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

Property Address:	6824 5th Street, NW	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agenda
Landmark/District:	Takoma Park Historic District	<input type="checkbox"/> Consent Calendar
Meeting Date:	September 26/October 3, 2019	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Concept Review
H.P.A. Number:	19-439	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Alteration
		<input type="checkbox"/> New Construction
		<input type="checkbox"/> Demolition
		<input type="checkbox"/> Subdivision

Owner Steven Preister, represented by Suhaib Shah of Solenergi, seeks concept review for installation of 12 solar panels on the front (east) 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 columns. The house features an asphalt clad side-gable roof with a large center shed-roof dormer.

Previous Review

At the September 2018 HPRB meeting, the Board approved five panels on the roof of the front porch, four panels on the front dormer, and two panels above the dormer (the rear roof slope has solar panels that were installed by a different installer several years earlier). However, the Board found the installation of 12 panels (six on each side of the dormer) on the front roof to be incompatible with the character of the house and district after determining that they would be too prominently visible from street view.

Project Proposal

The plans call for the installation of twelve additional solar panels on the front, east-facing portion of the roof. The proposal has been revised to include a different microinverter technology and rail channels that allow the array to be mounted approximately 4” above the roof, reduced from 6”. A black skirt would be provided around the edge of each installation so that the panels would not appear to hover above the roof.

Evaluation

In 2018, the Board determined that the installation of solar panels on the front roof slope of 6824 5th Street would create an incompatible visual intrusion on the house and the streetscape. At this property, the steeply pitched gable roof, dormer, and hipped roof porch are defining architectural features. The Board found that installation of panels on the relatively flat surfaces of the porch and dormer would have limited visibility, but that the modular size and reflective quality of the panels on the more prominently visible portions of the roof were out of character with the scale, texture and finish quality of the existing roof, and would be a discordant and incompatible alteration.

The Board's determination in 2018 was consistent with the standard that it has applied for solar panels (as well as other roof appurtenances, such as skylights, antennas, vents, and mechanical equipment), which is to encourage their location on secondary elevations where they are not prominently visible from public street view. The Board has delegated HPO to approve solar installations that are consistent with this principle; to date, more than 1,400 permits have been approved administratively for solar installations on historic property.

For installations that do not meet this principle, the Board has the authority to decide whether an exception is warranted or to determine whether the extent of a visible installation is not so prominent as to be incompatible. An example of the former would be the Board's approval of a solar roof structure on a non-contributing parking garage at Walter Reed, which was determined acceptable because the visible panels wouldn't impact an historic building and was located well away from the more historically sensitive areas of the campus. An example of the latter is the Board's approval of solar panels on the street-facing side elevation of the corner house at 500 Dahlia Street NW. Even though the panels would face a public street, the Board determined that the extent of visibility was quite limited based on the siting of the house and the surrounding tree cover; the Board also noted that the panels were being installed tight to the roof and that the roof had recently been replaced to match the color of the proposed frameless panels.

While the revised proposal at 6824 5th Street is tighter to the roof and the addition of the skirt around the edges of the panels would eliminate a visible gap between the panels and roof, the proposal isn't substantially different and doesn't seem to address the incompatibility concerns that the Board found in the previous proposal. The extent of visibility would be the same as presented and found incompatible by the Board when it reviewed the proposal in 2018.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Board find the installation of 12 additional panels on the front roof slope at 6824 5th Street is not consistent with its principle that roof appurtenances be located so that they are not prominently visible from public street view, and incompatible with the character of the Takoma Park Historic District.

HPO Contact: Steve Callcott



6824 5th Street NW with panels on porch and dormer roof approved by HPRB in 2018



Solar panels installed on side elevation of 500 Dahlia Street NW



Solar panels installed on side elevation of 500 Dahlia Street NW