

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

Property Address:	1918 11th Street NW	X	Agenda
Landmark/District:	U Street Historic District		Consent Calendar
Meeting Date:	December 18, 2014	X	Concept Review
H.P.A. Number:	15-168	X	Alteration
Staff Reviewer:	Steve Callcott		New Construction

Prime Investment Group LLC, represented by Bonstra/Haresign Architects, seeks concept review for alterations and a rear and partial roof addition to a rowhouse in the U Street Historic District.

Property Description

1918 11th Street is a two-story, red brick, bay-fronted rowhouse above a raised English basement. The façade is punctuated with one-over-one windows and a double front door opening topped by a projecting brick surround, and is capped by a corbelled cornice with a small decorative pent roof. Based on the original building permit, it was constructed for owner W.C. Montgomery by builder Diller B. Groff in 1887 for a cost of \$3,333.

Groff was a prolific developer and builder in Washington in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, constructing scores of dwellings, principally rowhouses, in the developing city. His own detached Italianate residence is still extant diagonally across the street from the subject property at 1901 11th Street (1878), and he also designed and constructed the flat-iron shaped Goodwin House at 1800 Vermont Avenue which subsequently housed Freylinghuysen University and is individually listed on the National Register. After 1889, Groff most often employed architect Julius Germuiller to design his developments, which often display fanciful and elaborate brick corbelling. Groff's name survives in Square 779 on Capitol Hill where a public alley, Groff Court, bears his name and retains the alley dwellings he constructed. In the 1890s, he became the principal developer of Brightwood Park.¹

Proposal

On the rear, the project calls for removing an insignificant aluminum-clad one-story shed addition, and replacing it with a three and a half story addition. The addition would extend the width of the lot and project approximately 23 feet from the back wall of the main block of the house. The rear elevation would be clad in split faced masonry at the basement level and fiber cement panel above, with aluminum-clad wood windows. The third floor would extend atop the rear addition and partially atop the existing house, with a small deck on the front portion of the roof set back from the parapet.

On the front, the plans call for a new steel stair to replace an existing non-original steel stair,

¹ Despite his successful career, Groff came to an ignominious end. His brother and others patented a device for attaching public mailboxes to telegraph and other street posts and formed a company to manufacture them, to which they gave the Post Office Superintendent a lucrative share. Groff and his brother were convicted of bribery and sentenced to two years in prison; Groff died soon after his release.

expanding the basement windows by lowering the sills, a new continuous window well around the base of the projecting bay, new wood windows and a perimeter fence.

Evaluation

In footprint and materials, the rear addition is subordinate and compatible with the house and its context. The extent to which the addition projects into the rear yard is consistent with, and indeed slightly less than, the immediately flanking properties. The design of the rear elevation is well-composed and the masonry and cement panel siding are sufficiently compatible for a non-public rear elevation.

The addition would be taller than its immediate neighbors by one floor. In similar instances where there is a relatively uniform rear height line such as is found in this block, the Board has required some planar relief or differentiation in surface treatment at the third floor to reinforce the original 2-story height of a building. Some similar type of differentiation would be appropriate here and would improve the addition's compatibility.

The applicant's sightline studies show that the third floor addition would not be visible from immediately across the street and from the south. However, when the height and setback of a roof addition are designed to so closely follow a hypothetical sightline, it allows absolutely no room for error or the inevitable adjustments that take place during construction, nor does it fully factor in perspective views from oblique angles. When considering the lower height of the houses to the south and the slight drop in topography, it appears likely that the third floor addition would be visible from within this street. Regardless of its potential visibility, the proposed addition is not compatible in massing with the existing house or the two-story context of this block. The Board has been consistently requiring that the appropriate setback from the front for roof additions is the rear wall of the main block of the house. This would set the proposed addition back a comfortable 30 feet or so from the front, and would preserve the massing of the front block of the house.

While the specifications remain to be developed, the proposed window replacement, lowering of the basement window sills, replacement stair, and perimeter fence are all compatible in concept and should be finalized with staff. Small individual window wells should be evaluated as a less intrusive alternative that would preserve more of the public space front yard to the proposed continuous window well at the base of the projecting bay.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Board find the proposed concept generally compatible with the character of the historic district with the condition that the third floor addition be pulled off the main block of the house and a modest setback or change in architectural treatment provided for the third floor at the rear. The basement window well should be reduced to the greatest extent possible, and final approval should be delegated to staff.