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## HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION

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Property Address:	<b>1612-1616 7<sup>th</sup> Street NW</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agenda
Landmark/District:	<b>Shaw Historic District</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Consent Calendar
ANC:	<b>6E</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Denial Calendar
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Concept Review
Meeting Date:	<b>May 5, 2016</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Alteration
H.P.A. Number:	<b>#16-262</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> New Construction
Staff Reviewer:	<b>Brendan Meyer</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Demolition
		<input type="checkbox"/> Subdivision
		<input type="checkbox"/> Archaeology

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The applicant, owner Richard Grudsky, seeks concept approval for a rear addition of four-stories at 1612-1616 7<sup>th</sup> Street NW, three two-story buildings which contribute to the character of the Shaw Historic District. Plans were prepared by PGN Architects PLLC.



1 PROPOSED PERSPECTIVE RENDERING  
SCALE: 3/16

1612-1616 7TH ST. N.W.

1612-1616 7th St. N.W.  
Washington D.C.  
Square: 420 Lot No: 38 Zone: C-2A

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PROPOSED PERSPECTIVE RENDERING

A-31

04/18/2016

### Property Description and Context

The site is in the far northeast corner of the historic district, just below Rhode Island Avenue. The blocks of 7<sup>th</sup> Street below Q Street are outside the historic district and not subject to Board review. The block of 7<sup>th</sup> Street across from the site is also outside the historic district but includes two designated landmark buildings; Shaw Junior High School and The Lafayette.

The three subject buildings were built as a group some time before 1874 based on tax surveyor records. The first floor facades are not original. The second floor facades are largely intact and exhibit historic materials and craftsmanship, including: cast iron window hoods with pendants

and a wood cornice of brackets, modillions and arched spandrels. The awning-like devices above the second floor windows are not original. The rear of the group is a conglomeration of small additions that have transformed the once recognizable rear wings and dog leg courts into a dense group of one and two story additions nearly reaching 100% lot coverage.

As two-story buildings, the group fits neatly into the overall row of historic buildings on this block of 7<sup>th</sup> Street. These two and three story buildings are typical of the historic commercial buildings in the Shaw Historic District along 7<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Streets with commercial ground floors and residences or offices on the upper floors. As streetscapes, while retail storefronts were frequently updated with changing architectural tastes, the materials and dimensions of the upper stories remain largely unchanged and to a large extent define the scale and dimension of the historic district.

### **Proposal**

The applicant proposes to demolish the rear wings and their multiple additions and retain the main block of the buildings to a depth of 35 feet from the front façade. The floor systems and load bearing walls will be retained except for the original rear walls. The second and third floor of the addition would be the full width of the property at the front, but immediately behind that setback five feet from each side property line to affect a sort of T-shaped floor plan. The third floor would extend 14 feet forward on top of the historic buildings and provide walk-out access to a roof deck that would come to within 6 feet of the historic facades. A fourth floor would setback from the third story of the addition at a 1:1 ratio on all four sides.

The front façade of the new third floor would be clad in painted brick to match the historic second floor façade below, and the fenestration of the addition would align with the historic openings. The fourth floor would transition to a contemporary arrangement of metal and glass panels on all sides. The rear elevations of the addition would be at the rear property line and repeat the materials of its front.

The historic facades would be renovated by removing non-historic elements including the storefronts and awnings over the second floor windows. A series of three matching storefronts would be constructed with each consisting of a projecting show window two bays wide and an entrance to the south. Above the flat roofs of the show windows, a horizontal line of transoms and cornice would run across the facades and align with the openings below.

### **Evaluation**

Adding on top of a small historic building in a compatible manner has two fundamental challenges: how to avoid excessive demolition of the historic house and how to add additional stories when the height and scale of the historic buildings is an important contribution to the character of the historic district. As a general rule, a rooftop addition that is set back off the top of the main block of a historic building will successfully address both of these challenges by reducing the amount of demolition and hiding the addition from primary views. The more a rooftop addition extends on to the top of the main block, the more potential it has to be visible or result in excessive demolition. These assessments should be calibrated against the context of the addition. If the context has a high degree of integrity, additions that might produce a conspicuous change should be reviewed guardedly, but if the context has eroded integrity the addition could fit inconspicuously into its surroundings. In this case, the streetscape, heights and cornice lines at the front of the historic row, and the building heights and massings of the interior of the square have a high degree of integrity. While the amount of demolition is kept at a sufficient minimum, the

addition would be prominently visible and fundamentally change the size and scale of the streetscape in an incompatible way.

As shown in perspective rendering (page A-31) both the third and fourth floor would be visible and alter the cornice line and profile of a large portion the block. While the third floor elevation is designed with materials and a rhythm borrowed from below, this is little redress for an addition that is simply too big and visible for such a modest sized row of buildings. In another context where an isolated group of historic building is surrounded by a back-drop of taller buildings—like in the Downtown or Fourteenth Street historic districts—some visible height of sufficient setback can be accommodated without changing the character of the historic district. But in this case, where the new addition would change the profile of the row and how it meets the sky, the change in character and perception of size and scale would be significant.

To a lesser extent but considerable in its own right, the height of the rear addition at the alley—37 feet—would introduce a new and prominent massing to the interior of the square where building heights are historic and generally 22 feet high. That is not to say the addition cannot be taller than the rowhouses, but to predict that a tall addition like this--the first of its kind on the square--could inspire other properties to propose similar sized additions.

The renovation of the front facade and the reconstruction of historic storefronts is a strong component of the concept.

Largely due to the small scale of the row, and the existing sightlines of the area, an addition that setback fully off of the top of the historic buildings and did not include a fourth floor would avoid many of the incompatibilities of the current proposal. A reduction in the program of the proposal might facilitate the design process for this option.

### **Recommendation**

*The HPO recommends that the Board find the concept of adding a third or fourth floor that would be visible form the 7<sup>th</sup> Street NW right-of-way to be incompatible with the character of this property and the historic district and inconsistent with the purposes of the preservation act.*