowhouse in the Mount Vernon Square Historic District. Plans were prepared by Wiebenson & Dorman Architects.

Property Description and Context

The row of six two-story, flat-fronted frame houses at 1221-1231 4th Street, NW were originally built by James Naylor between 1867-1870.¹ While once common throughout the city, frame buildings became increasingly rare as they were replaced with more durable and fire-resistive masonry construction. The row exhibits several characteristics associated with this building type: a regular pattern across the row of entrances, passages and widely space windows, an unbroken cornice of modillions, and short height at-grade elevations. 1233 4th was built separately in 1872 and exhibits the same characteristics. 1221 and 1223 at the south end of the row are new buildings reconstructed in 2006 to replace original houses which had deteriorated beyond repair. Both reconstructions include a third floor set back from the front of the row. 1235 4th is a new two-story house with mansard third-story approved by the Board in 2011.

Proposal

The applicant proposes to demolish the two-story rear wing and rear elevation of the house and build a new three-story rear wing. The rear addition would span the full width of the lot and measure 39 feet from deep from the main block of the house (19 feet farther than the former wing and 17 feet beyond the neighbor's wing to the south. A new basement would be excavated under the full length of the house with access provided from the rear yard. The third floor or the rear addition would be 32 feet tall to align with the third floor of the new houses at the south end of the row.

Evaluation

The Board has reviewed several cases for this group of houses and has consistently acted to protect the integrity, height, and sense of scale of these small historic buildings. It is recommended that the Board continue this approach as it considers the addition at 1227 4th Street.

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.

In 2006, the case for 1221 and 1223 4th began after more than a decade of abandonment, deterioration and structural collapses.² A new owner applied to demolish the buildings and replace them with three-story buildings that included replica front facades. The Board approved demolition of the buildings on the condition that the new construction have front facades precisely matching the originals and that the third floors be setback to the maximum extent possible so that they would not loom over the cornice line of the row. In 2011 the Board approved the new two-story and mansard rowhouse at 1235 4th in large part because the mansard roof generally complemented the cornice line of the adjacent row of small historic houses.³ The results from these Board actions are mixed.

The third floors of the new buildings at 1221 and 1223 were approved by the Board to be not visible from 4th Street. However, the row sits at the end of Ridge Street where it terminates at 4th Street. The result is that elements that were scrutinized to not be prominently visible are in fact distinctly visible (Figure 1). Proof to staff of their prominence is that they are frequently pointed to by applicants who seek guidance for their own rear and roof top addition proposals.

If the facades at 1223 and 1221 had been built in a contemporary design, rather than as replicas of the original facades, perhaps they would not be mistaken for historic buildings, but rather for what they are: new, non-contributing buildings built in the 21st century. 1227 4th Street is in a different category because it is a mid-19th century rowhouse and contributes to the character of the historic district. The Board should apply its guidelines for additions to historic buildings (not its guidelines for new construction) while also considering the visibility afforded by Ridge Street.⁴

Compatibly adding a rear addition that is a floor taller than the main block of a rowhouse is not as difficult as adding on top of a house, but it has similar challenges. Excessive demolition must be avoided, and any additional height must not significantly change the perceived height and scale of the historic house or loom over it. The demolition proposed in this case is extensive, but just short of substantial since the main block of the house will be mostly preserved. While a sightline test for the width of the street would usually be adequate, in this case the Board should not ignore the view offered from Ridge Street (Figure 1). This view shows the third floors of 1223 and 1221 to be substantially visible above the cornices of the row. It is safe to conclude, because 1227 is drawn to the same dimensions as this pair of new houses, that the proposed concept would produce the same amount of visible structure above the historic row of houses.

Recommendation

Staff recommends the Board advise the applicant to revise the height and/or setback of the addition at 1227 4th Street NW so that it would not be substantially visible from 4th Street or Ridge Street and return to the Board on the consent calendar or for further review.

Staff contact: Brendan Meyer

² HPA #06-374 Staff recommendation adopted by the Board, “If third floors are to be constructed on these buildings, they should be secondary in height, mass and visual appearance to the historic row.”

³ HPA #12-038, December 2011

⁴ Additions to Historic Buildings (1997), 16.1 “Any roof-top addition should be located far enough behind the existing cornice so that it is hidden from view by pedestrians on the street.”



Figure 1. 1221 thru 1235 4th Street NW, January 2019. 1227 is the house beyond the "one way" sign.