

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

Property Address:	1819 15th Street NW	X	Agenda
Landmark/District:	U Street Historic District		Consent Calendar
Meeting Date:	April 28th, 2022		Concept Review
H.P.A. Number:	HP 22-087	X	Alteration Subdivision

The applicant, architect Nima Biabani, seeks conceptual design review for façade alterations and construction of a three-story on a non-contributing building at the corner of 15th Street and Swann Street in the U Street Historic District.

Property Description

The building is located at the end of a row of four two-story Italianate houses. At 26 feet, the lot is wider than its adjoining contributing historic building. It was originally constructed in 1901 as a dwelling, however, the building’s façade was removed and replaced with cementitious panels in the mid-20th century when converted to a church. The side elevation along Swann Street is relatively intact with brick cladding and traditional punched windows. Due to the total loss of its historic façade, the building does not retain sufficient integrity to qualify as a contributing building.

Swann Street is one of a number of narrow “minor” streets in the U Street and 14th Street historic districts with an intimate character, and do not have the generous public space greensward “parking” strip. Across the street is a three-story building with a mansard roof and Italianate features; constructed in 2007, the Swann Street elevation is a reconstruction of the original house on that site which was lost due to demolition by neglect and a fire.

Proposal

The plan calls for a recladding the two street facing elevations and adding a third floor and raised entrance. The entry will be slightly higher than those on the historic row to the south. The front façade proposes a centered two-story projecting bay rising to the height of the neighboring houses with wood panels and a cornice that continues around the side elevation. The third story would be treated as a mansard roof with dormers along the front and side elevations. The fenestration would be a mix of single and double ganged casement windows with black trim. The rear elevation would have sliding glass doors and balconies on each level. A roof deck is proposed on the top of the mansard roof, set back approximately 27’ from the front and around 6’ along the side.

Evaluation

While the general scale and massing are appropriate for the historic district, additional work is needed to refine the design to bring it to an acceptable level of compatibility with the historic district. HPO recommends the following revisions:

- The width, proportions and detailing of the large projecting bay window on 15th Street are very different from bays in the historic district and overwhelm the finely scaled, vertically-oriented originals. Lowering the projection under the primary cornice rather than engaging it and using an alternative window type and spacing should be explored.
- The windows throughout should be more vertically-oriented rather than square or horizontal.
- The placement of the dormers should be reevaluated. Typically, dormers within mansard roofs have a different spacing than the underlying windows to provide variety of rhythm to the elevation, as is witnessed in the original dormer configuration on the Swann Street elevation of the property across the street. Study should be given to breaking up the large central dormer on 15th Street into three separate dormers, and slate or artificial slate should be used instead of vinyl shingles.
- Despite the use of setbacks, the roof deck will be visible from Swann Street and down 15th Street, and is particularly awkward on top of a mansard roof. The roof deck should be eliminated or designed so that it is not visible from street view, as is the standard requirement applied by the Board.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that Review Board support the general scale and massing of the concept as compatible with the character of the U Street Historic District but that the project be revised as outlined above and for it to return for further Board review when ready.

Staff Contact: Imania Price