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

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Property Address:	<b>441 M 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 type="checkbox"/> Concept Review
Meeting Date:	<b>July 9, 2020</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Alteration
H.P.A. Number:	<b>#20-287</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> New Construction
Staff Reviewer:	<b>Brendan Meyer</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Demolition
		<input type="checkbox"/> Subdivision

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The applicant, owner Jessica M. Fox, seeks concept review for a three-story rear addition to 441 M Street NW which is a contributing building in the Mount Vernon Square Historic District. Plans were prepared by Studio SKG.

### **Property Description and Context**

This block is a varied and eclectic collection of 2-, 3- and 4-story residences built from 1850 through 1920. The simplest forms—like the adjacent property to the west—are small 2-story vernacular rowhouses set back from the front or sides of their lot. More robust buildings—like the subject property and its neighbor to the east—are stacked compositions of quirky forms and a variety of materials and fenestration types. The sandstone and sheet metal components of the façade are severely deteriorated. 441 and 439 M Street were designed by N. T. Haller and built together in 1891. The main block is three-stories tall and 32 feet deep. A two-story rear wing 40 feet long gives the house a total depth of 72 feet. The house sits on a very deep lot (150 feet) without an accessory building. This absence differs from the lots to the east which together form a row of two-story accessory buildings fronting the T-shaped alley at the center of the square.

### **Proposal**

The applicant proposes a rear addition to extend all three floors to a depth of 90 feet, meaning that 18 feet would be added to the first and second floors and 52 feet would be added to the third floor. Additionally, a semi-enclosed stair would project another 15 feet and rise to the roof to service a new roof deck on top of the third floor. A basement patio would also extend from the rear addition the same amount as the stair; both of which would come abreast of the adjacent accessory building of 439 M Street.<sup>1</sup>

The west elevation of the addition would be clad in brick veneer and be marginally visible from M Street over the low neighbor at 443 M Street. The brick clad rear elevation would step forward and back in different sections of the elevation and the semi-enclosed stair tower. Rear decks would extend off the stair tower at each floor. The roof deck would run the length of the addition and be set back 32 feet from the front property line.

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<sup>1</sup> These dimensions are extrapolated from the floor plans of the concept and the District's Geographic Information System (GIS). The site plan in the drawing set is not consistent with the dimensions shown in the floorplans.

The sheet for the proposed third floor (A.18) incorrectly shows a third-floor party wall running 72 feet between 441 and 439. The actual length of the party wall matches the main block of the house which is 32 feet (Figure 1).

## **Evaluation**

A compatible rear addition at 441 M Street NW is feasible, and the visibility of the addition from M Street—which would be insubstantial—is not a concern. Rather, the size and complexity of the proposed addition would be out of scale with its neighbors and have an incompatible effect on the historic district, even after applying the Board’s customary flexibility for secondary views and rear elevations. The archetypal rowhouse form (main block, rear wing, rear yard, and accessory building) would be erased or precluded from the site and overwhelm the nearby archetypal forms and building massings which still exist. This is exhibited most especially where the new stair tower and basement patio would come abreast of the row of accessory buildings merging the rowhouse and accessory buildings into a single conglomeration.

The rear addition would be improved by moving the stair tower to within the footprint of the addition. The benefit would be two-fold. It would preserve an open-space buffer between the addition and the accessory buildings and it would greatly simplify the overly complex rear elevation. Relocating the stair tower would allow for the rear addition to be comfortably separated from the accessory buildings. A separation not less than 15 feet—which is approximately half of that which exists at 439 M--would be a compatible relationship.

The scale of the addition could also be reduced and better conform with historic rowhouse massing patterns by reducing the depth of the third-floor addition so that it does not extend as far as the addition at the first and second floor. Setting the rear elevation of the third-floor addition back from the rear elevation of the lower floors would recreate the block-and-rear-wing massing that currently exists at 441 and its neighbors. This type of historic massing could also allow the roof deck to be relocated from the tallest roof of the project to the lower roof of the second floor making it a less conspicuous.

Subsequent to Board action, staff will continue to work with the applicant to assure that the preservation plan for the historic materials of the front façade meet the Board’s standards (i.e. replacement materials should be in-kind and match the original material as much as possible where it cannot be otherwise restored) and that intact load-bearing structural components will be substantially retained.<sup>2</sup>

## **Recommendation**

*The HPO recommends that the Board advise the applicant to revise the concept design for a three-story rear addition to 441 M Street NW and return to the Board for further review.*

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<sup>2</sup> “Work considered demolition under the Act shall include...(b) The removal or destruction of all or a substantial portion of the structural components of the building, such as structural walls, floor assemblies, and roofs;” (DCMR 10C, 305.1(b)) and “...determination of [demolition] shall depend on the extent to which...historic or structural integrity...would be lost,” (DCMR 10C, 305.2) which allows staff to be flexible if historic structural members are found by staff inspection to be damaged beyond repair or previously replaced.

Staff contact: Brendan Meyer



Figure 1. 441 and 439 M Street NW. Third floor party wall extends only 32 feet deep.