

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

Property Address:	1811 14th Street NW	X	Agenda
Landmark/District:	U Street Historic District		Consent Calendar
Meeting Date:	June 22, 2017	X	Concept Review
H.P.A. Number:	17-340		New Construction
Staff Reviewer:	Anne Brockett	X	Alteration

Circle Productions, working with Eric Gronning of Gronning Architects, seeks concept review for an addition to the roof of the building at 1811 14th Street NW, current home of the Black Cat, a club and concert venue. The building was constructed in 1917 by J.J. Moebis as a garage and auto repair facility, operated for many years by the Creel Brothers. Located between two non-contributing buildings, it is one of many automobile-oriented businesses that lined 14th Street in the early and mid- 20th century, most of which have been adaptively reused.

Project Description

The proposal calls for construction of a third floor set 21' back from the façade and 12' back from the rear wall. A stairwell with a sloping roof would provide access to the new floor in front of the addition. The brick side walls would be extended up as parapets to partially hide the addition and mask its height of 10½' at the front, 14' at the elevator overrun, 12½' for the main roof, and 16½' at the rear (where a stage with lighting and sound system would be). Above the parapets, the addition would be clad in metal panels in muted colors, differentiated to make the addition seem less massive. A partially covered roof deck would be situated on the south side, alleviating some of the proposed massing here.

The proposal also entails restorative work to the façade, which has suffered many changes over the years. The storefronts, infilled with incompatible materials, will be reopened; second floor windows, which have also been infilled, will receive steel reproductions of the original windows; and an unsympathetic metal band will be removed where the transom windows are located.

Evaluation and Recommendation

The addition would be visible from oblique angles to the north and south as well as the rear, where it abuts a large municipal parking lot. On smaller scale residential projects, the Board generally seeks to have additions set behind the main block of a building or otherwise set back to not be visible. Setbacks from the rear wall are also often required to alleviate too much mass on residential alleys. In this case, building behind the original block is not possible since the building's footprint occupies the entire lot.

For commercial buildings, or those with a large footprint, visibility can sometimes play a lesser role in determining compatibility since large buildings can support larger additions without having their character significantly impacted. This is especially true along the Fourteenth and U Street corridors where there is not a consistency in building types and heights and where new construction in and around historic buildings has altered the streetscape.

The Board has offered flexibility for visible roof additions at a number of proximate locations in recent years, including 1825 14th Street, a 1-story building, where the addition was set back considerably, but is visible; and 1840 14th Street (Room & Board), a similar building type, where the roof addition is set back 18' from the 14th Street façade and 10' from the T Street and alley elevations. In considering the compatibility of adding a sizable and visible roof addition at 1840, the Board concluded that the building's utilitarian, industrial character could support a roof addition where it would not be appropriate for buildings of a different character.

While light and glassy building materials are preferred for visible roof additions, such an approach would not work with the proposed use of the space at 1811. Instead, the combination of colored metal panels and brick helps disguise the height of the addition.

The material choices, increased height toward the rear with a minimally tall addition at the front, the set back of 21' from the front and 12' from the rear all help alleviate the increase in size. The fact that it is located between two non-contributing buildings, which could potentially be demolished or significantly enlarged in the future, and on a commercial corridor that can support more intense uses all contributes to the HPO's evaluation of the addition. Not insignificantly, the project proposes substantial restorative work to the façade, based on historic photographs, which would significantly enhance the character of the building and streetscape. The applicants have revised the proposal a number of times to reduce its scale to the maximum extent possible for its use and structural limitations.

The HPO recommends that the Board find the concept compatible with the character of the building and the surrounding historic district and delegate further review to staff.