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

Landmark/District:	Takoma Park Historic District	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agenda
Address:	500 Dahlia Street, NW	<input type="checkbox"/> Consent
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Concept
Meeting Date:	January 31, 2018	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Alteration
Case Number:	19-123	<input type="checkbox"/> New Construction
		<input type="checkbox"/> Demolition
		<input type="checkbox"/> Subdivision

Owner Anna Burger, with plans prepared by Bjorn Falk and certified by electrical engineer Timothy Rumford, seeks concept review for the installation of solar panels on a house in the Takoma Park Historic District.

Property Description

500 Dahlia Street, NW is a free-standing wood frame house built by Frank Wickline in 1908. The building is located at the corner of Dahlia and 5th streets. It is two-stories tall with a steeply pitched attic story topped by a front-facing gable roof; the roof is clad in dark gray asphalt shingles and features a gabled dormer on each side. A hipped-roof porch wraps around the ground floor. Mature deciduous and evergreen trees line Dahlia and 5th Street in front of the property and its neighbors. The front of the house faces north and 5th Street is to the east.

Proposal

The plans show installation of fifteen solar panels on each half of the gable roof, for a total of thirty panels. Each panel measures 3'5" x 5'1" and would be mounted approximately 4"-6" inches above the roof plane. The panels on the east-facing roof slope would be seen from Dahlia Street looking west and from 5th Street looking west; the panels on the west-facing roof slope would be slightly visible from Dahlia Street looking east.

Evaluation

The Board has applied several standards for solar panel installations. For flat roofed buildings, the standard is relatively simple: panels should not project above or interrupt the building's roofline as seen from public streets. For sloped roofs, the standards include: limiting installations to secondary (non-street-facing) elevations, retention of character-defining roof features and finishes, not projecting panels above the roof ridge, installing panels tight to the roof slope to minimize their profile, and ensuring that the panels are not prominently visible from public street views. If the underlying roof is scheduled to be replaced prior to installation, replacement roof materials that are similar to the coloration of the panels has been encouraged to minimize the contrast of the panels with the roof.

The proposed installation on the west roof slope meets all of the standards: it is located on a non-street-facing elevation, will not result in the removal of character-defining features or finishes, does not project above the roofline (and is also kept away from the dormer) and the panels are being mounted tight to the

roof plane. While the panels will be somewhat visible from Dahlia Street, they will be seen primarily in oblique views from limited vantage points that would not be discordant or incompatible with the building or streetscape. The roof has recently been replaced with a darkly colored asphalt shingle close in coloration to the panels, which will minimize the contrast between the two.

The installation on the east-facing roof is more problematic as these panels will face a public street and be prominently visible. While this view is somewhat obscured today by mature trees, this is a temporary condition that could easily change. Indeed, these trees currently shade the roof and call into question the efficacy of an installation on this roof slope. As an alternative, it is recommended that the panels on this east roof slope be located on the two-story rear wing that has shed roofs facing south, providing a more advantageous orientation for the panels on a secondary elevation that would not be as prominently visible facing a public street. Alternatively, the panels could be placed on freestanding mounts or on the roof of an auxiliary structure (i.e. garage or pergola) in the south-facing rear yard.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Board find the installation of solar panels on the west roof slope to be compatible with the character of the house and historic district, but that the panels on the east roof slope are not compatible facing a public street, and that an alternative location be identified on secondary elevations or on a secondary structure. It is recommended that final approval of the permit consistent with this recommendation be delegated to the HPO.

Staff Contact: Gabriela Gutowski



Aerial view of property from google maps