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1800 Kenyon Street NW, HPA 18-252, concept/roof deck on top of single story brick garage

Resolved, that ANC1D advises the Historic Preservation Review Board to judge the plans for a garage rooftop deck at 1800 Kenyon Street NW (HPO 18-252) compatible with the character of the Mount Pleasant Historic District.

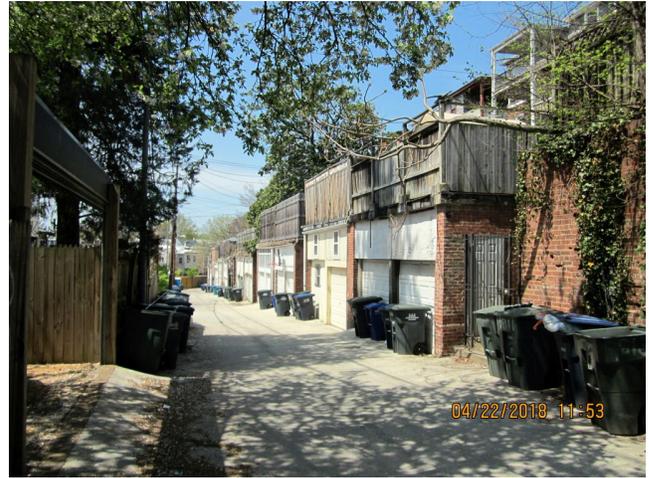
Why: the District's historic preservation law requires that "alterations of existing structures [be] compatible with the character of the historic district". Compatibility does not entail replication of what exists, but only similarity, so that the altered structure does not visibly clash with the architecture of the district, that is, clearly appearing to have been built at a different date. This is essentially what the residents of Mount Pleasant wanted when the historic district designation was made, in 1985: that old structures not be demolished and replaced by modern buildings, clearly different from the old. As a previous chairman of the HPRB, Tersh Boasberg, frequently said, historic preservation does not freeze a neighborhood in amber, resistant to all change. The requirement is only that changes -- alterations -- not clash with the traditional style of the neighborhood.

The HPO staff report advises rejection of this garage-deck concept. ANC1D challenges the HPO reasoning, as follows.

(1) "[T]his property is located at a street corner, prominently visible. . . There is no opportunity to tuck away the structure deep in an alley." This implies that the proposed deck is inherently "incompatible", and hence, is acceptable only if it is invisible from the public street. But if the deck is not judged inherently incompatible, and in fact looks like much of the rest of Mount Pleasant, then there is no need for it to be hidden.

(2) The "character of the alley must also be considered, and not just the three [?] streets from which the deck would be visible. The surrounding garages support no decks." Indeed, but one does not have to go far to find garage=roof decks and similar backyard structures along Mount Pleasant alleys. Certainly by 1985 these were generally accepted elements of Mount Pleasant architecture. One may not be pleased by their appearance, in particular the stake fencing commonly used in their construction, now decades old and weathered. There is no record that advocates of historic district designation stated, 33 years ago, that such decks would no longer be considered allowable. In fact, the filings for historic district designation make no mention of alleys, evidently not considering them to be significant elements of the neighborhood architecture. (See below for a couple of examples of rooftop decks in Mount Pleasant, close to the proposed site.)

(3) "[T]his deck comes with a privacy fence around it. By definition, fences stand on the ground. A



fence atop a building is an incongruous and historically incompatible element." In fact, the garage-rooftop decks in Mount Pleasant generally have fence enclosures, so this has been a commonplace style in Mount Pleasant for at least the past half century. It is true that these can be unattractive structures, but that does not necessarily make them "not compatible". The revised design calls for steel railing, surely an esthetic improvement over the stockade fencing, and overcoming this HPO objection.

In sum, the HPO objections do not meet the legal requirement that the design be shown to be not "compatible with the character of the historic district". The District's historic preservation law does not demand reversion to the architectural standards of long ago, but requires only that alterations be "compatible", and ANC1D judges that this proposed design meets that standard.

Resolution passed, 5 to 0 vote, at the legally noticed, public meeting of ANC1D on April 24, 2018, with a quorum present. Voting "yes": Commissioners Karaffa, Stewart, Karrer, McKay, Romero-Latin. A quorum for this commission is three; five commissioners were present.