

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

Property Address:	1514 T Street NW	X	Agenda
Landmark/District:	U Street Historic District		Consent Calendar
Meeting Date:	March 23, 2017	X	Concept Review
H.P.A. Number:	17-172	X	Alteration
Staff Reviewer:	Anne Brockett		New Construction

Owner Zachary Fisher seeks concept review to add a partial third floor and roof deck on his house in the U Street Historic District. The house is one of four brick rowhouses built speculatively in 1888. It is second in from the end of the row, which abuts an alley and the rear yards of houses facing 15th Street, providing a high degree of visibility from the east.

Project Description

The proposal would add a third story 25’ back from the front wall of the house (30’ from the front of the bay). The front wall of the addition roughly aligns with the original main block of the house, although the dogleg here has been partially infilled. From its front, the addition occupies the full width of the roof for approximately 11’, but steps in 5’ for the rear 11’ feet. A deck would occupy the remaining notch with another deck situated on the roof of the rear addition.

It is presumed that the sloping roof would be removed and reframed to accommodate the addition. The overall height from the ceiling of the second floor would be 10’. Siding is proposed as brick on the façade and Hardie-board on the remaining three sides.

Evaluation

The addition was positioned at the center of the roof rather than toward the rear in an effort to keep it as unobtrusive as possible. The initial proposal did not include the notched out area of the addition and after a flag test, the HPO suggested that the addition be cut back as much as possible to determine if this would significantly reduce the visibility. However, the 3-D images submitted appear to include a roof over the side deck, with no roof in the architectural plans. Certainly having no roof would reduce the visibility of the rear portion of the rooftop structure; however, the top of the entire addition remains visible from various viewpoints to the east.

According to the HPO’s *Roof Deck and Roof Additions: Design Considerations and Submission Requirements*, rooftop additions “can sometimes be achieved when they are not visible from street views, do not result in the removal or alteration of important character-defining features of the building or streetscape, and are compatible with their context.” The guidance goes on to state that in general, “roof additions that are visible from a public street are not appropriate, as they would alter an historic building’s height, mass, design composition, cornice line, roof, and its relationship to surrounding buildings and streetscape – all of which are important character-defining features that are protected for historic property. In rare cases, a visible roof addition may be found acceptable if it does not fundamentally alter the character of the building and is sufficiently designed to be compatible with the building.”

Thus the design must be evaluated with this guidance in mind and by examining previous Board practices. There are examples of visible rooftop additions within the U Street Historic District. However, many of these were built prior to the establishment of the district, or were approved early in its existence, before guidance was prepared and best practices established. There are also examples of illegal construction and additions not built according to approved plans.

Applicants often cite these projects as evidence to support their own proposals. However, construction that is inconsistent with the Board's written guidelines and recent, consistent determinations, or that is noncompliant with approved permits, does not provide an appropriate or compatible model. Indeed, the presence of these anomalous projects illustrates the importance of ensuring that the city's historic districts are not further eroded by roof additions that alter the rooflines and streetscapes.

The HPO acknowledges the applicant's willingness to adjust the plans to reduce visibility, but despite these changes, the result is still one that would alter the roofline of this row and is not compatible with the character of the historic district.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends the Board find the proposed roof addition incompatible with the historic district and inconsistent with the purposes of the Act.