

ADDRESS: 208-10 REX AVE

Proposal: Construct four pairs of twins; rehabilitate building

Review Requested: Review In Concept

Owner: Hewson and Virginia Baltzel

Applicant: Eric Leighton, Cecil Baker & Partners

History: 1857; William L. Hirst/Louis I. Duhring House; additions 1893, 1927 by Louis Duhring

Individual Designation: 1/1/3000

District Designation: None

Staff Contact: Laura DiPasquale, laura.dipasquale@phila.gov

BACKGROUND:

This in-concept application seeks guidance from the Historical Commission about potential redevelopment of a property currently under consideration for designation. The existing property at 208-10 Rex Avenue features a large Italianate villa with an Arts and Crafts addition, designed by H. Louis Duhring, who was also the owner of the property from 1919 to 1946. The historic property is surrounded by a large yard and has featured a semi-circular driveway since at least 1876. This application proposes to construct four sets of 3,000+ square foot twins and to create condominium units within the existing historic building. The new buildings would be accessed by a wide driveway. The semi-circular driveway would be replaced by a wide driveway for the new townhouses and a front-yard parking lot for the condominiums in the historic house.

SCOPE OF WORK:

- Convert existing house into condominiums
- Create paved driveway and parking lot
- Construct four pairs of twins

STANDARDS FOR REVIEW:

- *Standard 9: New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction will not destroy historic materials, features, and spatial relationships that characterize the property. The new work will be differentiated from the old and will be compatible with the historic materials, features, size, scale and proportion, and massing to protect the integrity of the property and its environment.*
 - The proposed project does not destroy historic materials that characterize the historic building, but does alter the spatial relationships that characterize the property. The NPS guidelines explain that any new additions should be subordinate to the historic building, and should be scaled and located far enough away from the historic building to maintain its character and that of the site and setting.
 - The proposed construction is overly large, obstructs views of the historic house, and includes an excessive amount of paving that alters the sense of the expansive lawn.
 - While residential in use, the proposed buildings have an institutional rather than residential appearance, and are incompatible with the residential property and its environment.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: The staff recommends denial as proposed, pursuant to Standard 9, but approval of some new construction on the site, provided it is of a residential character, is reduced in scale, does not obstruct views of the historic house, retains the sense of the curved drive, and the overall amount of paving is reduced.

MAPS & FIGURES:



Figure 1: View of 208-10 Rex Avenue from the driveway entrance along Rex Avenue.



Figure 2: The historic building at 208-10 Rex Avenue.

