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

Property Address: 1320-1322 8th Street NW	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agenda
Landmark/District: Shaw Historic District	<input type="checkbox"/> Consent Calendar
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Concept Review
	<input type="checkbox"/> Permit Review
Meeting Date: December 3, 2020	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Alteration
H.P.A. Number: 20-471	<input type="checkbox"/> New Construction
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Demolition
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Subdivision

James Foster of Arcadia Design, on behalf of contract purchaser Salman Zomorodi, Kevin Anderson and Eric Hirshfield, seeks conceptual design review for alterations and additions to two, two-story rowhouses at 1320 and 1322 8th Street NW in the Shaw Historic District.

Property Description

The two houses are part of a block that contains a variety of residential buildings of different sizes, styles and eras, ranging from narrow, flat-fronted two-story Italianate rowhouses from the 1870s to larger and more architecturally ambitious three-story Queen Anne rowhouses from the 1890s. The most notable building is the Victorian Gothic Immaculate Conception Church landmark across 8th Street. However, at the time the historic district was designated, the block was somewhat fractured by large vacant lots which have since been developed with tall new construction on its ends (801 N Street and 1336 8th Street) and behind (810 O Street).¹

1320 and 1322 8th Street NW are two unmatching rowhouses which both exhibit characteristics of mid-19th century rowhouses. The date of construction for each cannot be determined by building permit records--which did not become reliable records until about 1878--but both structures appeared on 1874 tax assessments. The setback nature of the 1322 marks it as the older of the two since houses were typically set back from the street to provide a front yard prior to the enactment of public space laws in the 1870s. Once public space laws allowed owners to utilize public space for yards and projections, rowhouses were typically built at the front property line like the other house at 1320. 1322 was also setback from its side lot line on the south and a one-story addition was built later in order to fill the original side yard.

Both houses exhibit building forms and ornament typical of the house type including one-story wings and dog-leg courts on the rear. While the front façade of 1322 is obscured by a formstone veneer, its wood cornice is still intact. 1320 8th Street is more intact and features wood surrounds at the front door and windows and a wood cornice of console brackets and modillions.

Proposal

The proposal calls for combining the two houses onto a single lot, demolishing their rear wings and adding four-story additions with penthouses to the rear of each house. The width of the addition on 1320 would extend over the current property line so that three new stories would

¹ 801 N Street NW (HPA #17-186, approved March 2017), 1336 8th Street NW (HPA #16-353, HPRB approved July 2016; PUD approved May 2017), and 810 O Street NW (HPA 15-248, approved April 2015)

appear over the one-story infill addition of 1322. Each addition would be set back approximately 18 feet from the front elevation of the house beneath it and create a staggered two-story elevation of new construction visible from in front of the houses and above their cornices. The penthouse at the fifth story will be set back to the rear so that it would not be visible from 8th Street. The unattached party wall on the north side of 1320 would be fenestrated with new double-hung windows on both floors, and the formstone at 1322 would be removed and the original brick restored.

Evaluation

There are two principle questions raised by the concept: the amount of demolition and the compatibility of adding visible height behind two small historic houses. While more information and detailed drawings are needed to fully evaluate the first question, the Board could provide vital and timely guidance on the second question.

Adding on top of a rowhouse has two fundamental challenges making it exceedingly difficult to do in a compatible manner. First, substantial demolition must be avoided. Second, any additional height must not significantly change the perceived height and scale of the historic house because it is in those basic aspects that the house contributes to the character and scale of the historic district. As a general rule, a rooftop addition that is set back off the top of the main block of a rowhouse could 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 of the rowhouse, the more potential it has to be visible and result in substantial 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 adequately within its surroundings.

In this case, the amount of new construction on the block and behind it has created a very mixed character. While the historic houses remain as historically scaled pieces of streetscape, the new construction has added substantially taller building forms as a backdrop and bookends. The new construction designed for the north end of the block (1336 8th Street) reflects this dichotomy the most. It will consist of six rowhouse forms of four stories to roughly align with and extend the historic rowhouses of the block and concentrate its height along the alley behind 8th Street. The 10-story massing at the alley creates an east façade that would set back 50 feet from the front facades of the adjacent row or historic rowhouses. By comparison, the setbacks proposed for 1320 and 1322 are 18 feet and 40 feet respectively. These dimensions are only partially consistent with the setback envisioned by 1336 which suggests that the concept could be improved by deemphasizing the addition on 1320 by narrowing it or setting it back farther.

On the question of demolition, additional information with a more convincing amount of specific information is necessary. Historic houses of this vintage are delicate by their type of construction and age. While removing the rear wings is an acceptable amount of demolition because they are not character defining features, documentation of the existing framing of the main blocks of the houses is necessary to assess how much framing can be removed without exceeding the Board's

regulatory demolition threshold.² This question will require further investment and study by the applicant, but would only be prudent if the Board endorses the size and visibility of the addition envisioned by this concept.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Board provide guidance to the applicant on the height, setback and massing of the concept design and ask the applicant to come back for further review after revisions to the demolition plan and concept design.

Staff contact: Brendan Meyer

² District of Columbia Municipal Regulations Title 10A Historic Preservation, Section 305.1, “Work considered demolition under the Act shall include, but is not limited to, any of the following, as determined by the Mayor’s Agent:… (b) The removal or destruction of all or a substantial portion of the structural components of the building, such as structural walls, floor assemblies, and roofs; (c) The removal or destruction of all or a substantial portion of the roof along with all or substantially all of one or more exterior walls;”