



SAN FRANCISCO PLANNING DEPARTMENT

MEMO

DATE: April 6, 2011
TO: Architectural Review Committee of the Historic Preservation Commission
FROM: Rich Sucre, Historic Preservation Technical Specialist, (415) 575-9108
RE: **Review and Comment for 937 Valencia Street**
Case No. 2010.1072A

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BACKGROUND

The Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) has requested review and comment before the Architectural Review Committee (ARC) regarding the proposal to complete ground floor exterior alterations and site work to the single-family residence at 937 Valencia Street.

The project is seeking a Certificate of Appropriateness, and has presented in front of the HPC on February 16, 2011 and March 16, 2011. The subject property at 937 Valencia Street is a contributing building to the Liberty-Hill Historic District, which is listed in Article 10 of the San Francisco Planning Code.

PROPERTY DESCRIPTION

937 Valencia Street is located on the east side of Valencia Street between 20th and 21st Streets (Assessor's Block 3609, Lot 036). Constructed in 1888, this property is a three-story, single-family Italianate residence. The wood-frame building is clad in shiplap wood siding and has a two-story slanted bay window. The building is capped by flat roof and a tall false-front parapet with a decorative cornice. The subject property is designated as a contributing resource to the Liberty-Hill Historic District and is located within the Valencia NCT (Neighborhood Commercial Transit) District with a 50-X Height and Bulk limit.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The proposed work includes replacement of the main entry staircase, relocation/replacement of the secondary stair, replacement of the side entry door, construction of a concrete garden wall, and replacement of the existing garage door. The existing garage door will be replaced with a painted wood-carriage roll-up garage door with glazing. The secondary stair will be located behind the side entry door along the southernmost side yard and will no longer be visible from the public right of way. New planters will be added along the existing retaining wall and along the low garden walls. The driveway and yard will also feature new landscaping.

STAFF ANALYSIS

To follow up on comments from the HPC, the Department seeks the advice of the ARC regarding the project's compatibility with the historic district and its compliance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation (Secretary's Standards).

The Department would like the ARC to consider the following information:

Removal/Redesign of Main Entry Staircase:

The historic staircase was removed and replaced prior to landmark designation. The proposed project will remove and reconfigure the existing, non-historic, concrete and terrazzo main entry stair with a concrete and wood straight-run stair. This new stair will feature a concrete base and a narrow landing shelf that will extend approximately two feet into the front yard.

Like the historic staircases found in the district, the new staircase is also a straight run stair with wood treads and risers. The design of the new staircase is differentiated from the existing historic fabric, and is relatively simple in design, thus it will not compete the overall reading of the building's historic fabric. The design of the landing shelf incorporates a chamfered concrete base underneath.

As an alternative to the proposed design, the Project Sponsor (Sponsor) has submitted a variant for discussion. This variant has not been previously reviewed by HPC. This variant shows the staircase in the same configuration, but eliminates the landing shelf and the concrete garden walls.

Recommendation:

The HPC determined that the landing shelf is not compatible with the character of the historic district, and seems out of scale with the front yard.

The Department finds the variant to be much improved compared to the proposed project, since it addresses the concerns regarding the landing shelf and the appearance of the stair relative to the front yard. The Department recommends adopting the variant.

New Handrail Design:

The proposed project also includes new steel handrails and decorative aluminum infill panels. The Sponsor has submitted the design of the aluminum infill panels and has specified the materials of the new main entry stair handrail, which will be constructed of steel. The aluminum infill panels will feature a custom cut floral/vegetal pattern and be constructed of 3/16" aluminum.

In the Liberty-Hill Historic District, historic staircases are constructed of wood, and would have featured wood or metal handrails with prominent newel posts and vertical wood members, often turned elements. A floral or vegetal pattern is often found on metal handrails. The proposed handrail design is a contemporary interpretation of these types of handrails/railings in an inverse manner.

The Sponsor has revised the proposed project to incorporate a newel post into the design of the new staircase, thus fulfilling an earlier staff recommendation. A newel post or a heavier, vertical element is common among the metal and wood handrails found within the historic district. Typically, the newel post occurs in pairs on either side of a stair at the base of on the ground floor level or on an intermediary landing.

As an alternative to the proposed design, the Sponsor has submitted a variant for discussion, which shows the main entry staircase with two newel posts at the bottom of the upper staircase. This variant has not been previously reviewed by HPC. This variant does not provide information on the handrail material or treatment of the infill panels. This variant addresses the Department's earlier concerns regarding the newel posts.

Recommendation:

The HPC determined that the proposed handrail is not compatible with the character of the historic district. Specifically, questions arose regarding the selection of steel as an appropriate handrail material that is compatible with the historic district, and the appropriateness of cut-out panels in the design of the new handrail. The HPC noted the importance of a newel post in the design of compatible staircases.

The Department finds the handrail configuration to be compatible with the Liberty-Hill Historic District.

The Department recommends adopting the variant and specifying that all metal elements have a painted finish, in order to relate to the material treatment found within the historic district. The variant incorporates a newel post and also eliminates the landing shelf.

Side Entry Door/Gate:

As part of the removal/reconfiguration of the secondary stair, a new side entry door/gate will be constructed at the ground floor level. This new side entry door is designed as a new decorative aluminum infill panel set within a steel frame. This infill panel will feature a custom cut floral/vegetal pattern and will be constructed of 3/16" aluminum.

Although aluminum entry doors are not common in the historic district, the Department determined that this type of door would not detract from the overall character of the historic district, as long as it remains secondary to the main entry and is not visually prominent.

