

**Testimony of the Capitol Hill Restoration Society
before the DC Historic Preservation Review Board on June 22, 2017
501 C Street, NE HPA 17-427**

My name is Beth Purcell and I am testifying on behalf of the Capitol Hill Restoration Society's Historic Preservation Committee. We met with architect Michael Marshall and architectural historian Anne Adams and reviewed the plans for the project dated June 5, 2017.

The three-story brick masonry building was built in 1875-1876 as a residence in the Italianate style. Since then, the building has undergone several changes to the exterior, additions to the rear dating to the 1920s, and various uses. This building is prominently located across the street from Stanton Park on the corner of 5th and C Streets, NE – it is highly visible due to its architectural style and location.

This applicant plans to restore the windows and doors to more compatible Italianate details and proportions based on photographic evidence from 1959. The applicant also plans to rework interior walls to better suit the programmatic needs, add a three-story rear addition to contain the elevator and access hallway, redesign the existing one-story rear additions with a new façade, and build a roof-top deck and pergola over the one-story rear additions.

The restoration of the 1876 structure is commendable and will help ensure the architectural significance of the building for years to come. The plans June 5 plans show a dark contrasting color for the trim of the exterior, imitating the colors in the 1959 photo, and we suggested a lighter color to better showcase the ornate trim especially in the eaves and door surround. The revised plans shown at the hearing today adopt this suggestion. The June 5 plans showed the first-floor northwest corner with two brick-paneled blank windows; we suggested that the applicant rework these prominent windows to complete the symmetry of the corner at 5th and C Streets, NE, and the applicant has accepted this suggestion.

We have two primary concerns with the plans: the elevator addition and the roof-deck.

Elevator

CHRS supports the addition of an elevator to provide access to all floors of the historic building. We agree with HPO comments which guided the applicant to maintain the clear delineation introduced by the glass walls of the hallway addition

in the latest revision but we suggest that the applicant further reduce the dominance of the elevator structure on the rear elevation. The proposed elevator and access addition obscures over one-half of one of the highly visible historic elevations and for this reason the addition will be not be compatible with the historic district. We urge that the location of the elevator be restudied to minimize the effect on the exterior of the building. The elevator can be located inside the existing building; this solution would require repurposing some bathrooms for the elevator shaft, and converting some office space to bathrooms on the second and third stories.

We urge two alternative strategies for the elevator:

(1) Locating the elevator inside the existing historic building was used successfully in a similar building which is open to the public for events. An elevator was installed inside the Old Naval Hospital, 921 Pennsylvania Avenue, SE, a large three-story mid-nineteenth century building with a mansard roof, and the need for building a new addition for an elevator was eliminated.

(2) The redesign of the Northeast Library, 330 7th Street, NE relocated the main stair to a glass and brick addition with VRF roof mounted equipment at the rear of the building, reducing the need for major interventions to the interior, allowing natural light into the building with minimal visual impact on the exterior of the building and surrounding historic district.

Roof-deck

The proposed roof-deck above the 1920s store and garage additions extends to the edges of the parapet. Analogizing the proposed pergola to pergolas in the back yards of Victorian Italianate houses is a bit off the mark. What we have here is a prominent pergola proposed to be built on the roof of existing garage additions. There is no back yard here and we don't think the analogy holds up. This is quite simply rooftop construction on top of existing garages which will all the more visible because of being elevated one story in the air. Lobbyists entertain, and for this reason, it appears likely that the roof deck would be used to entertain.

An HPRB ruling on roof-top decks on garages has allowed for a three-foot setback from the alley (See HPRB March 24, 2016 action pulling rooftop deck railing back three feet from alley at 1120 Park St NE, HPA 16-104). In accordance, we suggest that if a roof-deck is approved, that this deck should be pulled back

three feet from the southern elevation along the alley. ¹We believe that the current pergola design would be visible from across Stanton Park and would diminish and distract from the work done to restore the historic Italianate building.

While we have not yet seen letters of support from neighbors, neighbors have expressed concern over the potential noise and function of the roof deck as well as the continued use of the side yard for parking. We share those concerns. CHRS would prefer that the site plan would not allow for parking in the side yard along the rear additions.

Due to the current design of the elevator addition, roof- deck, and pergola, CHRS believes this project is not compatible with the Capitol Hill Historic District.

Thank you for considering our views.

¹ Garages are simple and utilitarian structures and roof structures on contributing buildings are not allowed. HPRB has previously accepted our comments that rooftop additions visible from public spaces such as parks are not permissible. (See HPRB January 28, 2016 action at 418-426 C Street NE, HPA 15-150 concerning property immediately across Stanton Park from the property currently under consideration.)