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

Landmark/District:	Woodley Park Historic District	<input type="checkbox"/> Agenda
Address:	2218 Cathedral Avenue, NW	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Consent
Meeting Date:	October 28, 2010	<input type="checkbox"/> New construction
Case Number:	10-456	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Addition
Date Received:	September 7, 2010	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Alterations
Staff Reviewer:	Tim Dennée	<input type="checkbox"/> Concept

Cathy Harrison, agent for owner Thomas Cutler (with architects Studio Crowley Hall), requests approval of a permit to construct an addition and deck atop this 1922, George Santmyers-designed, brick rowhouse, with a new deck and alterations to openings at rear.

This same project was submitted for Board review in 2007, with the Board approving it on July 26, 2007. As a permit has not been issued, and more than three years have passed, the approval has lapsed.¹

As it faces Rock Creek Park, the property is subject to Commission of Fine Arts (CFA) jurisdiction in accordance with the Shipstead-Luce Act. CFA approved the project on its consent calendar in 2007 and again approved it last month.

With regard to projects that may fall into the concurrent jurisdictions of the CFA and the HPRB, the District’s preservation law states that “the Mayor *may* refer the permit application to the Historic Preservation Review Board for a recommendation, but *shall* so refer all applications that are not subject to review by the Commission of Fine Arts under the Old Georgetown Act or the Shipstead-Luce Act.” Thus, most projects within areas of shared jurisdiction are not taken up by the HPRB independently, in order to avoid duplicative or unnecessarily conflicting decisions and to minimize the burden on applicants. HPRB will occasionally initiate an independent review if it is perceived that its standards—and the likely outcomes—would be substantially different from CFA’s. Such occasional differences of opinion typically arise from the two bodies having somewhat different missions—the CFA being principally a design review body, in this case responsible mainly for protecting views to and from the park, and the HPRB being principally a preservation body responsible mainly for protecting the individual and collective character of historic districts and landmarks themselves. In this case, the CFA and HPRB interests appear aligned.

¹ By regulation, a Board approval is valid for two years, with a one-year extension available for good cause shown. Unfortunately, the application has been submitted two months after which it could have merely been extended, so it comes before the Board again as new.

The HPRB also occasionally takes up a case independently at the request of an Advisory Neighborhood Commission, typically because of some neighborhood sentiment in opposition to a project. This was the case when the 2007 application was presented, as ANC 3C did not oppose but did not support the project, in light of neighbors' "grave concern about this project particularly the massing in the rear." In doing so, however, the ANC acknowledged that "this addition as presented appears to meet current HPRB standards to the extent that the addition will not be visible from the street..." As of the time of writing this report, the ANC had not weighed in on its position relative to the substance of the case. The HPO considered it prudent to place the matter on the Board's agenda pending more information as to whether it needs to be discussed at the hearing.

Project description

The proposal calls for demolishing the roof behind the existing ridge, and construction of a new roof extending rearward and upward at a low pitch so as to keep it invisible from Cathedral Avenue. The front mansard and its dormer would be retained. The rear elevation of the addition would be set back nearly twelve feet from the face of the rear wall below (the Board had pushed it back two feet in 2007), and it would be mostly glazed, with a series of fixed and operable French doors. A roof deck at rear would be surrounded by a pressure-treated balustrade set back three feet from the outside edges of the roof. The project is identical to that approved by the Board in 2007, very similar to one approved that year for 1733 Kenyon Street, NW, and similar to a number of other rowhouse projects, although set back from the rear wall more than most.

All of the openings at the first floor rear would be replaced by a centered pair of French doors flanked by fixed, full-length windows. The stairs and stoop or deck there would be reconfigured but would not increase in size except for a stepped series of planter boxes. The rear yard is surrounded by a six-foot-tall board-on-board fence, so the deck and planters and portions of the openings would not be visible except from the back yard and from vantage points above it.

Evaluation

The deck, stairs and planters do not pose historic preservation or design compatibility issues. The change to the rear openings does not constitute the absolute best preservation, but affect an elevation of secondary significance and are very much in keeping with alterations that have been routinely approved by the Board, HPO and CFA.

Given the Board's longstanding policy that most buildings should not have rooftop additions that can be seen from the street in front, the most important vantage point for judging the success of a design for such a project is across the street. With the encouragement of the CFA and the neighbors, the property owners had a mock-up erected in 2007 to suggest the massing of the proposal. From across the street, against the park boundary fence and opposite 2202 to 2210 Cathedral Avenue, a small triangular bit of what would be the side wall appeared over the parapet of 2216 and behind the subject house's front chimney. At a maximum, i.e., from the best vantage point, the mock-up showed about three inches high and several inches long.² The mock-

² It is perhaps nine inches or so deep as perceived from that point, although from at least 40 yards away, the distance is too great to give the exact dimensions. The east side of Cathedral has no sidewalk or residences, thus, even this glimpse would not be available to most passersby. The opposite side of the park fence is a pathless area above a steep drop, so it is unlikely that anyone in the park could see the addition either.

up for the higher rear chimney was not visible from the front. Because this small area threatened to make the addition a little visible from one vantage point on the street, the Board insisted in 2007 that the addition be revised as necessary to make it disappear.

While the Board discourages “visible” rooftop additions, it has been supportive of rooftop additions in instances of rowhouses with partial attics with mansard roofs. This condition permits an addition to hide behind a house’s existing attic. As the mock-up and the drawings indicate, the rear of the addition would naturally be visible from the alley and many neighboring properties. The Board has typically not considered this type of alteration to be of a significant harm to the character of the historic districts. The proposed setback has a substantial mitigating effect so as to render negligible the impacts on the historic character of the historic district.

Recommendation

The staff recommends that the Board approve a permit to construct the addition, roof deck, rear deck, and planters as proposed, with the condition that no portion of the addition be visible from across Cathedral Avenue.