

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

Property Address:	1355-57 U Street NW	X	Agenda
Landmark/District:	U Street Historic District		Consent Calendar
Meeting Date:	April 28, 2016	X	Concept Review
H.P.A. Number:	15-311	X	Alteration
Staff Reviewer:	Anne Brockett		Subdivision

The Board reviewed this project in July 2015 when the proposal included subdividing two lots and adding 4 floors plus a mechanical penthouse above two 2-story rowhouses. The Goldstar Group, working with Antunovich Associates architects, now seeks concept review to add 7 floors plus a penthouse at a greater setback than previously proposed.

The two historic buildings stand about 28 feet in height and are surrounded by similarly scaled residential and commercial buildings on this half of the square. To the east are a 2-story historic commercial building (Hamilton Printers), a 2-story non-contributing commercial building, and a 31-foot wide private alley belonging to the Ellington apartment building. To the west are a 15-foot wide alley and the rear elevations of the 2- and 3-story buildings that face 14th Street. At the rear is a wide alley (formerly Park Place), the recently constructed Langston Lofts, and Hamilton Playground. The proposed addition would be visible on all sides.

Project Description

The revised design attempts to respond to HPRB's comments, which indicated that while the proposed height might be compatible, the delineation and massing needed refinement. The Board also offered a willingness to consider additional height with an increased setback, the desired outcome being a structure that reads as an independent, mid-block building rather than as an addition to the rowhouses.

As previously proposed, the original main blocks of the rowhouses would remain with demolition occurring behind that line. At the last meeting, the design called for two floors added at a setback of 32 feet, two additional floors at a 44 foot setback, and a double height mechanical penthouse above that. The current proposal does away with the progressive setbacks, rising up 7 stories at a 48' setback with a penthouse above. The previous proposal stood about 85' tall; the current proposal rises to approximately 109 feet.

A specific materials palette has not been determined in an effort to focus the discussion on the proposed massing, form, and scale.

Evaluation

The proposal is incompatible in height, scale, proportions and massing with the historic district and the two-story rowhouses to which they are being added. The scale of the addition is out of character with the buildings to which it is being added and the surrounding historic low scale buildings. While there are certainly examples of high density, large construction projects in the U Street Historic District, there are important distinctions that allowed these to achieve a level of compatibility which the Board felt comfortable supporting. Generally, these development projects were determined compatible based partly on their large underlying sites, which allowed tall additions to spread out over a much greater area. Where they have been approved, these large additions have created a proportional balance between horizontal and vertical that remains absent from this proposal. Not insignificantly, many of these projects were also built on vacant land (i.e. The Elysium) or took advantage of vacant lots or non-contributing buildings which were

demolished and combined with occupied lots (i.e. Portner Place, the Louis). Such projects understandably had less impact to historic resources.

Of the closest non-historic buildings, the Langston Lofts directly behind the subject property is approximately 70' tall and the Ellington Apartments stands 86' tall, as does the project across the street at 13th and U Streets. As well, if an addition here is to read as distinct from the buildings below, it would require a greater setback to more clearly rear as distinct from the U Street corridor.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Board find the addition to 1355-57 U Street to be incompatible with the character of the historic district in height, scale, proportions and massing, and inconsistent with the purposes of the preservation act.

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Property Address:	1355-57 U Street NW	X	Agenda
Landmark/District:	U Street Historic District		Consent Calendar
Meeting Date:	June 4, 2015	X	Concept Review
H.P.A. Number:	15-311	X	Alteration
Staff Reviewer:	Anne Brockett		New Construction

On behalf of owner The Goldstar Group, the architecture firm of Bonstra Haresign seeks the Board's concept review to subdivide two lots into one and add six floors to two 2-story rowhouses in the U Street Historic District - to a total height of 90 feet plus a mechanical penthouse. Zoning relief will be sought for rear yard setback and parking relief.

The two historic buildings contribute to the historic district and reveal an interesting history of neighborhood development. Both lots were initially occupied by freestanding frame dwellings pushed back considerably from the street. By 1895, the house at 1355 had been replaced by a contemporary bay-front brick house and 2-story rear brick stable. The buildings remained in residential use through the mid-20th century and by the 1950s had become a restaurant with a two story addition joining the former house and stable together. Similarly, the brick building at 1357 replaced the earlier frame residence before the turn of the 20th century. In 1925, an 18 x 60' service garage was built behind the building on the named alley, Park Place. Around the same time, the building was being used as a store and Park Place was being developed as a community of auto repair shops with four of them within a half block of each other. By 1958, a restaurant occupied the front of 1357 U Street with an auto repair and welding shop behind.

Project Description

The two buildings stand at about 28 feet in height and are surrounded by similarly scaled residential and commercial buildings on this half of the square. To the east are a two-story commercial building (Hamilton Printers), a non-contributing commercial building, and a 31-foot wide private alley belonging to the Ellington apartment building. To the west are a 15-foot wide alley and the rears of buildings that face 14th Street. At the rear is a wide alley (formerly Park Place), the recently constructed Langston Lofts, and Hamilton Playground. The proposed addition would be visible from all sides.

