
HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION

Landmark/District:	Mount Pleasant Historic District	(x) Agenda
Address:	3305 and 3307 18th Street NW (rear)	
Meeting Date:	November 2, 2017	(x) Raze
Case Number:	17-659	(x) New construction
Staff Reviewer:	Tim Dennée	(x) Concept

The applicants, property owners Michael Cummings, Karen Hyun, Claudia Schlosberg and Wayne Kahn, request the Board's review of a concept to raze a two-story frame carriage house/garage and to replace it with a larger one, similar in design, but with several dormers and set four feet in from the alley.

Background

The carriage house is shared between two semi-detached houses, 3305 and 3307 18th Street, which were constructed in 1905-1906 by property owners Charles and Edward Murray to a design by the architecture firm of Clarence Harding and Frank Upman.¹ The same team built at about the same time the semi-detached houses that once stood at 1842-1844 Monroe Street.

The carriage house is roughly contemporaneous with the residences, but it was constructed in several stages. Its first half was erected behind 3305 by 1907, when it appears in the Baist real estate atlas. The Baist atlas of two years later suggests that it might have already been doubled in footprint with a northern half by that time—the two parts united under a single roof—but the expansion had certainly occurred by 1915.² The earlier part is indicated on the maps as a stable, and its south windows and apertures in the loft floor suggest that horse stalls were located there. The northern half could have been a carriage shed or, more likely by the end of the decade, a garage. The 1927 Sanborn insurance atlas depicts lower shed additions at the north and south ends of the building, with all four parts then labelled as being for automobile storage.³ One-story sheds were later added to the west side of the original sections, to accommodate longer cars.⁴ Despite being under a single roof, the spaces were ultimately divided between the two owners of the houses, with the north wall of the circa 1906 stable dividing the building nearly equally.⁵

¹ D.C. building permit no. 1131, October 16, 1905.

² The 1909 Baist map did not draw in the new walls, but it appears to have been intentionally colored to indicate a frame addition whose use was not specified as a stable. But the loft had a door and hoist apparently for loading hay, which would suggest that the building was still at least partly a stable by the time the two early sections were combined under one roof. There are presumably extant permits for this construction.

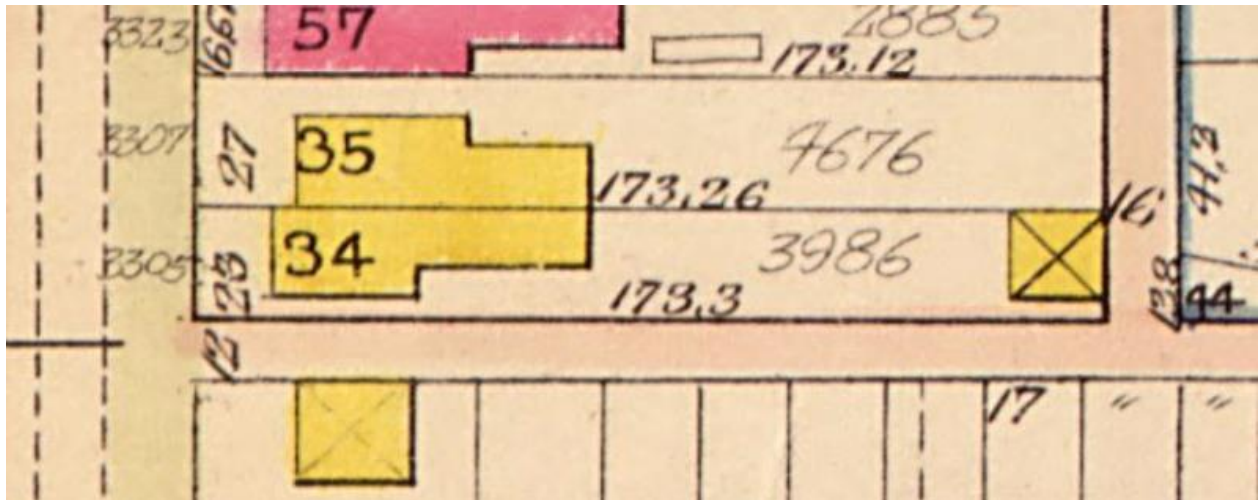
³ The 1919 Baist atlas does not illustrate these additions, so they may date to the first half of the 1920s. Their concrete slabs remain, one outside the building.