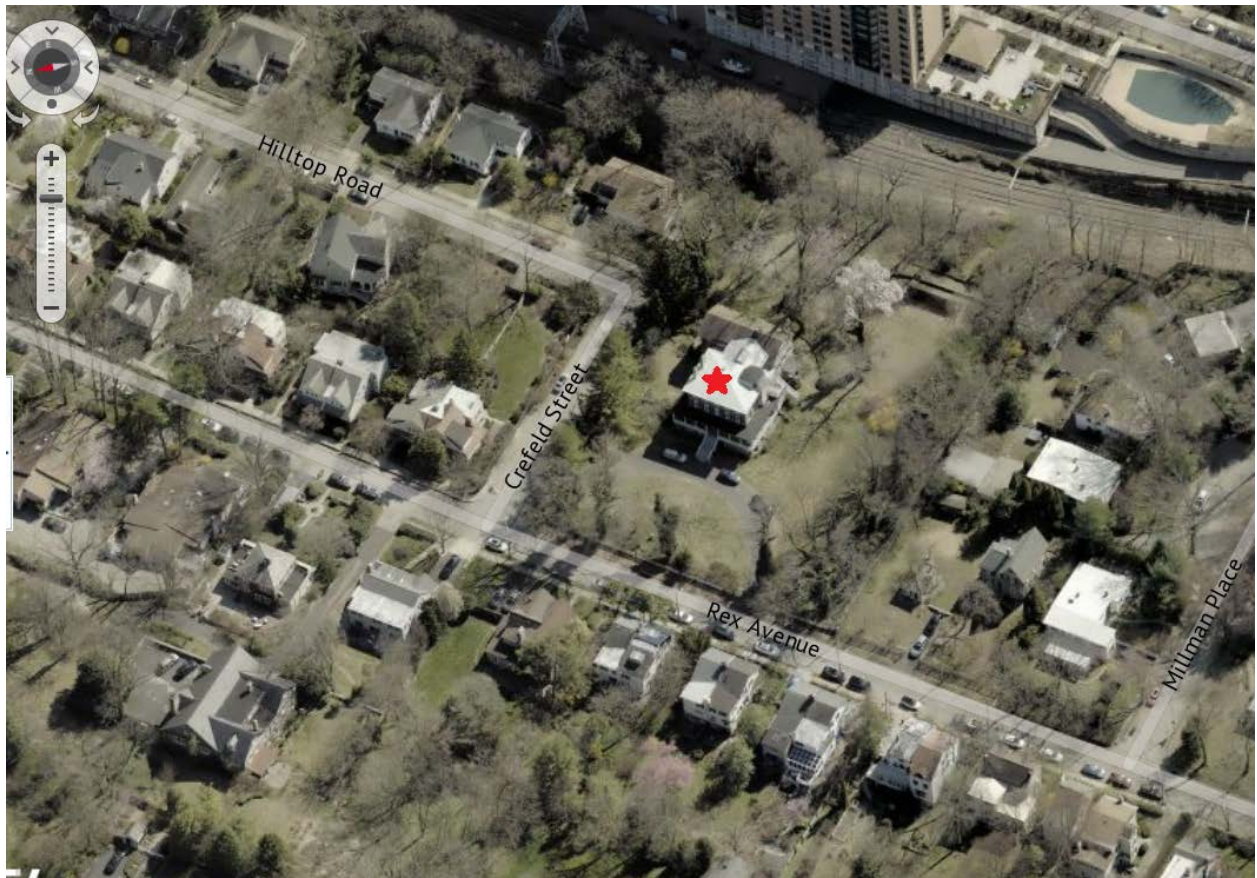


Figure 3: A 2020 birdseye view of 208-10 Rex Avenue, showing the house, large yard, and surrounding context.

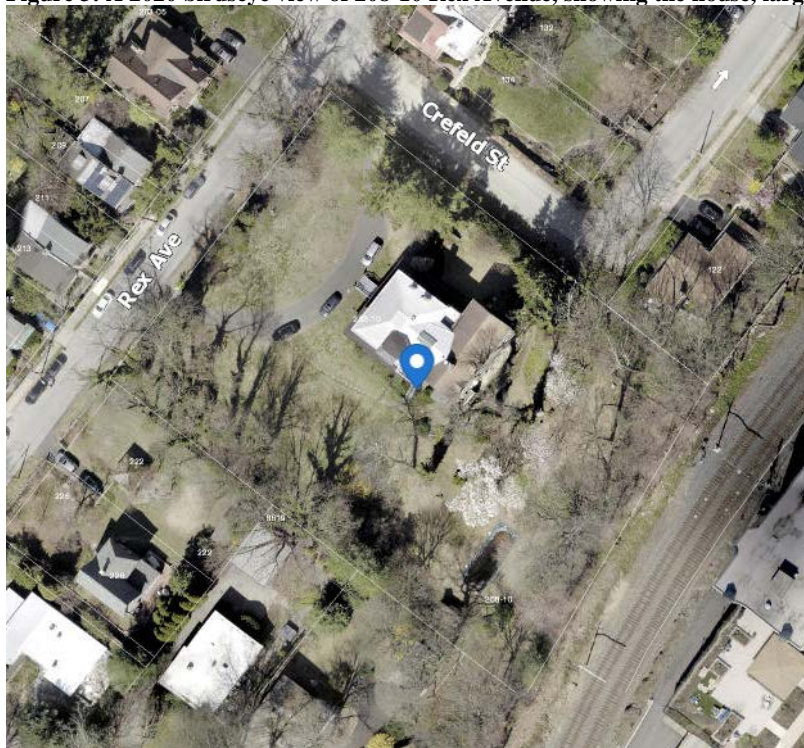


Figure 4: Current aerial of 208-10 Rex Avenue.

