

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

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Property Address:	<b>1508 Caroline Street NW</b>	<b>X</b>	Agenda
Landmark/District:	<b>U Street Historic District</b>		Consent Calendar
Meeting Date:	<b>January 22, 2015</b>	<b>X</b>	Concept Review
H.P.A. Number:	<b>15-147</b>	<b>X</b>	Alteration
Staff Reviewer:	<b>Anne Brockett</b>		New Construction

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In November 2014, the Board reviewed a proposal to add a third floor addition with mansard roof to match the mansard that was added to the abutting building. Owner Gerald West returns to the Board to seek review of a new concept to add a third floor that is pushed back from the façade. The proposal also includes a rear addition, an expansion of the existing side bump-out, and a side basement entry, which were part of the previous design.

**Property Description and Context**

The house is one of 24 brick duplexes (12 buildings) built on both sides of Caroline Street in 1879-80 by developer Diller Groff. The duplexes were identical when constructed, featuring a two story height and three bays each. On each side of the street, the two center duplexes feature flat fronts while the two end duplexes have a recessed outer bay, where the front door is located. Between each building is a narrow side yard. Groff’s overall plan was carefully and symmetrically arranged.

The National Register nomination form for the U Street Historic District specifically calls out the 1500 block of Caroline Street as distinctive. It states that Groff’s “paired duplex design on Caroline Street...is unique in the area. Located on the outer fringes of the neighborhood when constructed, these duplexes with side yards separating the houses are similar to suburban houses in LeDroit Park and other areas on the fringes of the city limits developed during the 1870s.” The 1500 block of Caroline Street is “unusual for the neighborhood, as it was developed with two-story, detached brick duplexes with narrow side yards.” As with the neighborhood’s other one-block thoroughfares, including Wallach, Riggs, and Corcoran, “these streets illustrate the still experimental nature of rowhouse design in the late 1870s, and the creative responses by builders to the narrow streets cut through some of the blocks.”<sup>1</sup>

The houses on Caroline continue to be characterized by their uniformity of height, rhythm, massing, and ornamentation. That these were intended as working and middle class homes is evidenced visually by their simple construction and historically through analysis of census data, which shows that most occupants were skilled laborers and government clerks, often living with extended family members. In fact, during their first 50 years, more renters than homeowners lived in the Caroline Street residences.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> National Register of Historic Places Registration – Greater U Street Historic District, 1998.

<sup>2</sup> Busch, Rick and Gamber, Dan. *Caroline Street, NW Washington, District of Columbia: The First 135 Years*, 1993.

### **Changes to Caroline Street**

Along with some additions to the rears, there are only three exceptions to the otherwise consistent buildings on the street. In 1888, 1506 Caroline, adjacent to the subject property, received a third story with a mansard roof. The following year, a front bay was added to 1505, followed by a covered porch, additional roof height, and a side addition. In more recent times, a third floor “pop-up” was added at 1519 Caroline. None of these alterations received HPRB review.

### **Evaluation and Recommendation**

Visible roof additions are rarely considered appropriate in historic districts. Pop-up additions can be found to be compatible on buildings that are set in from the end of a row, where they are not visible from any vantage point on the front, and/or they do not sit so far forward on the original block as to negatively impact the historic massing below. In addition, the Board generally requires a flag test or mockup for such proposals *to ensure non-visibility*. Because the subject house is semi-detached and the proposed addition would be clearly visible along the side wall and because there are no rear additions beyond the original block of the house, the proposal does not meet the Board’s standards for compatibility. In addition, a roof deck at the front of the house would likely require a visible railing, which would also not meet the Board’s standards for roof appurtenances.

As previously recommended by HPO, the concept for a rear addition of two stories with a rear deck, the extension of the existing one-story side entrance, and the basement entry are compatible alterations.

*The HPO recommends that the Board find this concept for a third floor addition to be incompatible with the historic district; to find a two-story rear addition, one-story side addition, and basement entrance compatible. The Board’s approval shall not be construed as approval for or endorsement of any necessary zoning relief.*