

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

Property Address:	2414 (rear) 18th Street NW	X	Agenda
Landmark/District:	Washington Heights Historic District		Consent Calendar
Meeting Date:	May 25, 2017	X	Concept Review
H.P.A. Number:	17-416	X	Alteration
Staff Reviewer:	Anne Brockett		New Construction

Working with Core Architecture, owner CoLuca LLC proposes to substantially alter a commercial garage building in the Washington Height Historic District for office use. The brick alley building, situated at the intersection of two alleys behind 2414-2420 18th Street, occupies a large footprint of one story under a truss-roofed attic space.

It was constructed in two phases, with the southern third of the building built in 1905 along with the commercial buildings directly in front of it facing 18th Street. The northern 2/3 of the building went up in 1912, the product of real estate investor Sydney Flagg. Sometime before 1928, the two combined garages were absorbed into the massive Mount Pleasant Garage Company property. This grand edifice was constructed in 1916 abutting the subject building on the alley and fronting onto 18th Street. The two garage buildings were joined under a single truss roof between 1912 and 1928.

The initial construction date of 1905 is very early for a garage in the District, only the third known permit issued for a garage building in DC. It may have been associated with owner Harry B. Mason's business; in 1906 he was identified as the vice president of the Home Ice Company.

The garage was identified as a contributing resource in the Washington Heights Historic District nomination.

Project Description

The project seeks to add a floor to the building by extruding the height upward. The new, fully glazed wall surface would add 7 feet of height between the existing cornice line and the roof. A new metal roof would be installed above, replicating the existing slope and supported on a new truss system. Five sets of skylight strips are proposed to run down each slope of the gable.

An uncovered rooftop terrace is proposed at the southeast corner, where the new roof would be cut back at an angle. Other changes include fully excavating a basement and replacing all windows and doors.

Evaluation

While this project represents an aggressive manner in which to convert a historic building to a new use, several factors should be considered in evaluating its overall impact to the building and the surrounding historic district. The HPO has recently completed a survey of alley buildings, which brings to light the numerous and significant resource types found in DC's alleyways. It also points to the importance of *using* these buildings: "...recent studies and developments in D.C. and other cities show that 'activated' historic alleys can provide distinctive urban spaces that contribute to a vibrant social realm. We hope that this study is a step towards the re-discovery and re-invention of the city's alleys and its alley buildings."

The proposal would certainly meets that goal, but the question remains of whether or not the reuse as proposed is accomplished in a compatible manner. The appearance of the building would be significantly

altered through the increased height, the wall of glass wrapping the new interior level, and the numerous skylights on both roof slopes. These changes also alter our understanding of the building's history and design as a utilitarian structure -- a simple service building will become a high-style, designed edifice.

On the other hand, the immediate context of the two alleys does not have particularly strong integrity. Non-historic introductions and alterations permeate the mix of commercial, apartments, and converted rowhouses that back onto it. As the only alley building within the block, the changes here cannot be considered precedent setting. In addition, the building has been long neglected and is in need of substantial exterior restoration. The truss has been evaluated by a structural engineer as well as investigated by HPO staff and has been determined to be structurally unsound to the point that it cannot be salvaged.

Recommendation

Returning a building in disrepair to service is an important outcome of any historic preservation proposal, and a specific objective of the alley survey. In this case, the building's alley location and construction history as two distinct buildings joined under a poorly executed roof system, adds to the difficulty in finding the right applicant to address the space, structural, and locational issues. Given the building's current condition and relative significance within the wider historic district, a greater degree of alteration may be warranted.

The best preservation solution would be to retain the roof height and replace the truss with a system that allows more floor space, which could be combined with the introduction of skylights. Another potentially compatible solution might be to raise the roof somewhat less than the 7' proposed here; in this solution, recessing the new plane of glass in from the masonry face of the building below would be beneficial in showing a distinction between the historic building plane versus the new.

In response to HPO comments, a design showing an east-facing shed dormer, combined with some skylights was reviewed and was encouraged by HPO as a compatible direction, and continues to merit consideration. Adding skylights on portions of the roof could be a compatible way to provide light into the top floor, as long as it is done in a manner that does not overwhelm the building. Raising the roof may also be a compatible solution however combining this approach with a large number of skylights represents too much alteration to the character of this simple building. HPO recommends the concept be developed either with skylights, or with a somewhat lower raised roof that contains substantially fewer or no skylights.

The HPO also recommends that the roof terrace be relocated at the north end of the building, particularly at the northeast corner, where it would be visually unobtrusive. The proposed location at the southeast corner is one of the most visible parts of the building at the intersection of the two alleys, and the erosion of the roof at this location appears awkward and unresolved.

Replacing doors and windows does not raise particular preservation concerns as long as the proposed replacements are appropriate to the historic character of building. The HPO will work with the design team on these details.

The HPO recommends that the Board direct the applicants to consider adding a dormer or finding another solution that does not raise the roof; or to propose to raise the roof in a manner that better maintains the building's historic industrial character. The HPO further recommends eliminating or relocating the roof terrace.