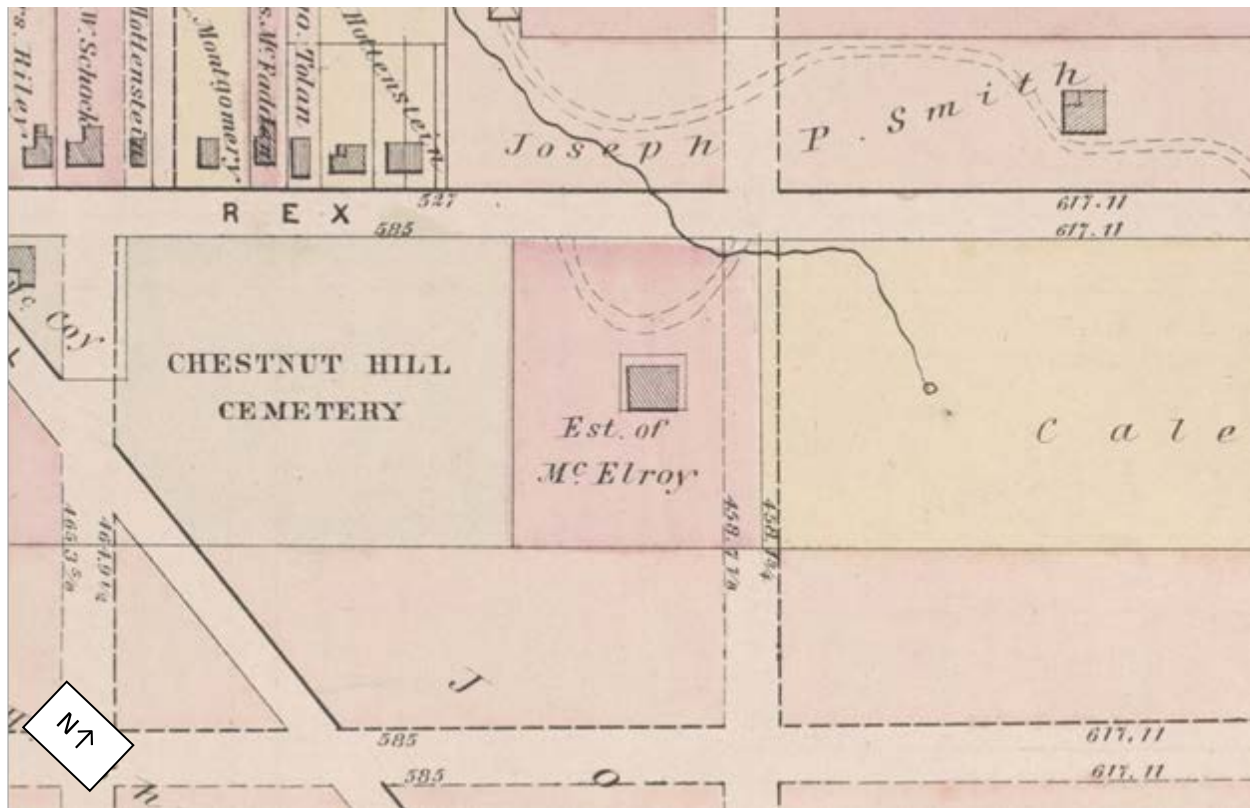


Figure 5: Detail of 1876 City Atlas of Philadelphia, 22nd Ward, Plate C. Source: Free Library of Philadelphia.

