
HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD

STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION

Landmark/District:	Mount Pleasant Historic District/ North Side 1800 Block of Park Road NW	(x) Agenda
Address:	1867 Park Road NW	
Meeting Date:	January 23, 2014	(x) Addition
Case Number:	14-091	
Staff Reviewer:	Tim Dennée	(x) Permit

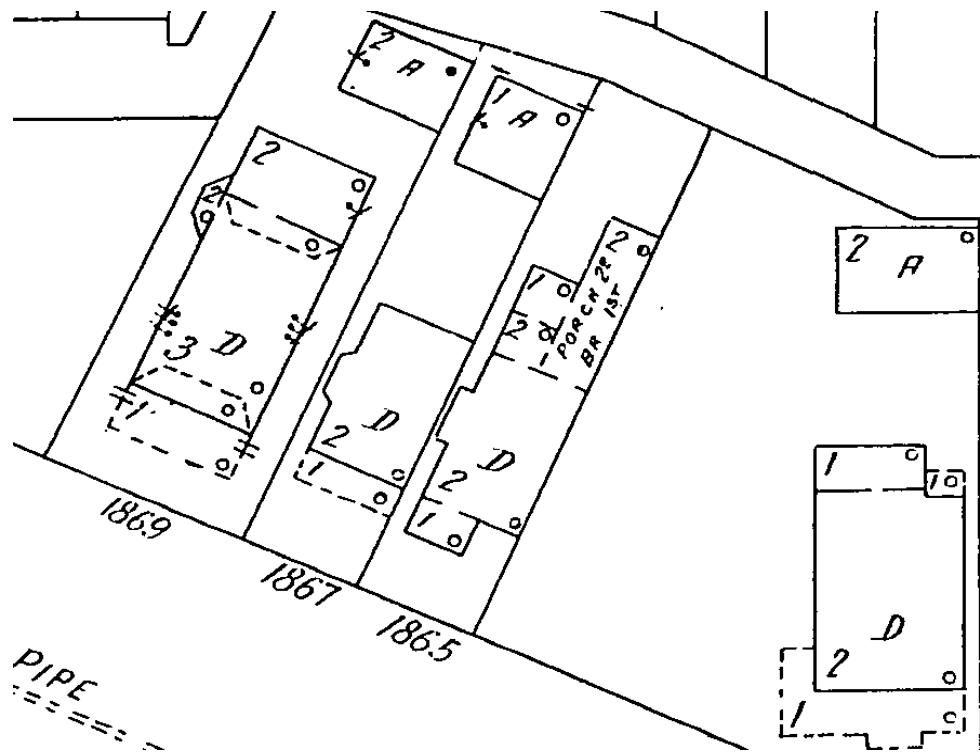
Trout Design Studio (Michael Beidler and David Morris), architect and agent for property owner Recap LLC, seek concept review for construction of side and rear additions to the single-family, detached, frame house at 1867 Park Road. The house stands on a double lot; there was once another house, 1865 Park, a few feet to the east. The project is intended to roughly recreate the lost house, but to connect it to the existing one and add rearward as well, in order to convert the property from single-family use to six units. There would also be alterations and repairs to the house, much of it restorative, as well as site work, such as the provision of five parking spaces at rear, the addition of a fence, and the reconstruction of the failing concrete steps and retaining walls in the front yard.

