

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

Property Address: 441 M Street NW	() Agenda
Landmark/District: Mount Vernon Square Historic District	(X) Consent Calendar
	() Denial Calendar
	() Concept Review
	(X) Permit Review
Meeting Date: February 4, 2021	(X) Alteration
H.P.A. Number: #20-287	() New Construction
	() Demolition
	() Subdivision

The applicant, owner Jessica M. Fox, seeks concept review to add a third-story to the two-story rear wing of 441 M Street NW which is a contributing building in the Mount Vernon Square Historic District. Plans were prepared by Studio SKG. The Board previously heard this application in June 2020.

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.

Revised Proposal and Evaluation

The scope of the addition has been substantially reduced to address the comments made by the Board at the June meeting. The footprint of the building will not expand, but a third floor will be added on top the existing two-story rear wing. It will include a roof deck enclosed by railings set back from the unattached west elevation so that it is not visible from M Street. The applicant has also substantially reduced the size of the sunken patio in the rear yard so that it no longer encroaches on the row of the historic carriage houses at the rear of the lot. A comfortable 20 feet will separate the patio from the carriage houses.

Staff has conducted an interior inspection to investigate the request to brace the front elevation, demolish the interior framing and reconstruct all of the structural framing of the building. Such work typically exceeds the demolition standard established in the preservation regulations.¹ Unfortunately, the framing is in an obvious state of total loss. The first floor is open to the sky at the rear. The floor joists of the second floor have collapsed into the front room of the house. The

¹ DCMR 10C, 305.1 “Work considered demolition under the Act shall include, but is not limited to, any of the following, as determined by the Mayor’s Agent:...(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;...”

weight of the debris has partially collapsed the first-floor joists into the basement. Bracing the front façade and unattached west party wall so that they can be retained, and reconstructing all of the floor framing, is the best preservation course of action left available.

The proposal calls for lowering the reconstructed floor assemblies on the second and third floor by approximately 8 inches. However, as drawn, this would appear to create a conflict on the third floor by intersecting with the existing transom windows; this should be resolved in the construction plans.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Review Board find the concept for a one-story addition on top of the rear wing of 441 M Street NW, and reconstruction of the floor assemblies, to be compatible with the character of the historic district, and delegate final approval to Staff.

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