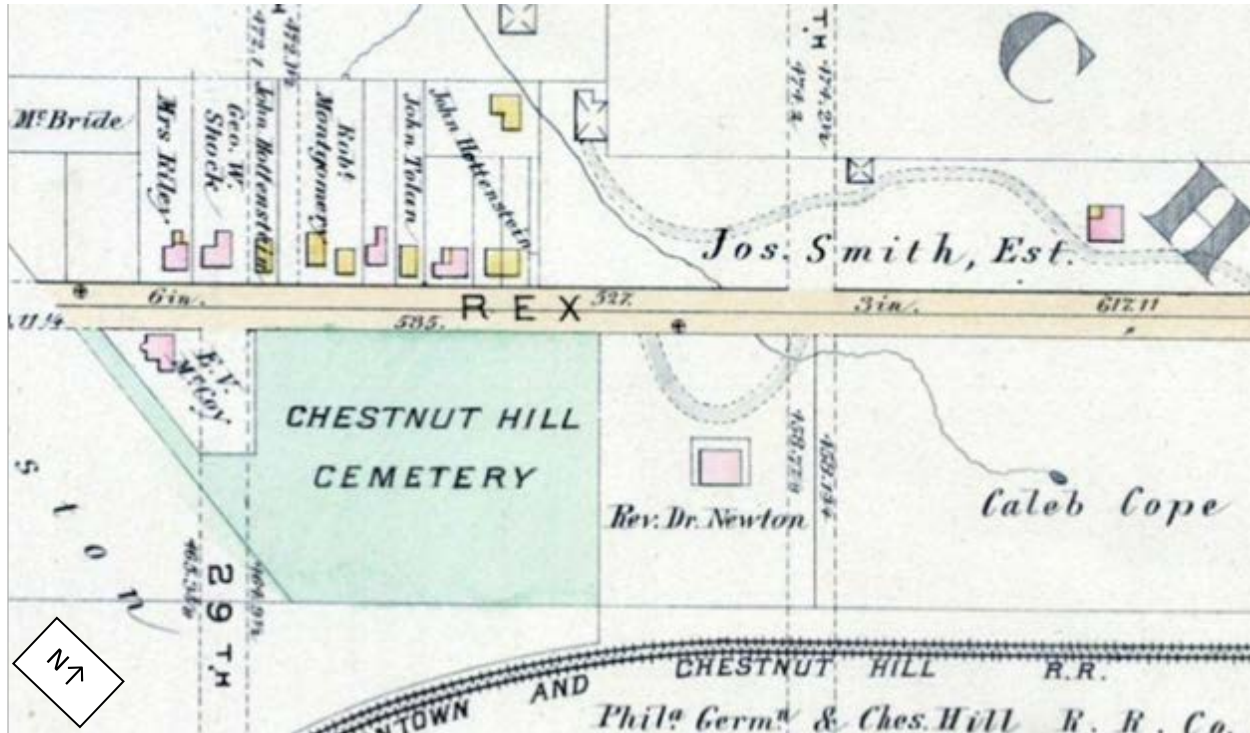


Figure 6: Detail of 1885 G.M. Hopkins map, Ward 22, Plate 003. Source: Historic Map Works.

