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

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Property Address:	<b>1251 4<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>November 4, 2021</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Alteration
H.P.A. Number:	<b>#21-503</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> New Construction
		<input type="checkbox"/> Demolition
		<input type="checkbox"/> Subdivision

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Agent, Mark Morgensen on behalf of owner Delta Rhino Company, seeks concept review to add a third-story addition and make other alterations to 1251 4<sup>th</sup> Street NW, a contributing property in the Mount Vernon Square Historic District. Plans were prepared by Valerion Consulting. The Board has approved concept designs for different owners of this property in 2017 and 2018 that have not been constructed.

### **Property Description and Context**

1251 4<sup>th</sup> Street is at the corner of 4<sup>th</sup> and N Street and built as a grocery and flats building in 1885. The building's commercial history is evident in its projecting storefronts, corner entrance, arched cornice and stepped parapets. The storefronts are not original, but their dimensions are consistent with historic forms and they date from the period of significance for the district. The three-story brick main block of the building steps down to a two-story brick wing along 4<sup>th</sup> Street.

### **Proposal**

The applicant proposes to reconstruct the two-story rear wing, matching its current material and dimension, and construct a third-story addition on top of the wing. The new glass and metal third story would be set back from the west and south wall of the wing. A shallow pitched roof would include a deep overhang above the west side of the addition and include a deck nested into it. A roof deck would also be installed over the full extent the main block of the building by lowering and flattening the roof behind the parapets. The front façade would be altered by squaring off the front entrance chamfered diagonally across the corner of the building and reconstruct the storefront projections to either side. Two new straight-run basement entrances would be constructed along the length of the 4<sup>th</sup> Street face of the building.

### **Evaluation**

The concept application includes many elements already addressed by previous Board reviews, but the premise of an enclosed third floor addition on top of the rear wing is a new proposal for this building. In September 2017 a roof deck for the rear wing was approved as a compatible, temporary form of construction with little discernable impact on the historic district. While there may be some narrow chance for a small, deferential third floor addition on top of the addition which would not obscure or erase the archetypal main block/rear wing rowhouse form exhibited by 1251 4<sup>th</sup>, this proposal shows the opposite. The large roof form projecting over the west side of the addition counteracts any benefits gained from setting back the walls of the addition from the walls of the wing. The roof produces a conspicuous contemporary roof form not similar to any contextual historic form. Sometimes juxtaposing contemporary forms with historic elements distinguishes and augments the perception of the historic character of a building, but this strategy

works best when the contemporary portion is modest and deferential and does not compete with or overshadow the historic resource. This design overshadows the historic building in the theoretical and literal sense with its deep, shadow-casting roof overhang.

The work proposed for the storefronts and entrance at the front of the building excessively alter character defining features of the building or are inconsistent with the Board's commercial guidelines. The current appearance of this part of the building is a blend of original and non-original conditions. The corner entrance and dimensions of the storefronts and transom windows are original, while the infill brick construction of the storefronts are non-historic 20<sup>th</sup> century repairs. The previous concept approved by the Board treated these features better by retaining the corner entrance, rebuilding the storefronts with historic glazing and paneling, and reopening the transom windows above the storefronts. The applicant should follow the concept approved here for the prior owner. The rendering also shows window openings added to the south elevation. These should not be included in the concept so that the fenestration of street facing primary elevations are not altered.

The roof deck proposed for the top of the main block is also a concern for the visibility it will enable in a very prominent location. While the deck itself will be hidden by the parapet created by demolishing the roof and rebuilding a lower flat roof, its activity, occupants, furniture and contents will be prominently visible. Setting back the deck from both north and south might gain a deck of some usable size invisible to the public, but that is typically not the case for a corner building like this exposed on three side.

Reconstruction of the rear wing is likely warranted based on the material presented. The photos of the extremely bowed masonry of the south wall is indicative of significant structural distress. A staff inspection or engineer's report could confirm these conditions. The rear wing is an unornamented historic form important for its materials, dimensions and relationship to the main block of the building. These characteristics can be replicated in a reconstructed rear wing that is constructed of brick to match the color and size of the brick of the main block and with windows and doors that match the shape and location of the ones facing 4<sup>th</sup> Street. Reconstruction also presents an opportunity to relocate one proposed basement entrance to the less conspicuous south elevation of the wing.

### **Recommendation**

*The HPO recommends that the Board find the third story addition, roof decks, and front and side alterations at 1251 4<sup>th</sup> Street NW to be incompatible with the character of the historic district and advise the applicant to further develop plans to reconstruct the rear wing and return to the Board for further review.*

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