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

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Property Address:	<b>1900-1902 16<sup>th</sup> Street, NW</b>	<b>X</b>	Agenda
Landmark/District:	<b>16<sup>th</sup> Street Historic District</b>		Consent Calendar
Meeting Date:	<b>October 26, 2023</b>	<b>X</b>	Concept Review
H.P.A. Number:	<b>23-566</b>	<b>X</b>	Alteration
			New Construction
		<b>X</b>	Demolition
		<b>X</b>	Subdivision

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Agent Nneka Shelton, with plans prepared by architect Ray Izadi (Arcon Design Build) for an undisclosed owner, seeks concept review for a project that includes partial demolition, new construction and additions to two buildings in the 16<sup>th</sup> Street Historic District at the corner of 16<sup>th</sup> and T Streets NW. The project would also involve a subdivision to combine the two lots and buildings into one structure on a single lot.

**Property History and Description**

1900 16<sup>th</sup> Street was constructed as a two-story brick building in 1878 and has housed a variety of neighborhood-serving retail uses over the years, including a drug store, grocery, deli, tailor, laundry, and even the headquarters of an illegal gambling ring in the 1970s. The Italianate-styled building features a scored stucco façade over brick, a bracketed wood cornice, segmental arched second window openings, and the original wood cornice atop the first-floor storefront.

In 2019, while operating as a corner convenience store, the south side wall of the building collapsed. At the direction of the city’s Chief Building Code Official, the building’s remaining structure was stabilized, the open side wall temporarily enclosed, and the façade braced with a steel armature. The building has remained in this temporary stabilized condition, albeit with evidence of some additional façade cracking and settlement.

1902 16<sup>th</sup> Street was also constructed in 1878 as a two-story brick house, and retains its original features and appearance, including a wood cornice and segmental arched two-over-two windows. The façade brick shows some evidence of settlement which appears to be longstanding and unchanged over the past two decades.

The 16<sup>th</sup> Street Historic District is notable as a grand avenue of buildings along one of the most important streets in the Federal City and includes rowhouses, detached houses, churches, apartment buildings and institutional buildings in a wide variety of architectural styles. The subject buildings are among the more modest structures in the district, constructed at a time when this area was at the outside edge of the developed city. While corner commercial stores were once common throughout the abutting Shaw, U Street and Strivers communities, 1900 is the only corner commercial building on 16<sup>th</sup> Street.

**Project Description**

The project calls for demolition of the remaining structure of 1900 except for the cellar walls and the north party wall. The front façade would be reconstructed in brick and reuse the

original storefront and building cornices, but with some alteration to elevate the first floor 4 feet above grade to allow for a basement entrance on the front elevation below the storefront window. The side elevation would be brick and feature a three-story projecting bay. A third-story mansard roof with dormer windows would be added atop the reconstructed building and the rear elevation would feature large open decks on each floor.

A third-floor mansard roof and rear decks would also be added to 1902, and a shared stair would be constructed on the rear of the combined buildings. The buildings would be combined to occupy a single lot but the party wall separating them would remain with no internal connections between the two.

### **Evaluation**

The project presents several issues for the Board's consideration, including demolition and the compatibility of the replacement project at 1900, compatibility of the rear and roof additions on 1902, and compatibility of the subdivision to combine the properties.

#### *Demolition*

The deterioration and structural failure of 1900 is evident from photographs and on-site inspection. The collapse of the side wall pulled much of the wood floor and roof structure away from the remaining walls which will require that the interior structure be removed and reconstructed. Demolition of the 16<sup>th</sup> Street façade is the most regrettable loss, as it retains its original 19<sup>th</sup> century features and appearance.

- While the extent of structural cracking may leave dismantlement and reconstruction of the façade as the only way for it to be preserved, this approach should be based on a plan that includes accurate measured drawings (ideally laser scanning) and a salvage and reuse plan for remaining elements.

#### *New design for 1900*

While the extent of deterioration and loss of 1900 warrants design flexibility for the replacement project, there are several aspects of the design that are not compatible with the retained façade and which should be rethought.

- One of the building's most distinctive and unusual features is its 19<sup>th</sup> century at-grade storefront window. Elevating the first floor and putting a basement areaway directly in front of an at-grade storefront window is not a compatible treatment; storefront windows are located at grade to allow pedestrians to walk up to them and see the retail use within. The storefront should be reconstructed at grade and if an areaway is desired, it should be accommodated on the T Street elevation.
- While not entirely incompatible with the Italianate character of the building, the proposed mansard roof results in a substantial change to the character and proportions of original building. This might be acceptable given the condition of the building, but the relationship of the mansard with the three-story tower element and the large rear decks results in an awkward and incompatible juxtaposition of elements. A more compatible composition would be to eliminate the rear decks and the mansard roof and to construct a two- or three-story addition at the rear of the reconstructed two-story building. If the mansard is retained atop the reconstructed two-story building, any building projections on the side elevation should terminate at the top of the second floor.

- On the reconstructed front elevation, the storefront replacement should reasonably replicate the original large plate glass window and the second-floor windows should replicate the original 2-over-2 sash.

#### *Addition and alterations to 1902*

- The new floor plan for 1902 removes the original stair and changes the room configuration sufficiently as to raise questions about the extent of demolition proposed. A plan should be developed that documents the extent of structural retention and demolition of floor, wall and roof assemblies.
- The new areaway stair extends farther from the face of the building than is allowed under the Public Space regulations and is not consistent with the Board's standards for basement areaways. The existing areaway stair should be retained or could be modestly expanded in its existing configuration if needed to satisfy code requirements.
- While some flexibility for adding a mansard roof on 1900 might be warranted given that structure's deteriorated condition and the need for wholesale reconstruction, the Board has consistently found visible roof additions on intact contributing rowhouses to be an incompatible alteration, as they fundamentally change the historic building's height, mass, roofline and historic appearance. If a third floor is desired, it should be set back sufficiently as to not be visible from street view along 16<sup>th</sup> Street, as the Board has consistently required in other projects.
- The original windows should be retained and repaired or, if beyond reasonable repair, should be replicated in-kind, as consistent with the Board's window standards.

#### *Subdivision*

The subdivision would retain the party wall between the buildings, and they would only be combined for the purposes of sharing a rear stair. If the project is redesigned to retain the appearance of two separate structures, the subdivision could be found consistent with the preservation act.

#### **Recommendation**

*HPO recommends that the Board find the concept incompatible with the 16<sup>th</sup> Street Historic District and direct the applicant to revise the proposal to respond to the points above and return to the Board for further review when ready.*

*HPO Contact: Steve Callcott*