Property History and Description

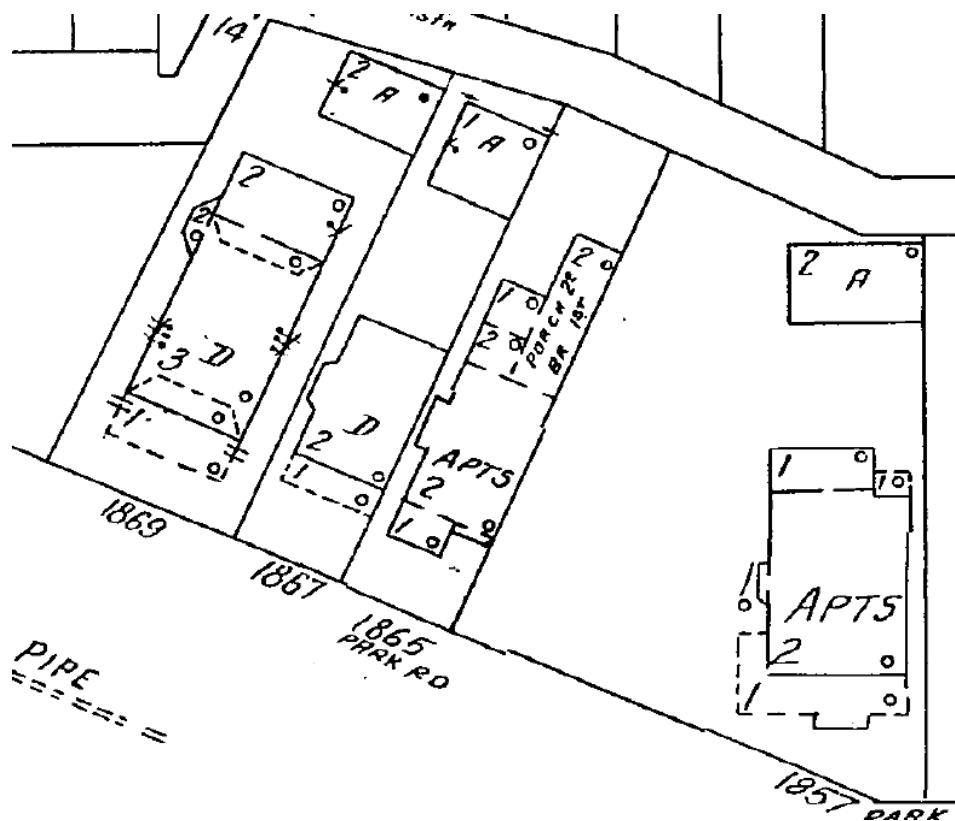
1867 and 1865 Park Road were constructed in 1904-1905 by Benjamin F. Seaton to plans by Frederic Morse Ashley, and the buildings stood a few feet apart (almost touching, when one considers the bay on the side of 1865) and on, or nearly on, the side property lines. The extant house was first owned by Ashley, presumably a speculative venture, while 1865 was built for his brother, George Hall Ashley, a government geologist specializing in coal, oil and gas. Frederic Ashley appears to have moved to Los Angeles before 1900 and partnered in the firm that designed the famous Griffith Park Observatory. George's house was demolished post 1967 (and before 1978), said to have burned, but the foundation remains.

The two houses were similar in footprint, equally deep with a projecting bay on the west side under a cross gable or hip. 1867 is a hip-roofed Colonial Revival, with a full-width porch. In the early 1910s, 1865 was described as "a modern, detached, frame house; old English style craftsman construction... Sunlight in every room; coolest place in Washington in summer; permanent views of Rock Creek Park and Virginia hills....[with an] Inglenook, enclosed 10-foot veranda, casement and landscape windows, pergola, lion-gate, &c. &c. &c.," "a spacious sun parlor in front, twelve large rooms [including two baths], and exceptionally large verandas on the front and rear. The interior is finished in Flemish style, and the heavy crossbeams and paneled ceilings greatly enhance its attractiveness." A bedroom/studio and a half bath were added to the

first-floor rear, along with a probable extension of the kitchen or a pantry. A large sleeping porch and perhaps another bathroom were built at the second story (see maps below).



Details from the 1927 Sanborn insurance map atlas, above, and the 1959 atlas, below.



There was a small garden in the back yard. Obviously, there was some disagreement among newspaper reporters and real estate brokers as to the architectural style of the exterior; one of the sources called it “Spanish mission architecture,” despite it lacking the defining features of that style. A newspaper photograph (see applicant’s packet) suggests that it might have been meant to evoke late medieval European architecture, with the steeply pitched roof and a front gable that may have formed a jetty or projection forward of the stories below. The front also featured an unusual bay projection at the second story, above a picture window at the first.

The homes changed owners fairly frequently, and owners of both began offering some rooms for rent by 1920, but 1867 seems to have remained mainly in single-family use, while 1865 (and the next-door 1857) was apartments by 1959, presumably a consequence of the residential crowding that occurred during World War II.

Restoration

The house at 1867 Park is one of the more modest of the row of fine Park Road homes that were initially designated in 1978 before being incorporated into the Mount Pleasant Historic District. It cost slightly less than its neighbor at 1865. Yet, it is more modest than its original state, having experienced alterations such as removal of the porch roof and re-siding with Masonite which is seriously deteriorating.

The house would have to be re-sided, and with the possible exception of the rear addition, should be re-clad in wood to match as closely as possible the original material and exposure, even if the exact profile cannot be ascertained.

Alterations to the house would include rebuilding the porch with a hipped roof, and rebuilding the piers and deck, which have deteriorated for lack of the roof. An incompatible non-original dormer would be removed from the west side of the principal roof.

The concrete front-yard retaining walls and the approach steps must be reconstructed, as they are heaving outward and downslope.

