

---

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

---

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 type="checkbox"/> Alteration
H.P.A. Number:	<b>#21-557</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> New Construction
		<input type="checkbox"/> Demolition
		<input type="checkbox"/> Subdivision

---

Agent, Mark Morgensen on behalf of owner Delta Rhino Company, seeks conceptual design review for new construction of two three-story rowhouses at Lots 34 and 35, Square 523. For the previous owner, the lots were approved by the Board in 2017 to be subdivided off of the lot of 1251 4<sup>th</sup> Street NW.<sup>1</sup> Plans were prepared by Valerion Consulting.

### **Property Description and Context**

This block of 4<sup>th</sup> Street features an eclectic variety of wood frame and brick rowhouses from 1850 through 1900, with several instances of modern construction built since the designation of the historic district in 1999.<sup>2</sup> Heights, materials, and styles vary accordingly. The tallest historic building on the block is a three-story flat front brick rowhouse with wood cornice at 1215 4<sup>th</sup> Street. The largest group of houses consists of two-story mid-19<sup>th</sup> century brick houses from 1233-1225 4<sup>th</sup> Street. As a whole, the block displays a variety of rowhouse sizes, styles and forms, with no single type predominating. Under a separate application this applicant seeks to add a third story addition to the rear wing of the corner building.

### **Proposal**

The concept design is organized to present the two lots as three attached rowhouses. The façade on the south end would occupy one lot and the other two façades occupying the other lot. The latter two façades are each about 17 feet wide (but not each the same width) and the third façade is approximately 23 feet wide. The houses are articulated with projecting bays in a variety of configurations and heights which also compose an irregular roofline generally aligned with the neighboring roof at 1235 4<sup>th</sup> Street. The front elevations are rendered as brick and with two sections of metal roof appearing in portions of the third story. Fenestration consists of divided lite double hung sashes and transoms and narrow undivided casement windows. An areaway runs the length of the raised basement and is bridged in three places with metal stairs up to the main entrances of the units.

### **Evaluation**

The height and proportion of the proposed row of houses is generally compatible but the diverse variety of architectural forms veers away from the traditional design approach for rowhouses and results in a rhythm of forms out of synch with the building type and the historic district. Primarily, even as architectural styles and materials have changed over the city's history, Washington builders have approached building groups of rowhouses the same way. Materials were as unvaried as possible to make procurement more efficient and affordable, and houses were designed very similarly for speed of construction. Distinction between houses is modest and when it is applied it is applied subtly, for

---

<sup>1</sup> HPA #17-075. Concept and subdivision approved by HPRB. Subdivision was executed. Resulting lots subsequently sold to current applicant. Staff anticipates a new address assignment by the Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs when the building permit applications are filed.

<sup>2</sup> 1211-1213 4<sup>th</sup> Street NW (2011) built to evoke the historic house at 1215; 1220-1228 and 1232-1234 4<sup>th</sup> Street NW (2012) built as contemporary versions of the Victorian bay-front rowhouse at 1230; 1235 4<sup>th</sup> Street NW (2014) built to emphasize the two-story character of the row of frame houses but with a mansard.

instance, by alternating the shape of projecting bays from square to hexagonal. Variety in historic districts comes not from each house being different, but from each group of matching houses being different than other groups. The concept design approved by the Board for this site in March 2018 embodies this approach and shows that compatibility can be achieved with simplicity rather than panoply (Figure 1).

Several details should be revised to match the rowhouse character achieved by this approach. Each façade should have a single bay, all the same width, for a total of three across the row. Any variety in the detailing of the bay should be subtle and alternating. The current design has a fourth projection sharing the southern façade with another bay. The fourth bay adjacent to the existing neighbor, and proportionally too narrow with narrow windows, should be removed. The houses should have a common cornice at one height and pattern of decoration, and stringcourses and masonry courses should be treated similarly. Window types and sizes should be streamlined to center on a single undivided double-hung unit that can be paired. Transoms should be reserved for the first floor and positioned only above a window or door. Window size and configuration variations are commonly found at top floors and basements, so if window variety is desired it should be located at these places. The three sets of metal steps should match.

The continuous basement areaway needs a slightly different approach since this sort of element is not a feature of historic rowhouses. Areaways such as these are a modern conception that the Board has approved when they are designed to be inconspicuous and do not give the effect that the building is sitting in a deep hole. To achieve this, the areaway is best broken up into individual sections at basement entrances. Egress windows at the fronts of basement windows do not need to be necessary if the interior rooms can be laid out to use the door as egress. But otherwise, a small egress well only large enough to meet minimum dimensions required by building code would improve compatibility. The space gained by segmenting the areaway should provide a better ground plane for the building as space for landscaping and to conceal the basement components.

### **Recommendation**

*The HPO recommends that the Board direct the applicant to revise the proposal as outlined above and return to the Board after further review.*

*Staff contact: Brendan Meyer*



*Figure 1. Concept design approved by Board for previous owner, HPA #18-205, March 2018*