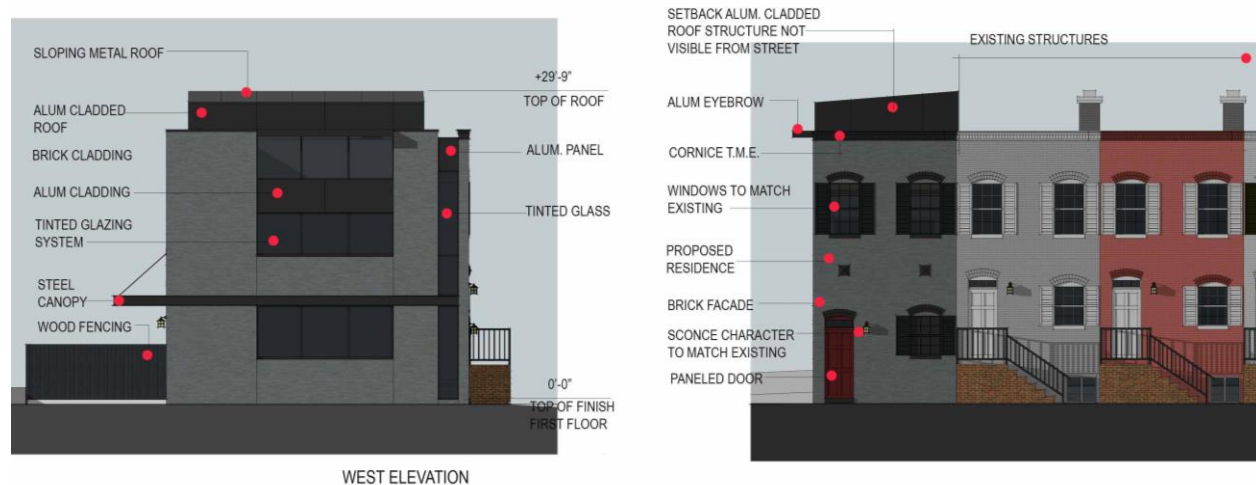

HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION

Landmark/District:	Foggy Bottom Historic District	(x) Agenda
Address:	929 rear 25th Street NW¹	
Meeting Date:	June 30, 2022	(x) New construction
Case Number:	22-327	(x) Revised concept

The applicant, Alexander Gallo, contract purchaser and agent for property owner William H. Cowdrick, trustee, requests the Board’s review of a concept to construct a single-family residence abutting the west end of a seven-unit row of two-story alley dwellings erected in 1890. The lot predates 1958, so it may be developed, assuming the granting of zoning variances for required lot area and rear yard. The exposed side of the new building would abut a perpendicular, pedestrian branch of the alley.

Two years ago, the Board reviewed and approved a concept for a three-level house, including its general height, boxy massing and its materials, and it delegated further review to staff, with the conditions that a pop-up slanted roof be eliminated; that the brick be either a compatible red or be painted; the fenestration be adjusted as suggested in the staff report; shutters be eliminated; the color of the metal panels be reconsidered; and that any code issues be addressed.

The project returns as the initial two-year concept approval is expiring, because it has changed substantially, and so that HPO may receive the Board’s input on the revised pop-up.



Elevations from the 2020 concept application.

¹ In the previous review, the property was referred to as 0 Snow’s Court, because no street number had been assigned to the lot, and it fronts Snow’s Court and abuts 1 Snow’s Court.

The changes generally represent improvements, but a little further revision is necessary. As in the original concept, the entrance is at grade, which is eminently practical, especially given a three-floor program. There is no reason why the floor levels need to align with those of the old houses. The 2020 staff report had been critical of too closely copying the facades of the historic alley dwellings only to turn the corner with a very different, contemporary expression. The present simple, modern box is a better approach. It respects the height and width of the adjacent historic homes while being distinct. The Board opposed the pop-up roof structure or monitor in the previous application, but this one is lower and set back enough to not be problematically prominent. HPO recommends the following revisions:

- The proportions of the windows should be changed and standardized. There does not appear to be a compelling reason that the Snow’s Court (south) elevation has such narrow windows, much narrower than the others on the house. Especially without the house’s floors aligning with those of the historic row, *the width of the openings should be the same that of the historic ones*, to continue the rhythm. Although they are schematic at this point, the windows on the west and north elevations might be narrowed slightly, so that the lights are at least square, if not vertical.
- The utility of the lowest quarter of the large windows on the west elevation—bringing the opening to the floor and then obscuring it with translucent glass—is questionable and may be something that gets “value-engineered” out because of the extra cost of such a large and custom unit.
- The south elevation could use something as a base along the alley, like a low planter rather than just a planting strip, continuing the row’s stoops in a sense.
- The cornice should be revised. Perhaps no cornice is necessary here, given that this is a contemporary building, and the south elevation is not actually its façade. One would normally return such a cornice across the entire west elevation, the location of the entrance, but this cannot be done here without raising a level parapet on that side. If there is to be a cornice, it can be distinct in profile from the historic one next door.
- The relationship of the larger west-side windows to the proposed planters is odd. It is the best policy to design the elevation first and then add planters to it, as appropriate. It is unclear why one of the planters is at the floor line of the top story and the other is so deep that it rises to eye level at the second story—and access to each for maintenance appears to rely on someone reaching under an open awning window. At the west property line is an alley, which may mean that the projections are not permissible (12A DCMR §§ 3202.7.2 and 3202.10.1).

The applicant includes an alternate west elevation, which would be fine, if the windows can be regularized. The Board may prefer this simpler approach, because it resolves some of the issues raised above. It does have a level parapet across which a cornice could be returned, and the entrance is pre-eminent.

- Again, the brick should either be a red complementary to the historic district or—as the light-colored elevations suggest, be painted, as the abutting historic row has been.

Recommendation

HPO recommends that the Board approve the concept and delegate further review to staff, with the condition that the applicant adequately address the points raised above and any comments of the Board.