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

Property Address:	479 Ridge Street NW	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agenda
Landmark/District:	Mount Vernon Square Historic District	<input type="checkbox"/> Consent Calendar
ANC:	2C	<input type="checkbox"/> Denial Calendar
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Concept Review
Meeting Date:	June 4, 2015	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Alteration
H.P.A. Number:	#15-259	<input type="checkbox"/> New Construction
Staff Reviewer:	Brendan Meyer	<input type="checkbox"/> Demolition
		<input type="checkbox"/> Subdivision

The applicant, owner Wyvongela Watson, seeks concept review for adding a three-story rear addition to an existing two-story frame rowhouse at 479 Ridge Street in the Mount Vernon Square Historic District. Plans were prepared by KC/DC Studios.

Property Description and Context

479 Ridge is a pre-Civil War, two-story, side gable frame rowhouse. It is located on the north side of Ridge Street, a narrow one-block street originally platted as an alley. 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. This house is one of at least seven constructed before the Civil War on this block. 479 Ridge was built in conjunction with, and as the mirror image of, 481 Ridge. In 2010 the Board approved changing the one-story rear wing of 481 to a two-story wing. That project increased the visible dimensions of the side of the house, but utilized a traditional roof shape compatible with the characteristic profile and massing of this building type.¹

The rears of both 479 and 481 Ridge, along with other vernacular houses of Ridge Street, are fully visible from N Street because of an open parking lot and rear alley. As a group, the rear of these houses display dimensions, roof materials and shapes important to the character of Ridge Street as a neighborhood of 19th century working class housing. Elevations are small in scale, simple and capped by low sloped gable roofs receding to the center of the house.

Proposal

The project calls for constructing a rear addition of three stories extending the full width of the lot and projecting 25 feet deep. This would set a new rear elevation (27 feet tall) four feet beyond the rear addition at 481 Ridge. The rear wall and slope of the existing roof would be demolished and replaced with an irregular roof of flat and sloped sections. The rear elevation is rendered with horizontal siding and two bays of double hung windows and a door at grade.

Evaluation and Recommendation

The Board's adopted design guidelines for additions advises that a rear addition that can be seen from a street or alley should be compatible with the rear elevation of the existing building. Specifically, the guideline states that the roof shape of the addition should relate to the roof

¹ 481 Ridge St NW, add second-story to one-story rear wing visible from Ridge and 5th streets, HPA #10-071.

shape of the existing building.² The proposed addition is not consistent with the simple building forms and dimensions of the historic house type found at 479 Ridge and along the length of this street. Additions on buildings of this type, where they exist, are one or two stories and are not taller than the main block of the house. These additions have simple roofs of a similar or complimentary angle to the low pitched gable roof of the main part of the house. In this way, original wings and modern compatible additions are secondary to the main block of the house. In this proposal, the rear elevation would be nearly a third taller than its neighbors and not be softened by any receding roof form. While the rear addition would not be visible from Ridge Street it would be clearly visible from N Street and starkly different from its neighbors.

The proposed floor plans show that the first and second stories of the addition alone would nearly double the size of the existing house. The size of the addition in plan is not incompatible with the historic district and similar to dimensions of other nearby additions. Eliminating the third floor from the program would simplify the shape, massing and construction method of the addition and allow for a rear elevation height and roof form compatible with the simple character-defining massing of this vernacular house type.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Board not find the concept design for a 3-story rear addition at 479 Ridge Street NW compatible with the historic district and advise the applicant to return to the Board after further development.

² *Additions to Historic Buildings* (1997), p. 4, p. 11