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

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| Property Address: | 410 N Street NW | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agenda |
| Landmark/District: | Mount Vernon Square Historic District | <input type="checkbox"/> Consent Calendar |
| ANC: | 6E | <input type="checkbox"/> Denial Calendar |
| | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Permit Review |
| Meeting Date: | September 24, 2015 | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Alteration |
| H.P.A. Number: | #15-509 | <input type="checkbox"/> New Construction |
| Staff Reviewer: | Brendan Meyer | <input type="checkbox"/> Demolition |
| | | <input type="checkbox"/> Subdivision |

Agent, Gary Cooper of STS General Contractors, on behalf of owner Ming Zhang, seeks permit review for adding a third story to 410 N Street NW, a two-story brick rowhouse that contributes to the character of the Mount Vernon Square Historic District. Plans were prepared by AEPA Architect Engineers.

Property History and Description

The 400 block of N Street NW is primarily composed of two story rowhouses that date from between the Civil War and the early 20th century. Two groups of contemporary rowhouses built since the creation of the historic district in 1999 fit the two-story character of the street. 410 N Street was built in 1892 as part of the row of six houses from 404 to 414 N Street. The architect, Edward Woltz, arranged the facades in an alternating pattern of round bays with conical roofs and square bays with pyramidal roofs. A short band of mansard roof and metal cornice ties the row together. The houses are 30 feet deep and all still have their 12x18 rear wings that are two stories tall like the front of the houses. Most of the row—and 410 in particular—is prominently visible from Ridge Street because of an alley and open rear yards of 4th Street.

Proposal

The permit application proposes to demolish the rear wing, rear façade, roof and interior partitions of 410 N Street in order to add a third-story to the top of the rowhouse and capture the dog-leg court to interior space. The new third story would consist of a bedroom, bath, deck and enclosed access stairs. The overall depth of the house will reduce three feet. The new third floor would result in a 3-story flat front brick rear elevation approximately 30 feet tall and the full width of the lot. The dimensions of the existing front basement entrance will be expanded.

The application comes to the Board not as a concept application but as a building permit application. The application was submitted to the Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs (DCRA) in June, underwent review by code disciplines (zoning, structural, etc.) and then referred to HPO for historic review in August.

Evaluation

While conceptual design review is not required prior to a permit application, the Board strongly encourages, by regulation and guidelines, that projects of substantial alteration like adding a floor to a rowhouse be reviewed conceptually early in the design process.¹ It is regrettable that this project was not referred for historic review until the end of the permit review process, especially in this case

¹ DCMR 10C, Section 301.1

because the addition would be visibly incompatible with the size, massing and hierarchy established by the historic houses of the 400 block of N Street.

The Board has typically taken a liberal stance when reviewing rear alterations and additions to rowhouses, recognizing that rear elevations are less significant in defining the character of a building, and historically where buildings have been added on to and altered to meet changing needs. However, roof top additions have been more problematic, as adding “up” is not a traditional way of expanding a building and more often threatens to compromise significant features of an historic building, row, or streetscape. Most often, roof additions alter the height and simple block-like massing of the building to which they are being added. Roof additions have only been approved where they have been found not to alter significant character-defining features, are not visible from public streets, and can be found consistent in height and massing with their context.

The proposed third floor would require the demolition of the roof, rear wing and rear elevation, an extent of demolition that constitutes demolition under the Act.² The section drawing on page A-4 used to analyze sight lines from N Street is inaccurate and gives the impression that the third floor addition will not be visible. However the mansard is much shorter than drawn (3 feet, not 8 feet as drawn) and the public right of way wider (32 feet, not 25 feet as drawn). Correcting these dimensions would lower the sight line at which a third floor alteration would be visible and likely expose parts of the third floor addition to visibility from N Street. The proposed rear addition would be prominently visible from Ridge Street and stand in stark contrast to the adjacent rowhouses to which it is attached. Its flat front at 30 feet tall would be 10 feet taller than the neighboring houses and blunt the existing pattern of solid and void created by the rear wings and dog-leg courts of the rowhouses.

While it is recognized that the proposal would shorten the house to accommodate modern zoning standards for lot coverage (60% in this zone), the most traditional and compatible way of adding to a rowhouse in a historic district is to extend the depth of the house rather than add to the top of it. The project should be reconceptualized as a two-story, lot-width rear addition without a third story. This would preserve the existing roof, avoid the demolition threshold of the regulations, and result in a new rear elevation not out of character with its row.

Recommendation

The staff recommends that the Board advise the Mayor’s Agent that a third floor addition to the two-story rowhouse at 410 N Street NW is not consistent with the purposes of the preservation law, because it is not compatible with the character of the historic district.

The purposes of the Act are:

(1) With respect to properties in historic districts:

- (A) To retain and enhance those properties which contribute to the character of the historic district and to encourage their adaptation for current use;*
- (B) To assure that alterations of existing structures are compatible with the character of the historic district; and*
- (C) To assure that new construction and subdivision of lots in an historic district are compatible with the character of the historic district;*

² DCMR 10C, Section 305.1(c), “Work considered demolition under the Act shall include, but is not limited to, any of the following, as determined by the Mayor’s Agent...(c) 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;”