⁴ A 1918 sale ad mentions the garage at the rear of 3307. A 1915 rental ad for 3305 does not mention a garage, but another two years later says that one is available "if needed."

⁵ The alley façade of the building has a vertical trim board where the joint was made in that wall.

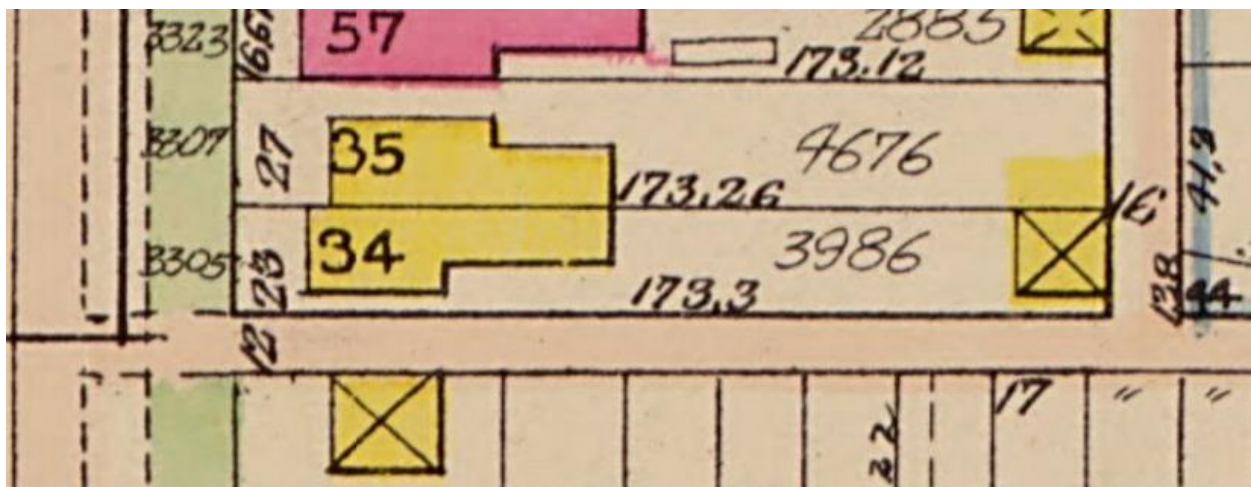
Evaluation

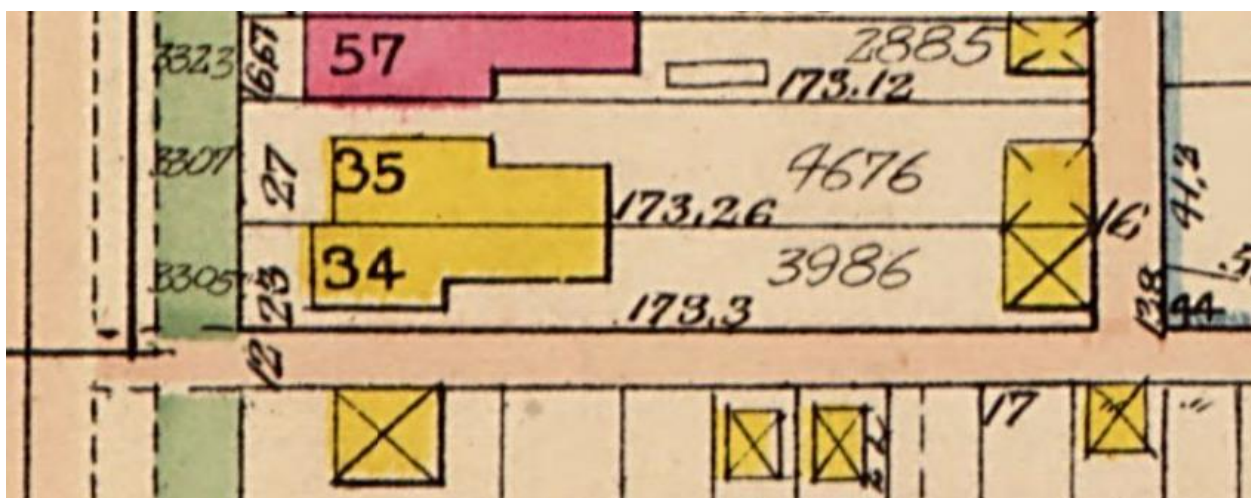
The applicants have submitted a structural engineer's report (attached) which concludes that "the structure needs to be rebuilt from the ground up." This is presumably submitted to support a contention that the carriage house now lacks sufficient historic integrity to be classified as a building contributing to the character of the Mount Pleasant Historic District. Section 305.3 of the historic preservation regulations states that "[t]he filing of an application for a demolition