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

Property Address:	448 M Street NW	<input type="checkbox"/> Agenda
Landmark/District:	Mount Vernon Square Historic District	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Consent Calendar
		<input type="checkbox"/> Denial Calendar
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Concept Design
Meeting Date:	October 27, 2016	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Alteration
H.P.A. Number:	16-625	<input type="checkbox"/> New Construction
Staff Reviewer:	Brendan Meyer	<input type="checkbox"/> Demolition
		<input type="checkbox"/> Subdivision

The applicant, owner 448 M LLC, seeks concept approval for a rear addition, new partial fourth floor, and altered front basement entrance to 448 M Street NW in the Mount Vernon Square Historic District for the purposes of conversion to a 4-unit building. Plans were prepared by Teass\Warren Architects.

Property Description and Context

448 M Street was built c. 1866 according to tax assessment records. The proportions of the front façade, with its short floor heights, supports this date of construction. The current façade was likely built around 1890 on an alteration permit and in conjunction with 450 M Street. The flat-front façade is three bays wide and three stories tall with a bracketed wood cornice and a non-original door surround at the front entrance. A small original basement entrance sits under a modern metal stair. The main body of the house is unusually short (18' wide x 27' deep) with a long 14x36 foot rear wing that is two and three stories tall. A non-contributing garage sits at the rear of the lot. The block is a varied and eclectic collection of 2-, 3- and 4-story residences built from 1850 through 1920. The simplest forms are small 2-story vernacular rowhouse forms setback from the front and sides of their lot. More robust buildings exhibit grand scaled Italianate ornament on three-story flat-faced rowhouses, while other elevations are composed of stacked quirky masonry forms and fenestration patterns. 448 M sits at the end of a short north-south alley that itself branches off of a long alley of some significance due to its dimensions, materials and alley buildings.

Proposal

The applicant proposes a series of small additions at each of the existing three floors and to add a partial fourth story to the top of the house. The dog-leg court at the back of the house will be filled in a length of 17 feet at each floor and result in a new rear façade for the main block of the house that is 40 feet from the front property line. The new rear wing at each floor will be 23 feet deep from this wall. The front of the partial fourth floor will not sit on top of the main block of the house, but instead place its front wall in line with the original rear wall of the main block of the house. Cladding materials and scale of components of the new construction will be contemporary. Materials include clapboard and panels at the rear and horizontal cladding at the fourth floor. Due to the setback of the fourth floor and the adjacent houses, the new fourth floor will not be visible from M Street.

The existing basement slab will be lowered and as a consequence the front basement entrance steps need to be extended so they run farther. The new steps will run parallel to the front façade, leaving room for new utility meters under the existing entrance. The public space front yard that is currently paved with bricks will be partially taken up so that a landscaped area about 14x14 feet will be restored to the public space.

Evaluation and Recommendation

Adding on top of a rowhouse has two fundamental challenges making it exceedingly difficult to do in a compatible manner. First, excessive demolition must be avoided. Second, any additional height must not significantly change the perceived height and scale of the historic house because it is in those basic aspects that the house contributes to the character and scale of the historic district. As a general rule, a rooftop addition that is set back off the top of the main block of a rowhouse could successfully address both of these challenges by reducing the amount of demolition and hiding the addition from primary views. The more a rooftop addition extends on to the top of the main block of the rowhouse, the more potential it has to be visible and result in excessive demolition. These assessments should be calibrated against the context of the addition. If the context has a high degree of integrity, additions that might produce a conspicuous change should be reviewed guardedly, but if the context has eroded integrity the addition could fit inconspicuously into its surroundings.

The approach of this concept--to add to the rear of the building in small, judicious doses--satisfies these challenges and results in a compatible composition. Demolition of the house is kept to an acceptable minimum and the proposed additions will not be visible from M Street thus not changing the perceived height of the building. Staff can assure this result by conducting a flag test of the new fourth floor prior to final approval. As perceived from the rear, the addition will not alter the character of the alley due to the taller buildings already flanking 448 M and because the addition will leave open a substantial amount of the dog-leg court.

The new front basement entrance is consistent with the Board's adopted *Design Guidelines for Basement Entrances and Windows* (2011). The new entrance follows the recommendations for flat front houses by limiting paving, preserving the existing topography, keeping the entrance under the main entrance, and does not change how the building is perceived to sit on its site. Key to this result is the proposed landscaping which should screen the basement entrance considerably.

The building will have four residential units and the current concept shows the gas and electric meters will be installed under the existing front entrance. This is the only inconspicuous location for meters on the front of the building. If this location proves to be insufficient during construction and the meters need to be relocated, the meters should be installed inside the building in a utility closet or meter room. (*Design Guidelines for Utility Meters*, Section 1.5).

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Board find the proposed concept for rear additions and a partial fourth floor addition at 448 M Street NW compatible with the character of the historic district, consistent with the purposes of the Preservation Act, and that final approval be delegated to Staff.