
HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION

Landmark/District:	Fourteenth Street Historic District	<input type="checkbox"/> Agenda
Address:	1528 Church Street, NW	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Consent
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Concept
Meeting Date:	February 27, 2014	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Alteration
Case Number:	14-129	<input type="checkbox"/> New Construction
Staff Reviewer:	Steve Callcott	<input type="checkbox"/> Demolition
		<input type="checkbox"/> Subdivision

Owners Stephan Rodiger and Marissa Piropato, with plans prepared R2L Architects, request concept review for construction of a three-story addition to the rear of a two-story brick house in the 14th Street Historic District.

Property Description

1528 Church Street is a two-story, flat-front brick rowhouse. Its façade has three bays of two-over-two windows, is capped by a bracketed Italianate wood cornice, and has a one-story porch spanning its width (which was probably added later but certainly within the 1855-1940 period of significance of the historic district). Permit research indicates that the house was built by owner William Jones for a modest \$800; no architect or builder is listed. The dimensions of the house are indicated on the original permit as 20 by 25 feet deep, which corresponds to the depth of the first two rooms; its current depth of 35 feet indicates that the rear kitchen was added later. The house is set substantially back on its lot, approximately 24 feet behind the building line.

As is well known, construction of the 14th Street streetcar line opened this portion of Washington to development beginning in the late 1860s. However, development was initially somewhat slow and investments by builders and homeowners remained modest until it was adequately proven that there was going to be a demand for housing in the emerging neighborhood. The subject house's relatively small size, flat-front façade, two-story height, modest Italianate detailing, and set back from the building line are all typical characteristics of this first wave of development along the 14th Street corridor.

Proposal

Two alternative proposals were submitted for review by the Board in January, one that called for constructing a visible third floor on top of the house and another that included a three story addition to the rear that was substantially larger than the original house. In response to compatibility concerns raised in the HPO report, the case was deferred at the request of the applicants in an effort to develop a third alternative proposal that would respond to those compatibility issues.

Based on the discovery that the kitchen addition is not original to the house and of substandard construction, the new proposal calls for it to be removed. The rear addition would rise three stories behind the house, but has now been stepped down in height to respond to the lower grade at the rear of the lot. The addition has also been broken into two smaller masses, with the rear portion spanning only a portion of the rear yard and stepping down in height to two stories, as is typical of a traditional rear ell wing.

As before, the main block of the house would be renovated with the façade brick repainted, the vinyl siding on the exposed side elevation removed and the underlying masonry repointed, new energy efficient windows and compatible entry door installed, the porch reconstructed in-kind, and new landscaping provided in the front yard.

Evaluation

The small size of this house, its deep setback from the street, and its exposed side elevation pose particular challenges for substantially expanding it in a manner that retains its character and results in an addition that is compatible in form and relationship with the house and the historic district. The revised proposal no longer proposes an addition on top of the house – a treatment the Board has consistently found incompatible for its physical and visual impacts -- and would retain the exterior walls and structural assemblies of the main block of the house so that it would not result in demolition as defined by the preservation regulations.

While the revised proposal still calls for the addition to be taller than the main house – a situation that will be visible through the adjacent vacant site – the addition has been lowered in height from the previous proposal to diminish the height disparity. As well, the change in massing to two smaller elements, each of which is smaller in footprint than the main block, results in a more compatible composition of more equal parts rather than a large, taller monolithic addition that dominates the smaller house. Given the unusual siting of the house set deep on its lot, the removal of the third floor addition from the footprint of the original house, the lowered height of the third floor addition so that it will not be a full floor taller than the house or visible from the street, and the breaking up of the massing of the addition so that it does not overwhelm the house, the HPO recommends that the Board find revised proposal compatible with the character of the historic district.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Board find the proposal to be consistent with the preservation act and delegate final approval to staff.