permit shall be considered to incorporate a request for determination whether the property contributes to the character of a historic landmark or district..." The Board has not received a raze or demolition permit application for the building, but the issues of historic significance and historic integrity are central questions for the Board's consideration.



Above: A detail of the 1907 Baist Real Estate Atlas of Washington, District of Columbia. The 1903 atlas shows that nothing stood on the 3300 block of 18th Street only a few years earlier.

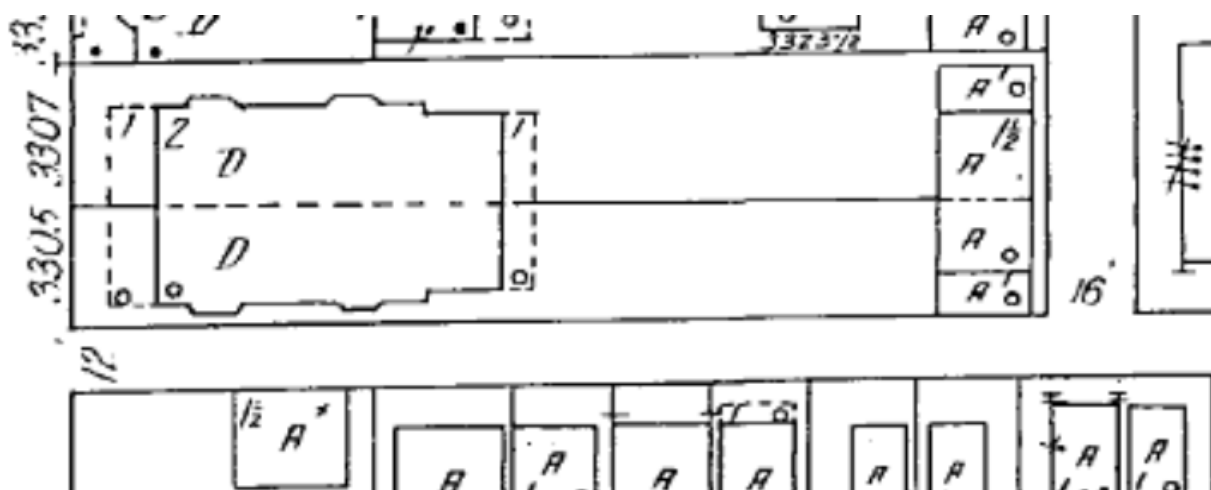
Below: The same detail from the 1909 atlas. It may not be clear in a black-and-white copy, but a rectangular area above the original stable has been colored yellow to indicate frame construction, despite the walls not being drawn in, nor an "X" to indicate a stable.