Recommendation:

The HPC had varying comments regarding the side entry door/gate. One Commissioner commented that the proposed design was acceptable and compatible, while another Commissioner did not find the cut-out aluminum panel to be compatible with the character of the historic district.

The Department recommends simplifying the side entry door to match other examples found within the historic district. Specifically, the side entry door should either be constructed of wood or metal. If the side entry door is wood, then it should be solid in appearance and simple in design with no cut-out elements. If the side entry door is metal, then it should be open in design and function similar to a gate with narrow, vertical metal elements. All metal elements should feature a painted finish, as is common in the historic district. Based upon HPC comments, cut-out aluminum panels should not be used due to questions of their compatibility.

REQUESTED ACTION

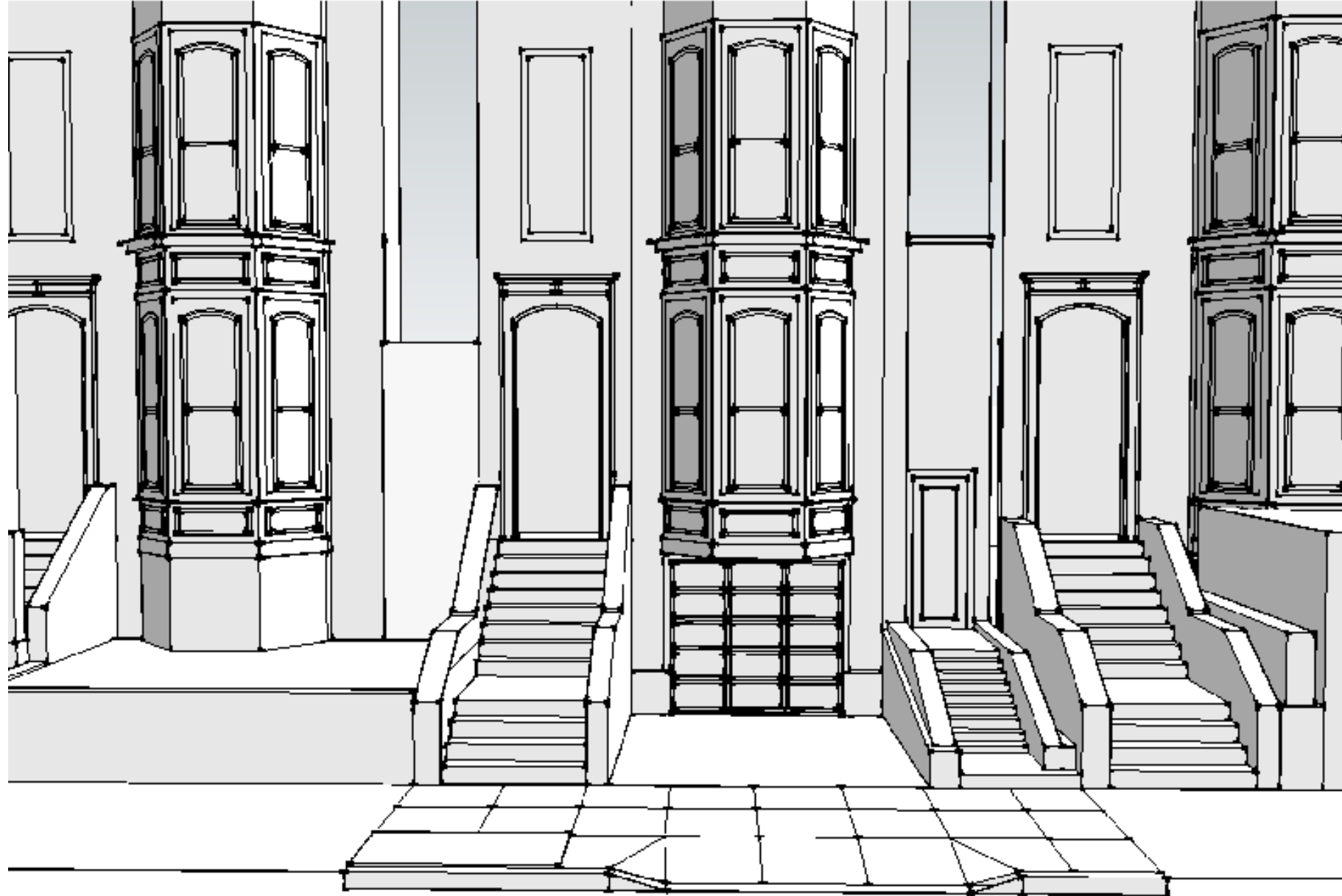
Specifically, the Department seeks comments on:

- The compatibility of the proposed project with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation, including the details of the main entry staircase, the proposed handrails and the side entry door/gate;
- The project concerns raised by staff and the commission; and,
- The project recommendations proposed by staff.

ATTACHMENTS

- Project Sponsor Rendering, Existing Condition
- Project Sponsor Renderings, March 7, 2011.
- Project Sponsor Rendering (Variant), March 29, 2011

Three-dimensional model View – Existing Condition



NOTES:
1. All information shown in this view is schematic; Information on architectural drawings prevails.

Three-dimensional model View A-a



NOTES:

1. All information shown in this view is schematic; Information on architectural drawings prevails.
2. Railings and gate shown are for location reference purposes only; Refer to architectural drawings for detail.
3. Areas shown as vegetation are for reference purposes only; they are intended to be planted with flowering perennials and shrubs (not turf).