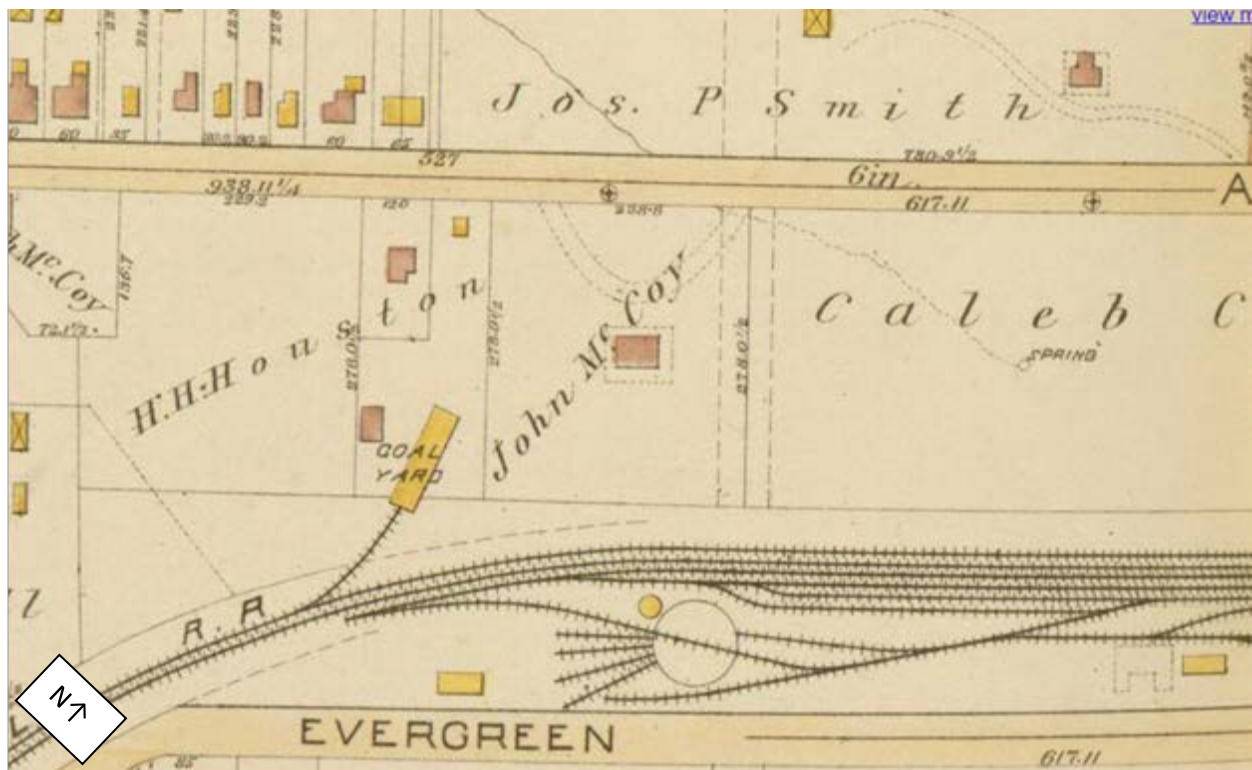


Figure 7: Detail of 1889 Atlas of the City of Philadelphia, Volume 7, 22nd Ward, Plate 19. Source: Greater Philadelphia GeoHistory Network.