Above: A detail of the 1915 Baist atlas depicting the complete structure.

Below: A detail of a 1927 Sanborn insurance map showing the property with shed additions to the north and south ends of the stable/garage.



The building is a contributing structure given that it is contemporaneous with the houses which date to the middle of the historic district's period of significance. There are several two-story carriage houses and carriage house/garages from the same period around 18th Street and Park Road, associated with some of the larger houses. But while there are several, they are rare in Mount Pleasant overall and important remnants of an early, suburban phase of development of the neighborhood, because relatively few residents could afford a carriage and team or an automobile—and a place to store them—just after the turn of the century.

In summary, the structural report observes that:

- the roof framing is adequate, but the roofing requires replacement;
- there is rotted siding and trim;
- the concrete slabs are cracked; and
- the wall framing needs reinforcement and much replacement and needs to bear on proper footings.

The report does not address the floor framing of the loft, which suggests that the engineer did not find significant deficiencies there. Some of the deficiencies cited are at the later shed additions.⁶

HPO staff has visited the property and inspected the interior.

The condition of the concrete slabs is not essential to the inquiry, as it is the superstructure of the building that is of particular significance and character. The interior floor at grade is not character-defining. These slabs could be replaced, or they could be parked upon indefinitely in their present condition.

The principal roof appears to be original, more than a century old, and is in need of replacement or significant repair. The slates are mostly present and generally in good condition but, as often happens, the nails have corroded so that many of the slates have come loose. The ridge and valley flashing has also come away in several places. These have allowed water to enter the building, mainly at the sides of the alley-facing dormer, but also at the ridge. Still, the engineer's report overstates the degree of rot in the roof sheathing; it appears that most of that on the principal roof could be retained in place and reused.

The report illustrates the condition of some of the siding and trim, mostly at the south end of the building, but concludes that all of the siding would have to be removed. It is true that the siding is in the worst condition on the south wall, where it has probably not been repainted for a span of decades. Yet, it is not all shot; the condition is worse on the lower two thirds, where most is unsalvageable because of rot. On the east wall, the siding has already been replaced with new. The north wall has little siding exposed, and it is sheltered by an eave. The greatest expanse of original siding, on the west wall, has been protected under wide-exposure Masonite-asphalt composite shingles.

In any case, the siding can be replaced, as necessary, without greatly diminishing the property's character. Such replacements do diminish the integrity of original materials and workmanship, but they retain the integrity of location, design and setting and would actually restore some of the integrity of feeling and association if they return the building nearer its original condition. Replacement of parts in kind as necessary is consistent with the District of Columbia's preservation design guidelines (and with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and American preservation guidelines and practice generally).⁷

⁶ For instance, the photo on page 8 intended to illustrate "[r]otten roof sheathing throughout" is in the north shed addition, as is the north wall shown on page 4.

⁷ The District of Columbia design guidelines for walls state that "[A]ll [walls and foundations] will eventually need some maintenance and possibly repair. In a few cases the materials may need to be replaced.... Building owners should regularly inspect and maintain existing walls and foundations.... Consideration should first be given to repairing only those areas needing attention, using in-kind materials; in other words, using the same types of materials as the existing. If deterioration is extensive, replacing the entire wall or foundation may be required. If this is necessary, the owner should first investigate the feasibility of replacing it in-kind. Only after in-kind replacement has been shown not to be economically or technically feasible, should the owner consider replacing the wall or foundation in a substitute material that is chemically and physically compatible with adjacent materials and is similar in appearance to the existing material." The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation state, among other things, that "The removal of historic materials or alteration of features and spaces that characterize a property shall be avoided.... Distinctive features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a property shall be preserved.... Deteriorated historic features shall be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature shall match the old in design, color, texture, and other visual qualities and, where possible, materials."

