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

Property Address: 1400 9th 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: March 3, 2021	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Alteration
H.P.A. Number: 21-142	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> New Construction
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Demolition
	<input type="checkbox"/> Subdivision

The applicant, Catarina Ferreira, AIA, on behalf of the new property ownership group 1400 9th St NW LLC, seeks concept review to reclassify 1400 9th Street NW, a contributing building in the Shaw Historic District, as non-contributing for the purposes of demolition and replace it with a new three-story building. The engineer's report was prepared by Bel Engineering, LLC. The concept design was prepared by Architextual.

Property Description

The building on this corner of O Street and 9th Street is not recorded in building permit records but appears in an 1874 assessment survey. It likely predates its neighbors based on its setback from O Street which is indicative of a mid-19th century pattern of development. It is a two-story brick building fronting on O Street and with a two-story rear wing setback from 9th Street. Windows are constructed with gauged brick jack arches and ornament is limited to a wood cornice of console brackets and modillions. Early in the 20th century the setback portions of the property were filled in with one-story brick additions likely for the purpose of converting it to commercial use. The building is vacant and its condition is precarious due to a long period of neglect and questionable structural repairs. The rear wing is in worse condition than the front block.

Its historic neighbors on O and 9th streets are a magnitude larger; they sit forward onto the property line and are three stories tall with taller floor to ceiling heights. The other side of 9th Street is outside of the historic district and consists of several recently constructed nine and ten story buildings.

Proposal

The applicant proposes to demolish the building and replace it with a new three-story building with penthouse. An engineer's report has been submitted to catalog and exhibit the structural deficiencies of the building. The new building would not replicate the setback of its predecessor and instead align with its neighbors on both streets. The front façade on O Street would be flat. A chamfer at the corner would host the main entrance. The long side elevation along 9th Street would have two sets of projecting bays combined with balconies above the first floor. Below the projecting bays areaways would provide light and egress to basement units. The main material of the building would be brick with metal paneling and trim at the bays and cornice. The cornice would align with the historic buildings to the west and include a four-foot parapet enclosing a rooftop deck. The penthouse would be setback from three sides and sit on the west property line.

Evaluation

There are two parts to this project that the Board must address separately. The first issue is determining whether the existing building, or a substantial portion of it, can be retained and feasibly restored for modern use.¹ If not, and the best course of action is to demolish the building, then the Board can address the second question of whether the new building is compatible with the Shaw Historic District.

Engineer's Report: The report from Bel Engineering presents a conclusion that the structural integrity of the building has been severely compromised and should be demolished. The report is not specific on the reasons for this conclusion beyond a list of visual observations and a series of photos. There is no discussion of repair options and it does not assess the entire building, focusing only on one area of the dilapidated rear wing.

HPO inspected the interior of the building with the owner and design team and concurs with Bel Engineering that the rear wing of the building is unsalvageable but remains unconvinced that the main block of the 19th century house is also beyond repair. Of the report's 19 photos, 12 show the conditions where the rear wing and main block should meet, illustrating that this area has been excessively and poorly altered. The original exterior east wall of the rear wing is removed at the first floor only (leaving the second-floor masonry wall supported on a reinforced concrete beam). The rear masonry wall of the main block has also been removed, reconstructed at the second floor only and supported underneath by unanchored columns, posts, blocks and wedges. The alterations in this vicinity were aggressive and poorly done. It has deteriorated to the point that large gaps exist between the roof of the rear wing and the wall of the main block. Structural wood framing is excessively rotten in this area due to chronic moisture. The rear wing of the house has lost its integrity due to these alterations and subsequent damage leaving demolition of the rear wing a reasonable option.

However, the remaining photos show generally original and intact framing conditions in the main block of the building, except for the roof which is visibly sagged at mid-span. Staff is not convinced that ordinary repairs and some reconstruction to the first and second stories of the main block of the house (repainting, replacing missing bricks, replacement and sistering of some framing, and roof repair) could not maintain the integrity of the house and keep it as a contributing building in the historic district. By also keeping the early 20th century front addition and projecting storefronts on both streets the house would still be able to tell its story as part of the Shaw Historic District.

Concept Design: If the Board determines that the site can be cleared of the existing building, the proposed new construction, the proposal for new construction is generally compatible with the historic district in its massing, height, setback and materials.

¹ The Board is acting under DCMR 10, Section 703.1(a) and is determining whether 1400 9th Street should be reclassified as a non-contributing building under the following consideration: "A building or structure does not add to a district's sense of time and place and historical development if its qualities of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association have been so altered or are so deteriorated that the integrity of the property is irretrievably lost." Reclassification as non-contributing would allow the building to be demolished administratively without a public Mayor's Agent hearing.

The surrounding context has a character of simplicity and tall proportions due to the nearby houses constructed in the 1870s. They have flat front facades, either plain or with only small one-story projections resulting in streetscapes dominated not by ornament and rhythms of tall bays, but by simple materials, fenestration, and tall proportions. The new building fits comfortably into this pattern simply by aligning its setback and height with the row of O Street houses.

The projections proposed for the 9th Street side elevation follow the allowed widths of the projection code and, as such, deliver proportional components to the building. While the areaways are not a historic form, they are positioned under the projecting bays and occupy a space that would have been projecting bays otherwise. The limited visibility of the penthouse does not substantially impact the profile of the building leaving its simple block massing undisturbed and a match for the historic buildings to the north and west.

However, as the design continues to be developed, refinement of the window proportions on the O Street elevation is recommended. As the new end unit, located directly next to a unified row of houses, the large openings and square proportions of the windows in the new building are discordant with its context.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Board not reclassify 1400 9th Street NW as a non-contributing property to the Shaw Historic District. In the event that the Board reclassifies 1400 9th Street NW as non-contributing, the HPO recommends that the Board find the general concept design for a three-story brick building to be compatible with the historic district and delegate final approval to Staff.

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