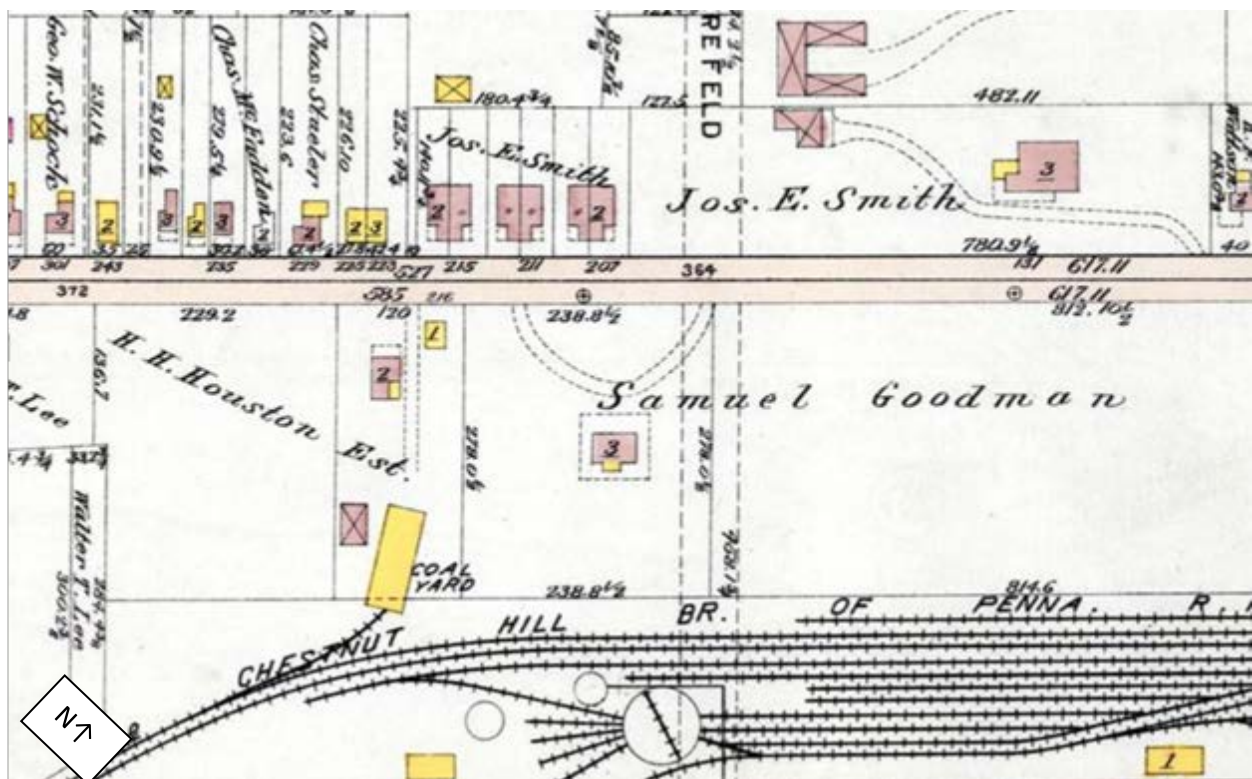


Figure 8: Detail from 1911 G.W. Bromley and Co. atlas, Ward 22, Plate 032. Source: Historic Map Works.

December 21, 2020

Dr. Jonathan E. Farnham, Ph.D.
Executive Director
City of Philadelphia Historical Commission
1515 Arch Street, 13th Floor
Philadelphia, PA 19102

**RE: 208-210 Rex Avenue
Proposed Multi-family Development
In-concept Review**

Dear Dr. Farnham:

This proposal for Historical Commission review and in-concept approval is for 208-210 Rex Avenue, (the Hirst-Duhring Residence), and its development into a multi-family project. The existing three-story mansion and 1.4 acre parcel, are nominated and currently under consideration for inclusion on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places (see attached Philadelphia Historical Commission nomination information). The nominator is the Chestnut Hill Conservancy (nomination author Benjamin Leech, consultant, edited by Emily T. Cooperman). The site lies within the Chestnut Hill National Register Historic District.

Acknowledging the architectural and cultural significance of the existing mansion and the site around it, as asserted by the nominator, and viewsheds familiar to the public from Rex Avenue and Crefeld Streets, along with the challenges of marketing this large single family residence and its upkeep, our proposal is a scheme intended to support and sustain first class preservation while fostering necessary development. We propose subdividing the mansion into four luxury bi-level condominium dwelling units and construction of eight new semi-detached twin residences, accessory parking, driveway and stormwater management infrastructure.

Floor plans of the existing mansion suggest natural lines for subdivision into residences of more desirable and manageable scale (approximately 2300-2700 gsf each) that incorporate existing architectural features. Successful examples of this approach exist in the neighborhood. The four pairs of twins (approximately 3100-3800 gsf per half), a prevalent archetype in the surrounding neighborhood, are relegated to the southwest edge of the site and to the southeast edge (behind the mansion) along SEPTA's Chestnut Hill West Railroad and in the shadows of the high rise apartment building on the opposite side of the railroad; as far from the mansion and least obstructive of the viewsheds as possible.

The scheme proposes working with the natural slope of the site to the greatest degree possible by nestling the twins into the hillside and ascending the slope rather than attempting to flatten it. A cul-de-sac, similar to adjacent Millman Place, is provided for required emergency vehicle maneuvering. Each half of the twins has a one-car garage,

RE: Proposed Multi-family Development at 208-210 Rex Avenue
In-concept Review

and six additional parking spaces are proposed along the driveway. An eight-car parking area at the northeast corner of the site, accessed from Crefeld Street, is provided for the mansion condominiums.

