

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE
OFFICE OF PLANNING



**ROOF DECKS AND ROOF ADDITIONS
DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS AND SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS**

ROOF DECKS

The Historic Preservation Review Board (HPRB) generally requires that new roof decks not be visible from a public street or sidewalk, so as not to alter the character or appearance of the building or its streetscape. This typically requires a substantial set back, the extent of which depends on the height of the deck and its framing, the height of the building and its parapets, the height of adjacent buildings, the topography of the area, the width of the street, and views from public vantage points surrounding the building. If it can be demonstrated that a deck is not at all visible from any public street, a permit application can typically be approved by the Historic Preservation Office staff under delegation of authority from the HPRB. A roof deck that is visible from a public street may require review by the HPRB to determine its compatibility.

ROOF DECKS

SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS

In order to understand and evaluate a proposed roof deck, the following is required for review:

- 1) **Scaled sight-line cross section drawing** – taken from 6’0” above the sidewalk on the opposite side of the street.
- 2) **Scaled roof plan** – showing the entire roof of the building with dimensions of the proposed deck and setbacks.
- 3) **Photographs** – showing the building from the sidewalk on the opposite side of the street, and from oblique views up and down the same sidewalk. Photographs from on top of the roof, showing the height of parapet walls, other roof decks on adjoining properties, and views to the street are strongly encouraged.
- 4) **Perspective drawings and Section drawings** – if a deck includes a new stair enclosure, it may be necessary to prepare perspective drawings and a building section to show the height and visibility of the penthouse.

ROOF ADDITIONS

Adding vertically to a building is generally discouraged as such additions typically alter significant features of a building, such as its roof line, height, relationship with surrounding buildings, and overall form and mass. Additions on top of a building can sometimes be achieved when they are invisible from a public street, do not result in the removal or alteration of important character-defining features of the building or streetscape, and are compatible with their context. If appropriate at all, this approach typically requires a substantial setback, the extent of which depends on the height of the addition, the height of the building, the height of adjacent buildings, the topography of the area, the width of the street, the relationship of the subject building to its surroundings, and views from public vantage points surrounding the building. Under most circumstances, roof additions that are visible from a public street are not appropriate, as they would alter an historic building’s height, mass, design composition, cornice line, roof,

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and its relationship to surrounding buildings and streetscape – all of which are important character-defining features that are protected for historic landmarks and in historic districts. In rare cases, a visible roof top addition may be acceptable if it does not fundamentally alter the character of the building and is sufficiently designed to be compatible with the building. Any visible roof top addition requires review by the HPRB, and applicants are encouraged to consult with the HPO early in their project planning to discuss their proposal and preparation of submission materials.

**ROOF ADDITIONS
SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS**

Applicants should understand that the level of documentation expected by the HPRB for evaluating any roof top addition is somewhat higher than for rear additions, as the impact on the character and perception of the building is potentially far greater. The burden of proof is on the applicant to illustrate the full impact and visibility of the addition, as well as to demonstrate how the addition is compatible with the character of the historic landmark or district to which it is being added.

In order to understand and evaluate the relationship of the proposed addition to the design of the historic building and the impact on its surroundings, the following is required:

- 1) **Scaled elevation drawing** – showing the building, addition, and either all buildings on the block, or for long blocks, at least 4-5 buildings on either side of the subject property sufficient to show the building in its immediate context.
- 2) **Scaled and dimensioned sight-line cross section drawing** – taken from 6’0” above the sidewalk on the opposite side of the street.
- 3) **Perspective drawings or renderings** – showing the building and addition from at least three viewpoints – one from the sidewalk directly across the street from the building, and at least two from the same sidewalk up and down the street in each direction from where the addition would be most visible. The specific viewpoints will depend on the site conditions for each project; applicants should discuss the vantage points for the preparation of renderings with the HPO staff, and to see if additional renderings may be required.
- 4) **Photographs** – showing the building from the various viewpoints selected for renderings.
- 5) **Block site plan** – showing the footprint of all buildings on the block on both sides of the street. Viewpoints selected for perspective renderings and photographs should be keyed to the block site plan.