

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

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Property Address:	<b>1469 Florida Avenue NW</b>	<b>X</b>	Agenda
Landmark/District:	<b>U Street Historic District</b>		Consent Calendar
Meeting Date:	<b>March 23, 2017</b>	<b>X</b>	Concept Review
H.P.A. Number:	<b>17-245</b>	<b>X</b>	Alteration
Staff Reviewer:	<b>Anne Brockett</b>		New Construction

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Prospective owners Matthew Schmidt, Charles Schmidt, and Charlotte Anderholt seek concept review to substantially rebuild and expand this house in the U Street Historic District. It is a free-standing frame building that was rumored (although no proof could be found) to have been moved here from another location. Peripheral support to this theory is provided in the fact that no permit information is available, and the date range in which it first appears on maps – between 1887 and 1894 – is quite a late date for both balloon frame construction and the use of the Second Empire style. The house was sheathed in stucco when the district was designated in 1998 and is currently clad in wood on the front and cementitious boards on the sides.

As presented in the engineering reports and plans, the balloon frame suffers from an eastward lean, and the interior and exterior walls are out of plumb. The applicants propose to correct the lean as well as add to the rear and convert the apartments to condo units.

**Project Description**

The proposal seeks to add a 31’ deep addition behind the 33’ main block of the house by removing existing rear additions. The new construction would also expand lot line to lot line, projecting 6’ further than the current east wall. Standing 3 stories in height, the addition has been designed with an open porch where it faces the street with substantial glazing behind.

The rear elevation is utilitarian in design and features a series of landings and staircases leading to terraces in the steeply sloped rear yard. A roof deck is proposed at the rear of the addition. It would be roughly centered on the roof with small penthouse enclosing a spiral stair.

Most significantly, the proposal seeks to correct the building’s lean by removing virtually all interior and exterior cladding materials and re-racking the frame. The original framing elements would be retained and the exterior would receive some much needed restoration.

**Evaluation**

This house is a bit of an enigma. In addition to a building of this style built at such a late date in this part of the city, it is difficult to fully understand its original appearance due to the poorly conceived exterior alterations. The siding is not original; the window sizes are too small and are finished with inappropriate trim; and it is possible that the mansard was added. However, the stone foundation, cornice, and bay appear to be historic (although perhaps not original).

The unknown original design elements are complicated by the structural lean, which the applicants propose to address through removal of all interior and exterior sheathing. Fortunately

the exterior siding, windows, and trim - except on the bay and at the cornice line - are not old, nor is it likely that any original siding (whether stucco or wood siding) exists beneath the current boards. Thus the risk of losing historic fabric is minimized while also allowing an investigation of original opening locations and dimensions.

### **Recommendation**

Because of time constraints due to the contract purchase period, the prospective owners have not developed complete plans and have not gone through ANC review. At this time they seek the Board's comments and direction on the project, rather than a formal vote of approval, so that they may move forward with purchase and further development of the concept for presentation when appropriate.

To provide guidance to the Board's discussion, HPO offers the following general recommendations:

- Given the condition of the building and lack of historic finishes, the removal of the exterior sheathing and existing rear additions would not result in the loss of historic or character-defining features, and therefore could be found consistent with the purposes of the preservation act. The bracketed cornice and bay should be retained in place.
- Removal of the exterior siding could provide information on original window sizes and other possible features. An exterior restoration plan based on a thorough understanding of the building's underlying conditions and evolution should accompany final designs for the project.
- Correcting the leaning condition of the building in a manner that retains the structure in place would address an important structural deficiency and allow the building to be renovated for reuse without resulting in the loss of historic framing;
- While the proposed rear addition is large, it is set back over 30 feet from the façade and would not overwhelm the existing scale of the building. It would not back up to or be visible from an alley. While the full lot width of the addition would close off the open side yard condition at the rear of the house, this is a narrow view that currently terminates in the hillside rather than providing a view of open space or sky beyond. Given these conditions, an addition of this general size, width and location are compatible.
- The proposed roof deck is appropriately sited at the rear of the new construction but should be flag tested to ensure it will not be visible from public street view prior to garnering a recommendation for approval.

Based on these points, the HPO recommends that the Board offer its general encouragement of the concept to allow the plans develop and lead to future community and HPRB reviews.