
HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION

Property Address:	6824 5th Street, NW	(X) Agenda
Landmark/District:	Takoma Park Historic District	Consent Calendar
Meeting Date:	September 27, 2018	(X) Concept Review
H.P.A. Number:	18-618	(X) Alteration
		New Construction
		Demolition
		Subdivision

Owner Steven Preister, with plans prepared by Hasan Spall of Solar Energinow, seeks concept review for installation of solar panels on the roof of his house in the Takoma Park Historic District.

Property Description

6824 5th Street NW was designed by Washington architect Nicholas T. Haller and built by D. F. Swab in 1912. The two-story house is elevated from street-level by a series of steps leading to a hipped-roof porch supported by Doric-columns. The house features an asphalt clad side-gable roof with a large center shed-roof dormer. Based on its date of construction and architectural character, the house is contributing to the historic district. Currently there are solar arrays installed at the rear portion of the roof facing west that are not seen from the street.

Nicholas T. Haller was a prolific Washington D.C. architect known mostly for designing rowhouses and apartment buildings. He designed a number of free-standing houses in Takoma Park including the adjacent neighbor at 6826 5th Street, NW.

Project Proposal

The plans call for the installation of twenty-three additional solar panels on the front, east-facing portion of the roof. Fourteen panels would be installed on the front gable, four on the dormer, and five on the porch roof. Each individual panel would project 6 inches above the surface of the roof. The new arrays would be visible from 5th Street.



Figure 1 image take from Google Earth Maps c. 2012 indication location of new solar arrays

Evaluation

One of the purposes of the Act is “to assure that alterations of existing structures are compatible with the character of the historic district.” The Board’s adopted Guidelines *Roofs on Historic Buildings* states that “Altering roof shapes, materials, elements and details will affect their design. Thus, any alterations must be undertaken with extreme care to ensure that the character of the roof is retained.” The guidelines go on to specifically address solar panels by stating that “on a flat roof, solar panels should be located so they are not visible from the public street. If located on a sloping roof building, they should only be installed on rear slopes that are not visible from a public street.” The guidelines similarly restrict antennas, satellite dishes, and skylights to non-visible portions of the roof.

The presence of the proposed solar panels would create a visual intrusion on the house and into an intact historic streetscape. At this property, and at so many comparable properties within the district, the steeply pitched gable roof; dormer, and hipped roof porch, are key defining architectural features. The modular size and reflective quality of the panels are not in character with the scale, texture or finish quality of the existing roof.

More than 600 solar panel installations have been approved throughout the city’s historic districts. In each case, the approval was conditioned upon the Board’s standard that the system not be visible from the street and that the installation not alter the appearance of primary roof forms. In the few instances where panels were installed at variance with approved plans and have been visible upon installation, the HPO has worked with owners to adjust the installation to ensure that the Board’s standard has been maintained.

The property currently features solar panels at the rear roof. If additional panels are to be installed they should also be located at the rear portion of the roof rather than on front facing roof slopes. Other types of solar installations, such as photovoltaic roofing shingles which have been installed on other properties in the District, may be a possibility at the front roof and should be investigated as an alternative. It is also possible that the panels could be placed on freestanding mounts or on the roof of an auxiliary structure (i.e. garage, pergola, etc.) in the rear yard.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the solar panels be installed on portions of the building or property where they will not be prominently visible property from street view, or alternatively, explore the viability of using photovoltaic shingles on the front roof slopes that would better retain the scale, texture and finish qualities of roofs found in the historic district.

HPO Contact: Gabriela Gutowski