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

Landmark/District:	Mount Pleasant Historic District	(x) Agenda
Address:	1842-1844 Monroe Street NW	() Consent
Meeting Date:	December 15, 2016	(x) New construction
Case Number:	16-617	(x) Alterations
Staff Reviewer:	Tim Dennée	(x) Revised concept

Property owner Barret Evans, with plans prepared by Cunningham Quill Architects, requests the Board's further review of a concept to construct two three-story two-unit rowhouses. The drawings have been revised since the Board first reviewed the project in October. The original staff report is attached.

At that time, the Board approved a subdivision of the 50-foot-wide lot into two 25-foot-wide lots¹ and supported the concept of two "flats" buildings.

But the Board found the proposal for new construction to be insufficiently contextual with Monroe Street's historic pattern of development. The Board suggested other approaches, including trying to recreate the massing of the double house that once stood on the lots, studying the few 25-foot-wide rowhouses in the historic district, or creating repeating—rather than mirror-image—units. Other ideas discussed in the staff report were possibly narrowing and further projecting the bays; having less symmetry; introducing a mansard roof to lower the top floor; and eliminating or reducing the use of double-ganged windows on the facades.

The applicant has revised the drawings to:

1. narrow the bays, shorten them to two stories' height, and make them project farther;
2. project the third-story façade over the bay as a pavilion;
3. eliminate the double-ganged windows, moving to single or triple-ganged windows;
4. separate the porches more and shorten them from full width, to place them between the bays, rather than across them;
5. adjust the heights of the windows between floors so they diminish going up, in a typical hierarchy;
6. introduce a water table as a base (at least suggested on the perspective drawing, if not the elevation); and
7. introduce projecting fire walls on the façade, both between the units and where this row meets the row to the east.

¹ From a strictly legal point of view, the subdivision is probably unnecessary, as there is no evidence to suggest that the underlying record lots 38 and 39, which date to a 1905 subdivision, have been erased. The overlay of an A & T lot is for convenience in paying property taxes only, although the law allows A & T lots to be sold. Still, it seems the Office of the Surveyor requires a re-platting of even old lots, to trigger their being taxed again as lots of record.

Item 7 does not seem necessary and is only passingly similar to the sort of fire-wall projection one finds on the adjacent row. It does little for the appearance or proportions of the building. And as suggested in the October staff report, a recess, rather than a projection, would be a better device between the units for separating and slimming the buildings.

A change in height of openings (Item 5) between the second and third floors is less perceptible now than in the October drawings. Perhaps the biggest issue with this project is that the height of the third story is equal to that of the first and second, plus it is surmounted by a parapet. This condition is not aided by the emphasis of verticality in the pavilion over the bay, unless the third story is actually lowered. Of course, the angle of the perspective does not help, given that it represents a vantage point from which no one would view the building(s), and thus there is no advantageous vanishing perspective.

The fenestration is otherwise definitely improved; the windows in the bays could probably stand to be slightly narrowed, to give them more vertical emphasis and a little more heft to the bay masonry.

The plans for the cellarless, full-lot-width houses have not yet accounted for the placement of electric meters, which for twin flats would be within two double-meter cabinets.

Recommendation

HPO recommends that the Board approve the project in concept and delegate to staff further review, with the conditions that the third floor be lowered and that the applicant revise and refine the project to address the other points raised above.



A perspective drawing of the October proposal, for comparison.