The new construction would be added 34 feet back from the historic facades, rising 5 floors with a projecting bay and then stepping back 10 feet on both the front and rear for the top (8th) floor. A penthouse enclosure would occupy much of the roof. The setback depth was determined by the apparent original rear walls, not including ells or additions. The rear walls, party wall between buildings, and all interior structure would be removed to align floor heights.

Evaluation

The proposal to add any substantial addition above and behind two diminutive rowhouses should be approached with restraint, with a goal of preserving the historic buildings and the character of the historic district. As a primary concern, the HPO takes issue with the amount of demolition proposed, which would leave only the side wall of 1357 and the façades, although removing the applied rock veneer and replacing the storefront may mean that much of 1357's façade may also need to be substantially rebuilt.

Secondly, the scale of the addition is not appropriate for the buildings to which it is being added. Although the applicants have lowered the height by 10 feet, the proposal is not compatible with these historic buildings or with the historic district.

There are certainly examples of high density, large construction in the U Street Historic District, but there are distinctions that allowed these to achieve a level of compatibility which the Board felt comfortable supporting. The “precedents” sited in the submission, as well as many other large projects in the district, have in common large underlying sites which allowed tall additions to spread out over a much greater area. Where they have been approved, these large additions have created a proportional balance between horizontal and vertical that is missing from this proposal. Not insignificantly, many of these projects were also built on vacant land or took advantage of vacant lots or non-contributing buildings which were demolished and combined with occupied lots. Such projects understandably had less impact to historic resources.

Projects of significant size are also almost exclusively located on corners, where vertical expression is more easily accommodated due to the opening up of the streetscape to the surrounding blocks. Mid-block additions of the proportions proposed are not appropriate on a street of small-scale brick rowhouses. Another common element for large projects is the presence of street frontage, which serves to firmly ground the new construction. All of the cases cited by the applicants contain a certain percentage of new construction at the street face, providing access without altering historic elevations and allowing new construction to read as a separate building rather than as an addition.

If compatibility is to be achieved here, the new construction would need to follow the principles that worked for other large projects in the area. To read as a separate building, a greater distinction from the fronting historic buildings is required by employing a much greater setback. Alternately, to read as an addition, something more akin to the addition approved at 1353 U Street, which is an appropriately scaled addition for size of the lots in question, could work at 1355-57.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Board find the proposal for an addition to 1355-57 U Street incompatible with the historic district and inconsistent with the purposes of the preservation act and that the applicants return to the Board with a more compatibly scaled design. The HPRB's decisions should not be considered endorsement for any zoning relief.

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Property Address:	1355-57 U Street NW	Agenda
Landmark/District:	U Street Historic District	X Consent Calendar
Meeting Date:	June 23, 2016	X Concept Review
H.P.A. Number:	15-311	X Alteration
Staff Reviewer:	Anne Brockett	Subdivision

This project returns to the Board for further review to add a residential building to the rear of two former rowhouses in the U Street Historic District. The Board reviewed this project in July 2015 when the proposal included adding 2 floors set back 32' and 2 set back an additional 12' with a penthouse above reaching a total height of 85'. The Board found this design incompatible and suggested that the addition needed to be set back further, possibly with an increase in height. In April 2016, the applicant proposed to add 7 floors set back 48' plus a penthouse at a total of almost 109' tall. The Board found the design and material palette more appealing, but determined the project was too tall to be considered compatible.

Permit research indicates that the original footprint of 1355 U Street was 32' in length, while a distinct change in brickwork at 1357 reveals an original length of 28'3".

Project Description

The revised design limits demolition to beyond the original footprint of each building and proposes a hybrid of the previous two proposals. A 1-story addition would sit back 26' from the facade, occupying a small part of the existing roofs. Floors 4-6 would be pushed back 48'3", floor 7 would be at 54'3", and floor 8 would be set back 84' from the facade. The penthouse has been removed and a simple screen approximately 5' tall will be used around rooftop mechanicals. The total height is just above 90'.

In addition, floors 3 and 8 would be set in from the west side while floors 7 and 8 step in successively from the rear. Floors 3, 4, 7, and 8 would have glass-railed balconies, each set in from the edge of the roof below. The materials and facade treatments continue to be refined with alternating framing elements of concrete and wood cladding. The top 2 floors will be clad in a lighter material above a heavier cornice line, both intended to lower the perceived height of the building.

Evaluation

The revised proposal results in an addition that more successfully reads as an independent, mid-block building rather than as an addition to the rowhouses. The lowest floor of the addition projects toward the front as it did in the 2015 design. However, it will be only minimally visible on the alley side, and is set back further than the adjacent roof addition at 1359 U Street. The additional setbacks of the upper floors on 3 sides also adds to a reduction in scale and a refined and articulated massing. Finally, the removal of a penthouse lowers the height considerably from previous iterations, keeping the building more in line with other U Street Historic District infill construction to the immediate east and north.

The proposal is compatibly designed and brings the height and massing in line with other approved mid-block buildings and additions within historic districts. The addition creates a proportional balance between horizontal and vertical that was missing from previous proposals.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Board find the addition to 1355-57 U Street compatible with the historic district and consistent with the purposes of the preservation act and to delegate final review to staff.