

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

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Property Address:	<b>1901-05 9½ Street NW</b>	<b>X</b>	Agenda
Landmark/District:	<b>U Street Historic District</b>		Consent Calendar
Meeting Date:	<b>February 25, 2015</b>	<b>X</b>	Concept Review
H.P.A. Number:	<b>16-101</b>		New Construction
Staff Reviewer:	<b>Anne Brockett</b>	<b>X</b>	Alteration

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In January, the Board reviewed a proposal by Bonstra Haresign Architects, on behalf of Evergreen Urban II LLC, to add an additional story to each of two alley dwellings and to build a new three-story dwelling between them. The Board found the proposal to unify the two historic buildings and new building under a mansard roof incompatible with the purposes of the preservation act.

The project has been revised to reflect the comments of the Board and staff, featuring a less historicist design for the new construction and roof additions and to set the additions back on the roof.

The owner of the three lots is now in negotiation to develop the adjacent vacant lot at 1907 9½ Street. The plans to build another building are ghosted in for the Board's reference, but are not part of the current application. The HPO has not reviewed a design, and it will be filed separately for review by the Board and the community.

**Project Description**

The concept now is to construct a three-story mansard-roofed building on the vacant lot at 1903 9½ Street and to add third floors on 1901 (set back five feet) and 1905 (set back eight feet). The additions would be clad in the same metal panels as the mansards, with simple punched windows.

The façade of the new 1903 takes its proportions from the adjacent alley dwellings, in a modern interpretation. The entire façade is inset by a foot, framed by brick with a brick and metal corbel above. The design introduces a mix of casements and fixed windows above awnings in a pattern that replicates the window sizes and their placement on the historic façades. The spandrel between the floors is the same metal panel system as on the mansard, and it copies the dimensions of the abutting properties. At the roof, the slight slope of the mansard is offset by a projection over the windows and a jump in roof height of approximately eighteen inches.

Each building has a roof deck set back roughly twenty feet from the façade, accessed through a low-profile hatch.

The proposal for rear additions approximately 21 feet in length at 1901 and 1905 is unchanged from last month, although the rear elevations of the three buildings have been revised with vertical divisions at the lot lines, variations in color, a change in finish materials, and a differentiation of materials between the third floor and the lower ones, all of which make the rear more appropriate.

In front, the plans call for the two historic facades to be "repaired and replaced as required," although the extent of demolition and reconstruction remains unclear. Inside, the buildings will be completely reframed.

## **Evaluation**

The HPO considered the three-story new construction to be compatible in concept, and supported a design that emphasizes the two-story character of the alley dwellings lining 9½ Street. However, the mansard additions on the two historic buildings were determined to be incompatible with the immediate context and not appropriate to the alley dwelling building type in setback, size, form, massing or scale.

The revised concept sets the roof additions back eight feet for 1905 and five feet for 1901, although it is unclear how the amount of each setback was determined. The new construction at 1903 would hide the roof addition at 1901 from view to the north, while there would be some visibility from the west. Similarly, the addition atop 1905 will theoretically be blocked by future construction on the vacant lot to the north, but it will be clearly visible to the west, from the portion of 9½ Street that forms the rear alley of properties facing T Street. Because of the continued understanding of the underlying buildings through a change in materials and plane at the third floor, and given the more alley-like conditions of the western leg of 9½ Street, some visibility is not necessarily incompatible. Indeed, given the diminutive size of the buildings, invisibility would be impossible.

In addition to visibility, the Board must also consider the appropriateness of the additions' size and massing relative to the underlying buildings. These buildings have suffered some loss of integrity and will be reframed on the interior with some reconstruction of the exterior. These modifications include restoring the façade windows to their original dimensions and rebuilding the failing and poorly (re)constructed cornices, both of which will emphasize the historic character of the alley. With the restricted visibility of the additions from the north, the reduced integrity of the buildings, and the restorative elements of the proposal, some flexibility is warranted to allow roof additions. However, the current scale of the additions is overwhelming to the buildings below. Greater setbacks are recommended, and the HPO seeks the Board's input.

The design of the additions may also benefit from a lighter touch – with more glazing, very light framing, and a reduction in height. Similarly, the third floor at 1903 needs refinement to reduce its bulkiness. A greater slope would help make the third floor appear smaller, and the height should be brought down by eliminating the bump up of the roofline. The projection over the third floor window should be eliminated or be less substantial in design and materiality.

Finally, the roof decks have not been shown in elevation and have therefore not been evaluated. The HPO would recommend against any deck railing or structure visible from the north, but some visibility from the west may be acceptable. Non-reflective glass railings are encouraged to reduce the anticipated visibility.

## **Recommendations**

*The HPO recommends that the Board find the concept to construct a residence at 1903 9½ Street compatible with the character of the U Street Historic District and consistent with the purposes of the Act, subject to modifications to the design as described above.*

*It is further recommended that the Board find incompatible the concept to add to 1901 and 1905 9½ Street as currently designed, as the additions are not compatible with the context of alley dwellings and are inconsistent with Board approvals of other rooftop additions in scale, massing, and visibility. The staff seeks HPRB input on whether there is an acceptable setback for the additions that could render the project compatible.*