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

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Landmark/District: **Mount Pleasant Historic District** (x) Agenda  
Address: **3205 19<sup>th</sup> Street NW** (x) Permit

Meeting Date: **October 26, 2023** (x) Alteration  
Case Number: **23-569**

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The applicants, property owners Hannah Kim and Tai Lung, request the Board’s review of a permit application to construct a front entrance to the basement of this 1909, brick rowhouse, one of nine erected here by developers Middaugh and Shannon.<sup>1</sup>

The purpose of the entrance is unstated, and no interior drawings were submitted. Such alterations are frequently intended to serve a basement apartment, which would raise the tricky issue of where to conceal additional utility meters.

Two options are presented, identical except for the location of the door itself. The applicant’s preferred option would lower the basement window to accept the door, and an HPO-suggested alternative would retain the window and locate the door less conspicuously into the south side of the porch.

The applicants have suggested that a basement entrance would not be visible from the street, but that is not the case. The front retaining wall reaches at a maximum height above the sloping sidewalk of 35 inches at the south corner (see photo below), and the slope of the yard behind it is gentle. A first glance may deceive because of plantings, but much of these would have to be removed for the excavation and the extension of the walk. An entrance from the rear yard is more compatible, and the houses on the row generally have such entrances.

The half-width front porch suggests that a basement entrance is conceivable, if it complies with the Board’s design guidelines, especially *Preservation Guidelines for Basement Entrances and Windows* (2011).

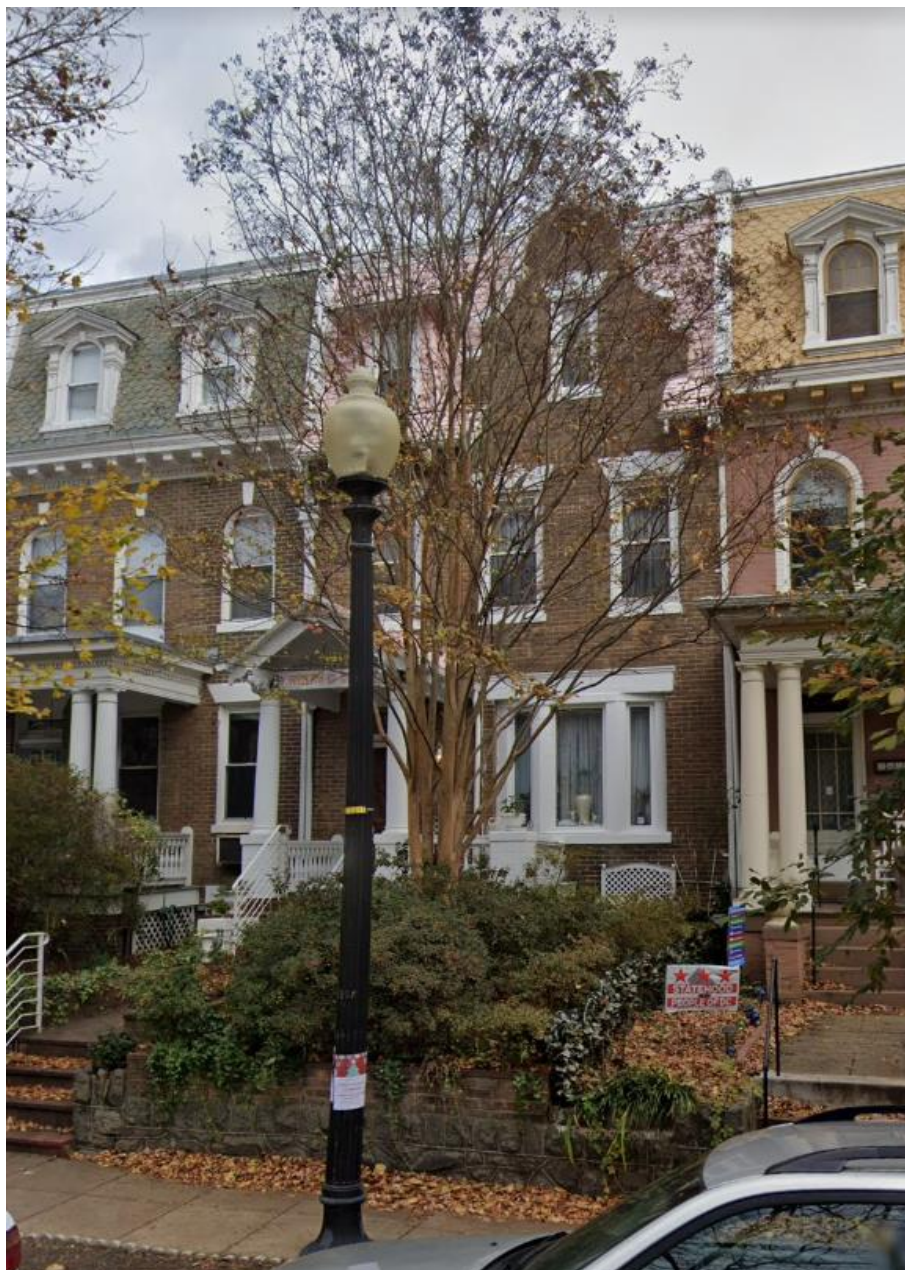
One of these guidelines’ overarching aims is that “new basement entrances should be visually discreet and subordinate to the main entrance.” Among the specific guidance is that “[n]ew basement doors should typically be positioned directly below the primary entrance and stair or, if this is not possible, in an otherwise inconspicuous location.” The option that puts the door in the side of the stoop is more compatible in appearance because it requires less alteration of the more exposed façade. This follows the pattern of Victorian rowhouses, where such entrances were more common than in the predominantly porch-fronted Mount Pleasant. However, this second option does not improve the layout of the areaway.

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<sup>1</sup> There appears to be work underway at the rear of the third story, for which there seems to be no permit.

Unfortunately, the proposed layout locates most of the stairs in the yard forward of the porch. But the guidelines recommend that “[s]tairs to basement entrances should typically run parallel to and not project substantially further than the main entrance stair.” They direct that “[b]asement areaways should be kept to a minimum size, typically projecting no more than 36 [inches] from the face of the building.” Reducing the landing to its minimum code-required size—three feet square—may provide sufficient space to accommodate a winder stair that mostly pulls the excavation behind the front edge of the porch. Doing so could also reduce the amount of safety railing visible around the areaway, an item not depicted in the plans. “Fences around areaways are discouraged because they are obtrusive and out of character with historic site conditions.”

A new entrance would require an extension of the walk which, unfortunately, had been covered with brick prior to 2004.



**Recommendation**

*HPO recommends that the Board not support clearance of a permit for the project as drawn, because the proposed work is not compatible with the character of the historic district, nor would it sufficiently retain the character of the subject property. The applicants may revise along the lines suggested above, possibly receiving staff clearance if a revised plan proves compatible.*