

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

Property Address:	2607 Connecticut Avenue NW	X	Agenda
Landmark/District:	Woodley Park Historic District		Consent Calendar
Meeting Date:	April 27, 2017	X	Concept Review
H.P.A. Number:	17-251	X	Alteration
Staff Reviewer:	Anne Brockett		New Construction

Owner Ilya Zusin, working with Core Architecture + Design, seeks concept review to add a 5-story addition and lower the first floor at this former townhouse in Woodley Park. The house was built for Dr. and Mrs. James Augustine Cahill by architect George N. Ray in 1922 in a Georgian classicist style featuring a 3-story brick façade with limestone trim and a 4th floor slate-clad mansard roof. The house is quite shallow with the original permit data indicating a width of 38 feet and a depth of only 28 feet. A narrow 3-story addition projects from the rear and an elevator penthouse from the roof.

Project Description

The addition would extend back at the same height as the existing building toward the rear, more than doubling the size of the existing building. Because of its location next to a one-story building to the north, the side of the addition would be visible from Connecticut Avenue. The side wall will continue the use of brick, and includes a 2½ inch wide metal reveal, inset to a 2½ inch depth, at the original rear wall location to differentiate new from old. The project would remove the unsightly rooftop penthouse and utilize a low elevator overrun in a non-visible location in the center of the new roof.

The rear is set back 24 feet from the property line and rises 5 stories above a partially elevated basement. The rear elevation mimics the front with brick cladding, paired punched windows, a symmetrical design, and string courses between the first and second floors and below the top floor. Windows are hierarchical in design, with the first floor receiving a heavy frame treatment, 2nd through 4th floor windows butted against each other, and the top floor with narrow brick mullions between the pairs. Trash storage and parking would fill the remainder of the lot.

On the front, the door opening would be lowered to provide access to an at-grade first floor. A single leaf, full-glass door would be installed where there is currently a pair of non-original solid wood doors. While details have not been provided, the stone threshold and steps would be at least partly removed. Planted landscaping would replace concrete in the public space and a new leadwalk would be flush with sidewalk.

The project would also restore the façade, most notably by removing the through-wall air conditioning units and replacing missing brick and limestone.

Evaluation and Recommendation

The proposed addition will be visible from multiple vantage points because of the lower heights of surrounding buildings. Unlike several previous iterations, where multiple additional stories were proposed, the current design will not rise taller than the existing building. The Board has found projects compatible where an addition extrudes the current height toward the rear. The reveal, recommended by HPO, will mark the location of the original rear wall on each side.

At the rear, this side of the alley is composed of former residential buildings long since converted to commercial uses, as well as historic and non-historic purpose-built commercial buildings. These buildings vary in heights and lengths. Across the alley is a row of residential rowhouses. While a larger apartment building anchors the north end of the alley, there are no buildings that rise a shear height of 5 stories at the proposed depth. The

presence of the proposed addition will certainly create a new alleyscape and alter the building to which it is being attached; however, neither change makes the proposal inherently incompatible. Its design must be reviewed using the Board's *Additions to Historic Buildings* Guideline, which describe these aspects of compatibility: setback, orientation, massing, height, scale, rhythm, materials, colors, roof shape, details and ornamentation, and reversibility.

The guidelines acknowledge that *setback* is generally determined by zoning and in this instance, the addition is proposed to be set back 9 feet further from the rear property line than is required by zoning. In preservation terms, however, setback generally refers to the position of the addition on or behind the original main block of the building and its depth into the rear yard relative to other buildings on the block. The guidelines state that "respecting the alignment of rear additions is generally not as critical because they usually cannot be seen *from* the public street." However, the Board has typically applied a stricter interpretation when alleyscapes are particularly uniform. Along this alley, there is no uniformity among setbacks, and many buildings extend the full length of the lot. The addition is also appropriately set behind the original main block of the addition and is therefore considered compatible in setback.

According to the Guidelines, an addition's *height* "does not necessarily need to be exactly the same height as the existing building," but should "be designed to be compatible with the height of the existing building and its neighbors" and may "vary in height by two or more stories" on the rear. In this case, the height is taller than neighboring buildings along the alley, and gets taller at the rear due to a change in grade from the street to the alley.

The addition proposes a simple rectilinear *massing* that is consistent with the building's existing main block. Many of the buildings on this block, however, have taller massing at the front (Connecticut Avenue) end of the lot, with only one or two stories at the alley end. The Board recently approved an addition at 2649 Connecticut that was set back 8 feet from the alley on the first two floors and then stepped back an additional 17 feet. This massing was determined to be compatible on this commercial alley.

The addition is decidedly larger in *scale* than the existing structure and the immediately surrounding buildings. The residence was built with and has maintained a small footprint relative to the lot size, which would be nearly tripled with the addition. However, among the surrounding buildings, there is no consistent scale, and the proposed discrepancy in scale is not uncommon along the Connecticut Avenue corridor of the historic district in which larger apartment buildings coexist with smaller row buildings.

The design of the rear, which has evolved to be less modern in style with a higher ratio of solid to void and a regular and hierarchical pattern of fenestration, is compatible in *rhythm* and *proportion*. The addition is also compatible in *orientation, materials, colors, roof shape, and details and ornamentation*.

Despite its visibility from the front, the addition is compatible in setback, orientation, rhythm, materials, colors, roof shape, details and ornamentation. The staff requests the Board to determine whether the scale and massing are appropriate for this building on this alley, which is commercial on one side and residential on the other. Although large, it is not unusual to have buildings that are taller than or occupy bigger footprints than abutting buildings in what has evolved into a commercial area. The HPO acknowledges the substantial changes already made to reduce the size of the addition. It is also noted that eliminating the unsightly penthouse represents a positive alteration and restoration of façade and installation of landscaping help offset the changes proposed to entry. The HPO encourages exploration of at-risk windows on the north wall to break up the expansive brick plane.

The HPO seeks the Board's direction on the compatibility of this addition and the delegation of review to staff.