The building stands today and is used regularly, despite being hit by a car and a mild earthquake, so most of its framing must be present. But the engineer's report is correct both in that most of the framing of the lower floor must be replaced, largely because a substantial amount has already been removed to make additional openings. As the engineer suggests, the roof framing generally looks adequate, except for some damage, especially around the leaking dormer. The report does not address the loft flooring, but that, too, looks adequate.

The loft floor is not level, however, because of what is happening below. The floor is higher in the center, because it is largely supported by the central partition, which may be the north wall of the 1906 section, which splits the space between the properties, while the walls north and south have dropped a few inches because of decay in some posts, and the fact that the south loft floor joists are partly held by a steel angle that is not itself adequately supported. The report correctly points out the inadvisability of having untreated wood framing in contact with the slabs. Remarkably, not all of those posts are shot, but most have to be replaced wholly or partially, and additional support and reinforcing ties are necessary.

The roof framing and loft-floor framing together constitute the greater part of the building's structure, and most of it is original, meaning that most of the building remains. If we overlook the minority of framing that needs to be replaced in the upper story and the minority of framing that can be retained in the lower, one might characterize the condition by this shorthand: the first floor has to be replaced, while the loft and roof can be saved.

This would require shoring and jacking up the building to pour adequate footings and to add new supporting structure. But performing this work and adding reinforcements such as Strong ties does not seem to be a heroic effort for a building of this size. Razing a historic building should only be undertaken as a last resort, and there appears to be a penultimate one available. After all, *new* construction would require new footings as well, and its own considerable expense for construction.

Demolition by neglect?

Such expenditure could have been devoted to the subject building earlier, avoiding the need for partial or total replacement. Related to that of physical integrity is the question of how the building arrived at its present condition. Whatever the qualities of their construction, buildings generally become dilapidated because of a failure to check deterioration. Each proposed raze of a dilapidated building raises the question of whether it has effectively been demolished by neglect, as each property owner has an affirmative responsibility to maintain their properties in accordance with the Property Maintenance Code. Owners will typically point to earlier owners, often with some justification. In this instance, the applicants have owned the property for a few years on the one side, and for a couple of decades on the other. In that time, considerable effort has been put into the houses, but less so into the garages. The north shed has had new framing sistered in relatively recently. A couple of new posts have been added, one at the south vehicle door where a car struck the building. Fixes to the roofing have been makeshift and temporary.

Wood exposed to the elements can decay rapidly without the regular application of paint. There is no evidence of the repainting of the siding and trim in recent years. Slate roofing can be repaired or replaced, yet the original roofing continues to detach itself slowly. The engineer's report refers to damage to the supporting posts from water on the surface of the slab. What had been done to correct that condition, to protect the posts or elevate their bases? It is likely that the

split ownership of the building has proved an impediment to its rehabilitation over the years. It would be unfortunate if ultimate cooperation resulted in its destruction.

HPO staff had previously recommended to the applicants that, rather than building an almost-facsimile of the carriage house, they might retain and reinforce what remains, add dormers to the west and north sides to introduce more light but limit the removal of roof framing and preserve the most prominent elevations, and reconstruct the one-story shed additions on the west so that large cars can be accommodated. Such work could have been approved administratively and would retain the authentic object.

New construction

If the raze of the existing building were approved, its replacement with a slightly larger structure would not be incompatible in itself, although the zoning regulations require that new construction be set in farther from the alley than the nearby other accessory buildings stand.

The materials have not been specified in this concept. There is a likelihood that substitute materials, inferior in character to the traditional ones of a historic building, will be proposed—potentially faux slate or even asphalt roof shingles, and thin fiber-cement board, perhaps of a different exposure than the original siding, rather than narrow wood lap siding. It is recommended that the applicants propose specific materials for roofing, siding, trim and windows.

Recommendation

HPO recommends that the Board deny the concept of razing the subject building, because doing so would not retain a building that contributes to the character of the Mount Pleasant Historic District contrary to the purposes of the historic preservation law.





