

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

Property Address:	2431 18th Street NW	Agenda
Landmark/District:	Washington Heights Historic District	X Denial Calendar
Meeting Date:	February 26, 2015	Concept Review
H.P.A. Number:	15-196	X Alteration
Staff Reviewer:	Anne Brockett	New Construction

The staff recommends that the Board deny an after-the-fact permit application for storefront alterations, which have been the subject of enforcement action since November of last year. Non-compliant exterior work includes the removal and replacement of the projecting storefront bay and bricking in the three transom windows above.

This building is identified in the National Register nomination for the Washington Heights Historic District as non-contributing because of the alterations to the façade. Originally a bay-fronted rowhouse built in 1904-5, the building suffered the loss of its bay and replacement of its decorative brick façade, windows, and articulated roofline in the mid-20th century, likely when 18th Street was widened as it became a major commercial and streetcar thoroughfare.

Enforcement Actions

The HPO inspector stopped work at the subject property on November 20, 2014 for exceeding the scope of a permit for interior work. At the time, the storefront bay was in the process of being replaced and the transoms had been infilled. After a hearing with the Office of Administrative Hearings, the infraction was upheld but the fine reduced from \$2000 to \$1000, which was subsequently paid. As per the settlement agreement, a permit application for work compatible work on the storefront was reviewed and approved by HPO staff and then issued by DCRA.

However, the work that ensued is out of compliance with the permit and the HPO-stamped plans, which showed a storefront with a low brick base with a 21-pane front window and 8-pane side window that extend all the way to the edges of the bay for maximum visibility. What was constructed is a storefront with a tall brick base, 18-pane front window, and 6-pane side window surrounded by wood lap siding. The punched transom windows and their wood frames have been removed and replaced with brick.

Evaluation and Recommendation

Essentially, the proportions and materials are inappropriate for a commercial storefront and both are more appropriate to a residential installation. While the building is considered non-contributing and the HPO does not require the storefront to match what was there prior to the current one (matching was per the applicant's design), it does need to be compatible with the historic district. In January, the HPO offered to assist with a design that could be approved that retains the already-purchased window. Such a design would lower the window by removing

several courses of brick, place a transom above it, and frame them both with a compatible wood cornice and panels. However, no response was received.

The HPO could approve such a design or another compatibly designed storefront, and regularly does so at the staff level. In addition, we would expect to review permit applications for signage, the front door, outdoor seating, or any other exterior work that may be forthcoming. The infilled transoms, which are a character-defining feature of a mid-century commercial storefront, should be reinstalled to maintain the history of the building as it changed from a residence to a store, sandwiched among upholsterers, furniture shops, apartments and rooming houses, and to maintain a proper proportion of solid to void on the facade. Even if they are blind windows, a molded wood frame and glazing should be inserted into each of the former transom openings in a design that approximately matches what was removed.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Board deny the permit application for storefront alterations as incompatible with the historic district and inconsistent with the purposes of the preservation act. The HPO further recommends that the Board direct the applicant to reinstall the transom windows and work with the HPO on a compatible bay design that can be approved through delegated review.