

**TESTIMONY OF THE CAPITOL HILL RESTORATION SOCIETY
BEFORE THE DC HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD
On the Proposed Addition at 1113 Pennsylvania Avenue SE (HPA #13-258)
May 2, 2013**

My name is Shauna Holmes, and I'm testifying on behalf of the Capitol Hill Restoration Society's Historic Preservation Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to talk with you about the atrium addition to Frager's Hardware, which is an iconic business on Capitol Hill. Given the addition's location immediately south of the intersection of two major thoroughfares, visibility of both the atrium and its large rooftop access structure is a key issue in considering the design and positioning of the proposed addition. Many, many people are going to see the addition every day, and unfortunately many, many people would see the rooftop structure. Every day.

The atrium is compatible with the massing, size, and scale of the historic buildings it would sit between. The top of its cornice aligns with the cornice of the Frager's store, and its 16' width is in keeping with the width of the historic rowhouses lining the block. Although simpler in style, the dark gray metal framework holding the large glass panels is compatible in both appearance and function with the dark gray metal framework of the glass storefront bays on Frager's corner building. Its metal color also echoes the grays in the tapestry brick in the corner store. The brown color of the front door and horizontal sun shades also picks up the predominant brown color of the corner store's brick. Further, the glass curtain wall will be transparently enclosing an already existing open space between two historic structures, and the exterior walls of the flanking buildings will continue to be exposed as the interior walls of the connecting structure.

Overall, borrowing from the corner shop the brown of the brick, the large storefront panes enclosed in a gray metal framework, and alignment of the cornices has pretty successfully translated these elements into a modern but fairly harmonious architectural vocabulary. While the contemporary design of the glass-fronted addition is very obviously "of its time", it appears to comport with the Board's guidelines for commercial historic buildings in commercial areas, which say that "additions need not replicate historical styles" and should "showcase interesting and thoughtful contemporary design". The guidelines go on to say "the use of contemporary elements [is] encouraged."

However, this atrium would be positioned where the Pennsylvania Avenue commercial strip wraps around the corner and meets a long block of residential rowhouses. The Committee thinks that for the atrium to really work here at the point of transition, it needs to be more deferential to the historic buildings and clearly demonstrate that it is subordinate to them – or, better yet, is a connecting "hyphen", rather than appearing to be a "row" building in its own right. To accomplish this, the glass wall would need to be set back at least 6 to 7 feet from the property line, rather than the mere 2 feet shown in the proposal. Placing the atrium too close to the property line shared by its next-door neighbors implies that it's meant to be their equal. A 6'-7' setback should establish that the atrium is a subordinate, recessed addition or connecting "hyphen", rather than a very modern building inserted into an unbroken block of historic buildings.

The Committee is quite concerned about the very large structure proposed for the top of the atrium. Since Frager's is on such a broad intersection, any structure on the roof will be visible from many perspectives, especially by people going southbound on 11th Street toward Pennsylvania Avenue. The low mechanical equipment already on the roof is clearly visible now, and any new rooftop structure would be even more so. Even at 6'8", it will dominate the rooflines on this corner. Therefore, we recommend that the access structure be no larger than necessary to allow a person to walk up the stairs onto the roof and be designed to minimize its obtrusiveness .

Also of concern is that the Committee doesn't know what the owner of 510 11th Street thinks about the proposal.

In sum, we believe the new connecting atrium can be appropriate if it is set back far enough to clearly establish it as a subordinate, connecting addition which has made an effort to be as transparent as possible and harmonize with the historic store to which it is being attached. If a rooftop access structure is approved by the Board, we ask that it be as small as possible to minimize its visibility.