Side addition

Most of the new construction would be an addition to the east side of the existing building. The appropriateness of side additions must be evaluated based on the particular character and conditions of the property. The present project is distinctly unusual in that it takes the form of a building that originally stood on the site, a few feet distant, about 45 years ago. It would be difficult to argue that returning that mass to the site is incompatible with the character of the historic district or inconsistent with the pattern of how homes on the north side of Park Road actually have been arranged and spaced.

How nearly the new construction should mimic the details of the original appearance is arguable, but it should be distinct from the present house so as not to create a false history or the appearance of an overarching composition that does not respect the individuality of the historic house. A vaguely historicist design, as offered, seems sufficiently compatible as one alternative to absolutely trying to recreate 1865.¹

¹ Recreation is another possibility, although the design of the façade clearly does take cues from the original. Something non-historicist is another possibility.

The side addition would be massed similarly to the 1920s appearance of 1865, but its rear wing would be set back farther from the east side of the lot, which helps minimize the extent of connection between the structures, as the light, glassy connection at rear is narrow and recessed.

The idea of joining two houses raises the issue of the degree to which they *look like* they are joined. The original houses nearly touched at the western bay projection of 1865, but that was halfway rearward on the main blocks, and one could still perceive separation. If the contact here is minimal and/or inconspicuous, especially as seen from the street, it can be successful. Recreating the narrow aperture that existed between the 1904 homes actually helps keep any link a short one, and cuts off views from most angles. The key is that the link itself has to be far enough rearward that, when viewed from the street, it is not prominent. One alternative to the present proposal is that the side bay at 1865 be recreated (again, see map above, or see west side of 1867 for comparison), and a link occur behind it.

As it is, the primary (i.e., two-story) link occurs fairly far rearward, just forward of the second-floor window on the side of 1867. This should be recessed far enough to be successful in visually separating the two structures. That window is visible from the sidewalk immediately below the property, so the upper story of the connection would be as well. What is less successful is the one-story piece that is farther forward. Originally meant to serve as an entrance, it is now to contain a bathroom and serves as access to and between the basement units. This additional infill between the main masses muddies the separation of the structures. If this piece could truly be disguised behind a fence or gate, it might be successful, but a full story cannot be so easily disguised.

Rear additions

If there were still two houses standing on the site, or if one accepts the idea of effectively replacing one of them, then each could certainly accept some rear addition. Both main blocks were fairly modest, and many homes on the block were built deeper, were extended and/or have accessory structures behind. As the above historic maps show, 1865 Park Road did have a deep addition, constructed in the 1920s, and 1867 had a masonry garage.

As with any rear addition, we have to consider—in addition to its massing, materials, proportions, etc.—its depth in proportion to the existing building and in relation to the pattern of surrounding buildings. The proposed additions are subordinate to the main blocks: lower, narrower, and not as deep. Although there is plenty of variety on Park Road regarding overall house depths, setbacks, depths of rear wings or additions, and the presence of accessory structures, the proposal appears consistent in the resulting extent of its front and rear yards. The lack of side yards is reflective of the historic condition of the two adjacent houses on their former lots.

Site work

There would be a parking pad for five cars at the alley. There would be a large basement areaway behind 1865 and a smaller stairway to the basement along the rear wing of 1867.

The renderings depict an existing wood fence along the west side of the property. Also shown is a suggested new privacy fence, between the subject property and that of 1857 Park, starting at the rear corner of the main block of the new construction.

Demolition

The most important preservation principle is retention of actual historic fabric. Since making application, the applicant has reduced the amount of structural demolition proposed, retaining the entire east side wall of 1867, despite much of it being encapsulated. The circulation connection between the structures now comes through a couple of apertures in 1867's back wall. The most significant structural demolition is of a front-to-back bearing wall near the center of the house, in order to create an open plan. While this is not ideal, it does not appear in itself to constitute demolition of the building in significant part, unless its removal means the removal of the floor framing that it supports. The "proposed" drawings are not definite as to how that framing would be supported, as only the columns in the basement are depicted.

In the plans initially submitted, a portion of the side wall was to be demolished and a new partition was to be built a little farther east. That demolition was problematic in itself, but it also necessitated the removal of the prominent chimney on the east side of 1867. Especially as this wall will now remain in place, the chimney should be retained as well. While the chimney is not especially decorative, its prominence makes it a character-defining feature of the roof.

Recommendation

The staff recommends that the Board find the general concept compatible with the character of the historic district contingent on:

- 1) *the removal of the one-story piece between 1867 and 1865, and*
- 2) *the retention of the floor framing and the east side chimney of the present house.*