

**Historic Preservation Committee of the
Capitol Hill Restoration Society
425 4th Street, NE HPA 24-046**

Testimony January 25, 2024

My name is Beth Purcell and I am testifying on behalf of the Capitol Hill Restoration Society's Historic Preservation Committee. The Capitol Hill Restoration Society's Historic Preservation Committee reviewed the plans dated August 10, 2023, December 13, 2023 and January 12, 2024. Earlier, the committee met with the owner, ANC 6C Commissioner Merkle, neighbors, and the attorney and architect engaged by the neighbors.

This brick bayfront house, two stories plus basement, is one of two designed by F.B. Pyle, built by Farnham & Cappell for owner Zeno B. Babbitz in 1891. It is a contributing building.

The proposed renovations and additions expand the existing house to accommodate multi-generational household (three generations) in seven bedrooms and multiple family spaces. The applicants are proposing a cellar addition at the rear of the townhouse; a first-floor addition that fills in the existing dogleg and extends the dogleg further back; a second-floor addition at the back of the existing second-floor extending the dogleg further back; and a third-floor addition on the main body of the rowhouse that turns and extends back on top of the existing second-floor. The second-floor dogleg addition and the new third-floor addition contribute to the visible massing of the additions. The footprint and rear projection of the additions in the January 14, 2024 plans are unchanged from the December 13, 2023 plans.

“An addition should be compatible with the massing of the existing building and that of its neighbors.” HPO, *Additions to Historic Buildings*, 9. Do the additions disrupt the rhythm and massing of the nearby buildings? This test should be applied by comparing the neighboring buildings on this blockface, i.e., the rowhouses adjacent to 425 4th Street, NE, which is the key visual context.¹ The staff report considers the entire square, which introduces irrelevant comparisons.

Rhythm and massing; The row of houses to the south of 425 4th Street house as seen from the alley present a strong rhythm of two-story doglegs behind three-story volumes on the street side. The two-story doglegs continue to the north on the row. The proposed addition extending the third floor all the way over the dogleg dramatically disrupts the rhythm and massing on this block face. The proposed additions should and could be improved by reducing the size of third floor.

The design and materials of the additions are appropriate and read as 21st century structures.²

We believe that at this time, the project is not compatible with the Capitol Hill Historic District.

Thank you for considering our comments.

¹ A typical square has four blockfaces.

² Responses to comments from neighbors:

Standard 9: It appears that the applicant satisfies the requirement to differentiate the old and new sections of the house.

Standard 10: An addition can be quickly removed without damage to the original structure. HPRB has not been applying this standard with respect to rear additions.

Carbery Place is a public alley, not a street. See DC Law Library, 9-204.01. December 20, 2018, Designation of Carbery Place, naming a public alley “Carbery Place.” Carbery Place also has the configuration of a typical Capitol Hill alley. The staff report correctly notes that HPRB has approved additions visible from alleys.