

**Testimony of the Capitol Hill Restoration Society
before the DC Historic Preservation Review Board on February 27, 2020
411 New Jersey Avenue, SE HPA 20-180**

My name is Beth Purcell and I am testifying on behalf of the Capitol Hill Restoration Society's Historic Preservation Committee. The committee reviewed the plans dated January 24, 2020.

411 New Jersey Avenue, SE is an irregular-shaped vacant lot at the end of a row of five brick rowhouses, 413-421 New Jersey Avenue. 413 was built in 1896, and 415-421 are Second Empire houses dating from the 1870s. The proposed building is two three-story brick rowhouses with cellar and a square tower at the corner (a solid presence on the block); the brick exterior continues around the corner, where the exterior material changes to Viroc panels. The new houses' massing and materials (mansard roofs, dormers, windows and doors) complement the existing houses. However, the plans for the front elevation are very historicizing, copying very closely the Second Empire houses, giving a false sense of history, and not reading as buildings constructed in the 21st century. HPRB's *Introduction to the Historic Preservation Guidelines*, cites the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation:

The new work shall be differentiated from the old and shall be compatible with the massing, size, scale, and architectural features to protect the historic integrity of the property and the environment. p. 5.

The *Guidelines* continue on p. 8:

New construction in historic districts should follow the same general principles as additions to historic buildings. New buildings in historic districts should be compatible with the character of the historic district and neighboring buildings without exactly duplicating a historic style or architectural period.

For these reasons, we suggest interpreting, not copying, the Second Empire houses. The aluminum-clad doors and windows, soldier course headers on the windows, and the modern brick cornice on the bay are steps in the right direction. Several changes would create a more contemporary complement to the excellent massing and overall design:

- The dormers very closely copy the dormers on the Second Empire houses, and read as very fussy. They should be simplified.
- Changing the windows from 2/2 to 1/1 will simplify the front elevation.
- The pilasters on the entrances copy the detail on the older houses; they should be simplified.
- The slate on the mansard should be a different shape from the hexagonal slate on the older houses.

- We suggest using an attractive brick that does not need to be painted, as the Board required in 300 8th Street, NE (HPA 16-443).

The contemporary side elevation reads as a jarring addition to a Second Empire house. If the front elevation appears more contemporary, the transition to the very modern addition will be smoother. The panels in the back section should be similar in color to the brick.

It would be helpful to have answers to questions.

- Are the front bay windows 2/2 or 1/1? Will they be operable?
- What is the design of the cast iron stairs?
- Would landscaping alleviate the formidable fence along the rail line?
- What are neighbors' views? The owner of 413 New Jersey Avenue will be facing parked cars in the rear.

This is a difficult site and the project has many excellent features. We believe that with modifications, this project would be compatible with the Capitol Hill Historic District.

Thank you for considering our comments.