

---

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

---

Property Address:	<b>1836-40 Kalorama Road, NW</b>	X	Agenda
Landmark/District:	<b>Washington Heights Historic District</b>		
Meeting Date:	<b>September 28, 2023</b>	X	Permit Review
H.P.A. Number:	<b>23-515</b>	X	Alteration

---

Contract purchaser Patrick Bloom of PT Blooms Development, working with architect Jonathan Kuhn, seeks the Board's review of a concept to add above and behind the existing building(s) at 1836 and 1840 Kalorama Road NW.

No. 1840 Kalorama was constructed 1912, one of three in a row designed by Nicholas Haller. It was immediately occupied by the Washington Montessori School, founded by Alexander Graham Bell and his wife Mabel Bell. As the second oldest known Montessori institution in the United States, the school had initially operated out of the Bells' home, but in 1913 moved to these premises. No. 1836 Kalorama Road was built in 1923 as an exercise and playroom addition to the school. At some point, a high fence was added to its roof, presumably to provide more outdoor play space. The entire property was used continuously for educational purposes since its construction until it was vacated several years ago.

No. 1840 features a shallow front bay and a stone porch and stairs that lead up to a non-original wood vestibule. No. 1836 projects out a few feet further toward the street, but it is flush with the face of 1834 next door.

### **Project Description**

The proposal would remove the rear wing, porches and fire stair from 1840 and the rear wall, interior floor slabs, and presumably the roof of 1836. It is unclear where existing openings connect the buildings through the party wall, but stairways and an elevator are proposed to center on the party wall, encapsulating parts of it.

Three floors are proposed to be added atop and behind 1836. The lower two floors would be in line with the façade of 1840 and therefore set back from the underlying school building. The topmost (fifth) floor is set back approximately ten feet and continues across the roof of 1840. At 1840, the rear slope of the mansard would be removed to create a walled roof deck between the addition and the mansard.

The facade of the addition above 1836 is composed of brick with French door openings. On the third and fifth floors, the doors open onto roof decks, with railings that are intended to mimic the fenced play space currently located on the roof of 1836. At the rear, the elevation is symmetrically arranged with sliding doors and balconies that feed into a projecting center stair. There is currently no access to the alley from the rear of the property, and the rear yard will be excavated to grade to provide six parking spaces with a central stair leading down from the elevated back yard.

Changes proposed for the front include converting a window to a door in the front bay, closing the existing door into the side of the school building at this location, and creating and altering openings beneath the front porch.

The applicant has worked with HPO staff to revise the design to be more compatible, but several aspects of the design warrant the Board's consideration.

### **Demolition**

The proposal seeks to remove most of the structure at 1836, including the interior floor slabs, the rear wall, and likely the roof. A structural report was prepared after a visual inspection of the property. Its purpose was to "evaluate the current conditions of the structural components accessible to us, and general building structure *for its feasibility to the proposed use*" (emphasis added). It notes degraded conditions within the building, but no tests were conducted to assess current stability, and the evaluation was based solely on whether the existing building could support what is being proposed.

Within 1840, the amount of structural demolition remains unclear. The plans state that the joists will be retained to the extent possible. However, with the removal of the rear walls, some of the party walls and the staircase, as well as the insertion of two new stairs and an elevator, the degree to which the historic property will retain its structural integrity is unclear and should be evaluated.

With proposed removal of concrete slabs and at least a partial removal of the roof at 1836, the question arises of how to retain the brick façade. While the revisions retreat from the initial submission calling for its removal and reconstruction, it is necessary to understand the process for completing the proposed demolition scope without demolishing the façade.

*HPO seeks the Board's guidance on the sufficiency of the structural report and the appropriateness of the demolition scope in terms of extent and method.*

### **Roof addition**

HPO takes no issue with an upward addition at 1836 Kalorama. The proposal to add two stories set back from the existing façade, aligning with the street face, and utilizing metal railings to recall the existing roof railing is compatible in this context. However, a third story would make this building the tallest on the block, a full floor taller than 1842 Kalorama to the east.

In addition, the manner in which the proposed fifth floor crosses through the parapet onto the roof of 1840 results in an awkward and visible intersection between old and new. The addition itself will also be visible, albeit minimally, over the roofline of 1840, as shown on the cover sheet rendering. Where HPRB has approved additions atop historic rowhouses, they are generally set back to not occupy the majority of the roof and to not be visible.

As the design of the addition is considered, HPO would recommend lowering the floor heights and studying the surrounding fenestration to relate more thoughtfully to the typical hierarchy of largest windows on the lowest floor and smaller windows as the building rises.

*The HPO supports the addition of two floors on 1836 but finds the addition on 1840 incompatible as designed.*

### **Rear addition**

The HPO takes no issue with the design of the rear addition itself; however, the open, projecting staircase is not particularly compatible with historic rears. There is a fire stair on the rowhouse currently, which served the school, but it is tucked into the side of the building, abutting the current rear porches.

The alley context is one of garages, retaining walls, and open parking. Changes to the grade to allow for parking have been executed by others, and removing a portion of the rear yard does not cause preservation concerns. The design of the centered stair from the yard down to the parking is a bit unusual and the stair might be better positioned to one side to bend in with other built components of the alleyscape.

*The HPO supports the design of the rear addition with refinements to the rear stairs to better camouflage their presence.*

### **Front alterations**

Changes are proposed to the front elevation and yard that conflict with several elements of the Board's adopted *Preservation and Design Guidelines for Basement Entrances and Windows*. According to the guidelines, basement entrances should not be through a projecting bay; there should be only one lead walk serving the main entrance; and entrance stairs and porches should not be altered to accommodate new basement entrances.

*The HPO recommends the building entry sequencing be reconsidered to utilize the existing doors and that the design conform to the Board's Guidelines.*

### **Recommendation**

In summary, the HPO recommends that the Board:

- evaluate whether the amount of demolition proposed is permissible given the conditions cited in the engineering report;
- find the concept of a two-story roof addition on 1836 compatible with revisions to the fenestration and entry;
- direct the applicant to lower or set back the roof addition to 1840 to not be visible from Kalorama Road;
- find the rear addition to both buildings compatible with revisions to the stairs; and
- request scaled drawings of all meters and mechanical equipment;

The Board's decision should not be construed as support for or opposition to any necessary zoning relief.

*Staff contact: Anne Brockett*

