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

Property Address:	440 Ridge 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"/> Concept Review
Meeting Date:	January 29, 2015	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Alteration
H.P.A. Number:	#15-135	<input type="checkbox"/> New Construction
Staff Reviewer:	Brendan Meyer	<input type="checkbox"/> Demolition
		<input type="checkbox"/> Subdivision

Owner, Nicole Mitchell, seeks concept approval for a setback third story addition on top of 440 Ridge Street NW, a two-story frame rowhouse that contributes to the character of the Mount Vernon Square Historic District. Plans were prepared by Archi-Textural, Pllc.

Property History and Description

The street is characterized by modest, two-story flat-fronted frame and brick houses, rare survivors of what were once typical and fairly common 19th century working class alley dwellings. 440 Ridge Street is one of a group of four such frame rowhouses that were built about 1855-1870. This property is typical of contributing rowhouses on this block in that its massing and ornamentation are simple and vernacular, consisting of a two-bay wide, weatherboard façade, flat roof, and Italianate wood cornice and brackets.

Proposal

The proposal calls for adding a new third story set back 16 feet from the front façade. With an interior floor to ceiling height of 7 feet, and by demolishing the roof and rafters on the back half of the building to nest the addition down into the roof structure, the height of the addition will be almost 5 feet above the current front cornice. The concept also plans to widen the rear wing of the house to the full width of the lot without extending the rear wing deeper into the lot. The existing basement crawlspace will be excavated to full-height basement story the full depth of the building with access provided by stairs in the rear yard.

Evaluation and Recommendation

A similar concept was presented to the Board for the adjacent property at 438 Ridge Street in 2009. At that time, the following recommendation was made to the Board,

“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. 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 very occasionally 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 proposal raises the question whether this type of addition is compatible in its height and mass when the immediate context is so consistent of character. The rear elevations of this row show alteration, but are essentially intact to their original appearance, with simple one- and two-storey ells. Across the alley are two-storey brick carriage houses that served several houses on M Street. Unlike many row house blocks, which have great variety in their height, mass, depth and architectural expression, the intimate scale of the alley, and the uniformity of these characteristics in this row is a feature that unites these buildings. The row of houses to which this one is historically related illustrates consistency of height and mass that would be fundamentally altered by the addition of a third floor above the current roofline.”

In that instance the Board did not approve a third story at 438 Ridge and a two-story project was completed instead.

The design challenge for 440 Ridge is little different than that of 438. One difference is that 440 Ridge Street enjoys slightly more flexible sight lines because it is not on the end of the row like 438. Nevertheless the dimensions of the proposed third story come precisely to the edge of visibility as shown in the submitted sight line studies, and as the Board has experienced since 2009, projects designed in this way, with no margin of error, invariably are built in a visible condition because dimensions are altered in the field by the builder. A secondary consideration is the amount of demolition and structural reinforcement compelled by a third story addition. Staff inspection of parts of the structure that were opened for view shows timber framing free of rot and defect. While the building will not win any trophies for being plumb and level, it is structurally sound.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Board not find the concept of a third story addition compatible with a two-story frame building that contributes to the character of the Mount Vernon Square Historic District, and that the Board advise the applicant to consider a rear two-story addition or reduce the program of the addition.