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

Property Address:	406 U Street NW	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agenda
Landmark/District:	LeDroit Park Historic District	<input type="checkbox"/> Consent Calendar
ANC:	1B	<input type="checkbox"/> Denial Calendar
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Concept Review
Meeting Date:	October 30, 2014	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Alteration
H.P.A. Number:	#14-715	<input type="checkbox"/> New Construction
Staff Reviewer:	Brendan Meyer	<input type="checkbox"/> Demolition
		<input type="checkbox"/> Subdivision

The applicant, Thomson & Cooke Architects on behalf of owner David Reina, seeks concept review for a rear addition to two-story semi-detached house at 406 U Street NW in the LeDroit Park Historic District. Plans were prepared by the applicant.

Property Description and Context

The subject property is a brick, gothic revival house attached on its east side to the adjacent property. Like all of the houses on this block, it was designed by architect James H. McGill as part of the original 1870s LeDroit Park development. It exhibits a high degree of integrity and shares many characteristics with the other McGill houses. The property and its joined neighbor share a complex, polychromatic slate roof consisting of numerous hips, dormers, valleys, ridges, scalloped bargeboards and Yankee gutters. The jerkinhead roof shape at the front and side gables are unique to amongst this collection of McGill houses. The attached pair of properties are individualized by having different arrangements of entrances and porches, with the entrance to 406 set back from the front face of the house at the end of a 21 foot long side porch along the west side of the house. The location of the proposed rear addition is occupied by an open, frame porch with a shed style roof that is not a character defining feature. The rears of 406 U Street, and the rears of the other houses to its east, are significantly visible from the 4th Street right-of-way.

Proposal

The applicant proposes to demolish the existing rear porch and replace it with a two-story brick addition by extending an existing hipped roof into a new jerkinhead roof. The approximately 20x20 foot rear addition would be brick to match the existing materials and match the height of the house. The roof would require reframing on both sides of the property line to accommodate new drainage paths and be clad in polymer roof tiles to replicate gray slates. A bay two stories tall with a hipped roof would project off the back of the addition.

The current crawl space under the house would be excavated for a new 2-bedroom basement rental unit that would span the entire footprint of the expanded house. The basement entrance is proposed to go behind the projecting wing on the west side of the house. Several basement windows, including on the front elevation, would be created or expanded and include new window wells for egress purposes.

Evaluation and Recommendation

The largest and most prominent change to the historic house—the rear addition—is sensitively designed and is compatible in form and materials. The addition rightfully takes its cues from the

complex roof shapes the historic house, its most character defining feature. The changes to roof framing necessitated by the addition are minimized and not apparent from any public view. The use of gray polymer slates and common hanging gutters appropriately distinguish the modern addition from the historic house. The slight change in dimension to the back of the house that would be seen from 4th Street is minor and compatible with the general patterns of massing, materials and fenestration established in the historic district.

While the largest change is harmonious, one of the smallest changes is incompatible. The front of the basement unit is slated to be the location of one of the bedrooms, and code requires an egress window for any habitable basement room. With the long porch along the west side of the house, and the attached condition on the east, the only exterior wall available for an egress well is at the front of the house. The three existing, very small basement windows each occupy a facet of the hexagonal frame bay on the front of the house. At the basement window closest to the entry porch, the applicant proposes to widen the opening, lower the window sill and install a 3'8" x 4'6" well in front of it. The well is meant to also accommodate the additional electric meter that would be required for the new rental unit.

The alteration to the basement window on the front façade and installation of a window well is contrary to the Board's adopted guidelines, *Preservation and Design Guidelines for Basement Entrances (2011)*. Owners are advised that basement windows and wells should have minimal visual impact and be the minimum dimension necessary. In particular, widening basement windows is generally not a compatible alteration because it alters the coordinated dimensions between the basement window and the primary windows above (4.3). This is the case in this instance. While in the vicinity there are egress wells on secondary facades, and front basement windows sheltered by acrylic domes and screened by landscape, the well proposed for this location would be very close to and at nearly the same level as the street. The lowered windows sill would be a very prominently visible alteration that would only be exacerbated by widening the opening (4.1). The high degree of integrity and significance of the front façade together with its close location to the street make it an inappropriate place to alter the dimensions of the window or install a window well. Egress requirements should be accommodated in another location or by relocating the bedroom away from the front of the house.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Board find the concept for a two-story brick rear addition with jerkinhead roof at 406 U Street NW, with the exception of the front alterations and window well, to be compatible with the character of the historic district, consistent with the purpose of the preservation act, and that final approval be delegate to Staff.