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

Property Address:	2001 18th Street NW	X	Agenda
Landmark/District:	Washington Heights Historic District		Consent Calendar
Meeting Date:	May 26, 2022	X	Concept Review
H.P.A. Number:	22-227		Permit Review
			New Construction
			Demolition

Owner Stephen King proposes to add a canopy structure to the roof and an exterior vestibule at the entrance of this property, which is comprised of three one-story commercial buildings that have been combined into one lot. The buildings are prominently located at the intersection of Florida Avenue, U Street, 18th Street, and Vernon Street NW. The two buildings that face U Street were built in 1912 as part of a longer row of Mission style commercial buildings. The diminutive 2001 ½ 18th Street infilled space between buildings in 1925 and carries the same stylistic qualities of red tile roof, projecting bays, and transom windows as the others on the original row.

Proposal

The proposed roof structure is a manufactured metal pergola with a louvered roof that can be opened or closed. Although not shown on the drawings, the sides are slated to have retractable screen walls. The structure would replace an unpermitted tent currently on the roof.

The structure would occupy much of the rooftop – essentially the same area as the existing tent. It measures 34’ x 18’ and would stand nearly 13’ tall. It would sit within the parapet walls on the south and west sides and rest on the parapet walls on the north and east sides.

Also unpermitted is a fabric exterior vestibule and handrail at the corner entrance, for which the owner seeks after-the-fact approval. The railing lines the at-grade corner entrance, which steps down from 18th toward U Street. The enclosure is a metal framed structure with fabric walls and roof and large transparent vinyl “windows.”



Evaluation

In 2015, the property came before HPRB for subdivision, adding the roof decks, which are recessed into the roof height, and adding two staircases to access the decks. The owner was aware of the preservation concerns regarding visibility at that time and the design had to be revised to lower the height of the stair enclosures and to set them back as far as possible. The staff report analyzed that proposal as follows:

“Due to grade changes and differing floor heights among the three buildings, the two stair enclosure additions will not be visible from across or up 18th Street or Florida Avenue. Slivers of visibility of the brick corners of the front stair tower may occur at more distant points to the south on 18th Street and to the east on U Street. However, the additions are pushed sufficiently far back on the roof and are low enough in height so as to blend into the existing and surrounding rooflines.”

These were conditions with which HPO felt comfortable recommending that the Board approve the project, which it did.



Approved stair towers circled in red with restaurant equipment in front

The pergola now proposed is substantial. It spans the entire width of the roof and much of its depth, is as tall as a second story, and has a heavy framing system. Because the roof can close and screens can be lowered, it could at times read as more of an opaque roof addition.

Roof pergolas have sometimes been approved when they are partly visible, but generally only when the installation is on a larger building that can support such a visible addition without affecting its character. Approvals also depend on context, the heights of surrounding and abutting buildings, the scale and architectural character of the underlying building and the historic district.

In this case, there are no mitigating factors that would justify deeming the proposed pergola a compatible alteration. The building is one of several along this row that are one story in height, as are those directly across the street and throughout the Washington Heights commercial strip. Approval of a roof structure would undoubtedly be seen as precedent-setting for the many other restaurants in the vicinity. It should be noted that taller building to the north with a visible pergola structure is non-contributing, which permits greater flexibility in approving alterations,

and has been designed with the pergola as an integral part of that building's composition and roofline.

The delicate and expressive Mission rooflines of the subject buildings would be impacted by a roof addition of any kind, whether largely transparent or not. The expansive views toward these small buildings simply do not provide an opportunity to add above them without a detrimental impact to their historic character.

The front entry enclosure is also not compatible with the building's form and the streetscapes of the Washington Height Historic District. The bulky, boxy addition reads as an addition to the front of the building and blocks the view of the corner entry and its architectural features. Its scale, materials, and location are incompatible with the historic building and district. The staff has no objection to the railing that was installed, which can be seen inside the enclosure, and recommends support for the Public Space application that is necessary for it to remain.



Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Board deny the concept of a rooftop structure and exterior vestibule enclosure as inconsistent with the Act and incompatible with the character of the historic district. HPO further recommends that the Board direct the applicant to remove the unpermitted roof tent and delegate permit approval for the installed railing to staff.

Staff contact: Anne Brockett