

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

Landmark/District:	Mount Vernon Triangle	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agenda
Address:	444-446 K Street, NW	<input type="checkbox"/> Consent
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Concept
Meeting Date:	June 4, 2015	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Alteration
Case Number:	15-298	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> New Construction
Staff Reviewer:	Kim Elliott	<input type="checkbox"/> Demolition
		<input type="checkbox"/> Subdivision

Studio Crowley Hall working with owner, Han Jan, seeks conceptual design review of a massing study for a new 10-story addition at the rear of two 2-story rowhouses built in the late 1800s.

Property Description

This pair of 2-story Italianate rowhouses was built in 1874 and now operates as a commercial business. Both buildings have short rear dogleg additions —the one at 446 is significantly altered and also does not extend as far back as 444. The façades of both buildings were once identical, but 444 K’s façade at the first floor (and interior) has been altered by removal of the front steps, relocation of the raised entry to street level, and reorganization of the structural floors inside. According to the applicants, the buildings have also suffered structural damage from the recent surrounding construction. That construction has resulted in a significant change in context for the historic buildings, which are now surrounded on three sides by 12 story residential buildings.

Proposal

The project proposes to remove the doglegs on both buildings and add a 10 story addition that would extend to the rear property line, overlapping the historic rowhouses by 15’ and infilling the side yard between 446 K and the adjacent building for an at-grade entrance. The addition would be clad in a steel and glass wall system. The proposal also includes a full restoration of the façades—and returning the 444 elevation to match 446 K Street elevation. The applicant will be applying for rear and side yard setback zoning relief.

Evaluation

The Mount Vernon Triangle Historic District is small and has a limited collection of historic buildings—many of which are sitting on sites zoned for much larger buildings—as is dramatically illustrated in this immediate context. The south corners of 5th and K Streets are the heart of the historic district, with the greatest concentration of early buildings. Retaining this collection relatively intact is essential to retaining the character of the district and modulating the scale of an area that is receiving much larger buildings. However, this pair of historic rowhouses clearly illustrates the dilemma in this small historic district—boxed in on all 3 sides by 12 story buildings that dwarf the existing property.

The proposed massing, a 10 story rear addition overlapping the historic buildings, is intended to establish a transitional massing element from the two-story historic building to the 12-story development around it. While in most contexts the Board has not found additions that are visible and taller than the historic buildings to which they are attached to be compatible, this context is very different than the typical addition project where a similar scale and consistent roofline are meaningful and critical. This proposed addition is clearly visible above the rowhouses and through the alley, but in this context could be compatible with the large-scale surrounding buildings that create a backdrop.

However, while a taller transitional tower element behind these buildings could be uniquely appropriate for this context, it should provide a more meaningful and convincing setback that allows the historic buildings to retain a sense of their original massing. The setback of only about 24' is not sufficient to give the impression that the buildings have been truly retained. As a general principle, the Board has required that new construction seen behind retained historic buildings should be set back a minimum depth that corresponds to the original block of the building, which is about 40 feet. The HPO recommends that the massing proposal be revised to provide an equivalent setback of 40 feet.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Board make the following findings:

- 1. A visible vertical addition could be compatible in this context as a transition from small-scale rowhouse to large-scale apartment building if it is set-back off of the main block of the building, with a minimum setback of 40 feet;*
- 2. Restoration of the original façade at 444 should be an important component of the project;*
- 3. No portion of this recommendation or the Board's action shall be construed as support for any needed zoning relief.*