

HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION

Property Address:	2412 18th Street NW (rear)	X	Agenda
Landmark/District:	Washington Heights Historic District		Consent Calendar
Meeting Date:	December 17, 2020	X	Concept Review
H.P.A. Number:	21-101	X	Alteration

On behalf of owner CoLuca LLC, Justin Mack of Larson Design Group proposes to substantially remove the roof and replace windows and doors to convert the contributing building at the rear of 2412 18th Street to use as a commissary kitchen. The brick building, situated at the intersection of two alleys, occupies a large one story footprint under a gabled attic space.

The building was constructed as a commercial garage in two phases. The southern third was built in 1905 and the northern two thirds in 1912. The two garage buildings were joined under a single truss roof shortly after.

In 2017, the Board reviewed a project that would have raised the entire roof structure and add an interstitial floor. Although the Board applied a good deal of flexibility on many aspects of the proposal given the building type – including vertical bands of skylights between the trusses – it ultimately recommended that dormers along the roof should be considered to provide useable space in the attic rather than adding a new level.

Proposal

The current proposal also primarily affects the roof with the goal of supporting the weight and ventilation requirements of substantial new roof equipment. The project would replace the attic floor with a concrete roof deck and the existing trussed gable with a new structure in the same form, but mostly open to the elements.

The lower half of the roof frame will be covered by standing seam metal where it sits atop the side brick walls. At the most prominent south-facing end, the standing seam metal would retain its existing appearance all the way to the gable ridge. From eye level, the roof will appear to retain its exact slope and surface material, while also shielding the new equipment from view.

Other work on the building would replace the non-compatible infill at the garage door openings, replace the windows, paint the building, and add signage.

Evaluation and Recommendation

In evaluating the alterations to the building, it is important to note that HPO's survey of alley buildings calls for "the re-discovery and re-invention of the city's alleys and its alley buildings." The current proposal would accomplish that objective in a compatible manner.

Removing roofs is not typically an appropriate preservation treatment, but several factors mitigate the treatment as currently proposed. This is the only alley building located here, and any changes would therefore not be considered precedent setting for its neighbors. The alley itself is comprised of a mix of commercial buildings, apartments, and converted rowhouses, many with non-historic alterations. In addition, the subject building has been long neglected and is in need of substantial exterior restoration.

The architect has worked with staff to develop a scheme that is less visually impactful to the building and alleyscape. The proposal retains the form and slope of the roof, as well as a significant amount of the standing seam roofing material, particularly at the most visible end of the building. The exposed roof framing mimics the gable and allows viewers from further away to understand the original building's form and appearance. Importantly, the building's utilitarian design and industrial character are also retained.

The replacement windows and doors are compatible with the character of the building. As the designs develop, it is recommended that the new storefronts be set back within their openings, as the garage doors currently are, and that the metal lintels above them remain in place and exposed. The HPO will work with the design team on the window details as well as retaining or replicating the cornice that wraps the building, which is in poor condition.

The HPO recommends that the Board find the concept to be compatible with the property and historic district, and that final approval be delegated to staff.

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