
HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION

Property Address: **1850 3rd Street NW**
Landmark/District: **LeDroit Park Historic District**

Meeting Date: **February 25, 2016**
H.P.A. Number: **16-204**
Staff Reviewer: **Brendan Meyer**

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The applicant, Jennifer Wisdom, owner of 1850 5th Street NW, seeks concept review for a new four-story, two-flat rowhouse at 1850 3rd Street NW in the LeDroit Park Historic District. Plans were prepared by Jonathan Kuhn Architect.



Property Description and Context

The existing lot is vacant. 1850 5th Street was originally built in 1890 as part of a row of four houses. The other houses of the row are extant. The row was designed and built by a minor architect/builder (W.E. Brown) and exhibit a blend of late Victorian and early Revival style attributes. The surviving buildings share a rusticated brick ground floor with at-grade entrances which alternate between arched open vestibules and flush trabeated doorways. Facades are organized with a single central bay fenestrated or articulated with a variety of compositions including a two story oriel, tripartite windows or dormer. The third floor of 1854 that now has a set of sliding doors was originally an open inset balcony (based on a similar row by Brown at 1826-1832 Corcoran Street NW) and is one

of a few incompatible alterations on the row. A round bay and turret roof hold the corner of the row where it meets an alley at an acute angle. The fourth stories are mansard roofs with one large dormer at each house and open eaves of rafter tails. In plan the houses vary in depth, as do their individual lots, as a result of the acute angle with the alley.

Proposal

The applicant proposes to fill in gap in the row with a speculated reconstruction of what originally stood at 1850 5th. The front elevation will match the height, floor levels, masonry (color and brick pattern), and roof type. The front entrance will replicate the arched open vestibule found on the row. Ganged windows will emphasize the central vertical axis at the second and third floors. The fourth floor will mimic the adjacent roof shapes, dimensions, and dormers. The rear elevation follows the utilitarian materials and form of the row with the addition of a small spiral stair to access the second floor.

Evaluation

No photographic record exists of 1850 5th Street, so it cannot be known how precisely the front façade replicates the original house. Nevertheless, the proposed design is convincingly consistent with the character of its neighbors and thoughtfully reverses the long-standing gap in the row. The small variety in detail between each rowhouse offers a comfortable amount of flexibility within which to design a compatible front elevation. The new elevation is organized, scaled and articulated the same as the adjacent houses to sufficiently fit the character of the row. This is sufficiently true despite some minor differences in component sizes and dimensions like the larger dormer and shorter windows at second floor.

If the goal or requirement of building on a vacant lot in a historic district were to replicate precisely that which stood historically or stands adjacent, these minor differences would warrant revision, but that is not the standard traditionally applied by the Board. The Board very rarely requires replication of old buildings in new construction and even then only exceptionally, as in the case where the remedy to demolishing a historic building without a permit may be to reconstruct it precisely. Another occasion this steep standard has been applied is when the row in question is of a high architectural quality or is the work of an architect of importance. None of these cases apply to the subject property.

The rowhouse proposed at 1850 5th Street is compatible with its row and will be a welcome addition to the LeDroit Park streetscape.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Review Board find the concept for a new 4-story brick rowhouse at 1850 5th Street NW to be compatible with the character of the historic district, consistent with the purpose of the preservation act, and to delegate final approval to staff.