

**Testimony of the Capitol Hill Restoration Society
before the DC Historic Preservation Review Board on December 5, 2019
716-718 L Street, SE HPA 20-037**

My name is Beth Purcell and I am testifying on behalf of the Capitol Hill Restoration Society. Thank you for considering our views.

The Capitol Hill Restoration Society's Historic Preservation Committee and reviewed the plans for the project dated October 25, 2019.

These are contributing three-story brick buildings, constructed in 1925. In 2017, the Board considered an application HPA 17-658 to add an addition to the existing three stories, and also add a fourth floor, and a large penthouse. We believed that the primary issue in the 2017 case was the overwhelming size and visibility of the proposed fourth story and penthouse. The proposed additions, at 8,081 square feet, would have overwhelmed the historic building (4,731 square feet). In the 2017 case the Board found:

... the general concept for rear and roof additions to be compatible with the character of the historic district, with the following conditions:

- (1) The rooftop addition should be pulled back from the front elevation a minimum of 20 feet to ensure that it is not visible from directly in front of the building on L Street;
- (2) The roof top addition's east elevation should be clad in metal to better differentiate the addition from the volume of the historic building;
- (3) The west side addition should be pulled back so that it aligns with the back of the existing building;
- (4) The design of the new storefront should be revised as described in the HPO staff report;
- (5) The replacement windows at the primary elevation should replicate the historic six-over-one window configuration; and
- (6) Final approval delegated to staff. Furthermore, the applicant is directed to share the above listed changes to the ANC.

A new applicant has filed for concept approval for a four-story plus penthouse multi-family apartment building. The current plans incorporate some of the Board's findings. The primary issue in this case that the very large proposed additions overwhelm and disrespect these modest buildings. To be compatible, the additions must be scaled back. Reducing the size of the additions and deleting the penthouse story would be a step in the right direction.

Additions to historic buildings must not be visible from public space, as measured from across the street. HPO, *Additions to Historic Buildings*, p. 13. The new fourth story and penthouse, set back only 12 feet (less than the 20 feet the Board required in the similar previous case), would be visible from across L Street, as confirmed by applicant's own drawing.¹ It appears that the setback would need to be approximately 27 feet to prevent visibility.

In addition, a green roof beginning at the very low front parapet and accessible by a door, could easily be turned into a roofdeck by adding a railing. The Board has generally required that roofdecks on the front of buildings be set back to prevent visibility of roofdeck appurtenances from public space. Alternatively, replacing the door with a window would allow access to the roof for maintenance.

Other issues in this case include:

- The fourth story and penthouse have oversize factory-type windows which emphasize the massiveness of the addition and dwarf the six-over-one windows on the lower stories.
- The alley elevation, where the stairs are located, is a large blank wall that could be relieved by adding openings.
- The rendering, p. 11, shows the storefront windows with the historically accurate angled opening, but the plans show squared openings.

We agree with the staff's assessment of this project, and we believe that at this time the project is not compatible with the Capitol Hill Historic District.

Thank you for considering our comments.

¹ In a case involving a two-story commercial building, 507 8th Street SE, HPA 16-518, the Board found the concept of adding a two-story addition of this size and visibility from the 8th Street SE right-of-way to be incompatible with the character of the historic district and advised the applicant to reduce the addition such that it will be smaller and less visible from the 8th Street SE right-of-way and return to the Board for further review. This project is very similar.