The lawn area between the mansion and Rex Avenue will be preserved as landscaped open space and contain both surface and subsurface stormwater management. The open space to the northeast of the mansion will be developed into a landscaped outdoor amenity space for the condominiums that will ideally incorporate existing stone steps and walls. The existing vegetated buffer, including fence, along the street edges will be edited and improved as a foreground to the viewsheds of the restored mansion. The existing vegetated perimeter along the railroad and neighbors of Hilltop Lane, Rex Avenue and Millman Place will be edited and improved as a buffer for both the privacy of these neighbors as well as residents of the new twins. Landscape improvements will take cues from design ideas consistent with the time of significance of the property.

A homeowner's association will be established to foster a consistent level of care and maintenance across the site.

The architecture of the twins will be sympathetic to both the Italianate and Craftsman portions of the mansion in massing, materials and articulation. These aspects of the project, in addition to others, will be part of a future submission for final review.

The site is zoned RSD-3 (Residential Single Family Detached) where multi-family (condominiums) and attached dwellings (twins) are not allowed. On the opposite side of both Rex Avenue and Crefeld Street, extending more-or-less to Germantown Avenue, the zoning is RSA-3 (Residential Single Family Attached) which allows the twins, but not multi-family. Across the railroad the zoning is CMX-2 which allows multi-family and is densely developed in this way. We believe variances from the requirements of RSD-3 zoning, allowing development more consistent with RSA -3 zoning will be necessary for this scheme and as demonstrated, fits well within the surrounding context. While a variance may be required for multi-family housing in the mansion, the resulting condition will not be as dense as a multi-family zoning implies due to the size of the parcel and area that will remain open. A noteworthy multi-family arrangement has existed with a rental dwelling unit in the mansion for many decades. Property records also indicate parking for 15 cars. There are two applicable zoning overlays; the Wissahickon Watershed Overlay District and Open Space and Natural Resources – Steep Slope Protection. The project as we currently understand it should comply with the former and may require variances for the latter. More will be known as engineering is undertaken.

The developers of the project are the current property owners, Mr. Hewson Baltzell and Ms. Virginia Baltzell, who can be contacted by mail at 208 Rex Avenue, Philadelphia, PA 19118, or by telephone at (215) 247-9412 or (917) 684-1005.

The attached development proposal, prepared for a non-equity partner not currently involved, was presented at a January 2020 meeting of the Chestnut Hill Community Association. Immediate neighbors, with whom we intend to meet, emerged as the most vocal stakeholders. The graphics sharing the date of this letter were recently prepared to supplement the information presented in January and further demonstrate how the proposal dovetails with the mansion as well as surrounding neighborhood.

After reviewing this information, please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions or should you require additional information which we will make every effort to promptly

RE: Proposed Multi-family Development at 208-210 Rex Avenue
In-concept Review

provide. We look forward to presenting our proposal to the Architectural Committee at their meeting on January 26, 2021, and subsequently to the Commission at their February 12, 2021 meeting. Thank you.

Sincerely,


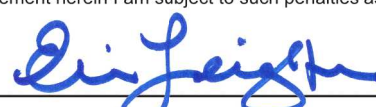
A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Eric Leighton", is positioned above the printed name.

Eric Leighton, AIA

Cc: Virginia Baltzell, Hewson Baltzell, Carl Primavera, Cecil Baker, file

Building Permit Application

for In-concept Approval

APPLICATION FOR BUILDING PERMIT		 CITY OF PHILADELPHIA DEPARTMENT OF LICENSES AND INSPECTIONS MUNICIPAL SERVICES BUILDING - CONCOURSE 1401 JOHN F. KENNEDY BOULEVARD PHILADELPHIA, PA 19102 For more information visit us at www.phila.gov	
APPLICATION # _____ <i>(Please complete all information below and print clearly)</i>			
ADDRESS OF PROPOSED CONSTRUCTION 208-210 Rex Avenue, Philadelphia, PA 19118-3719			
APPLICANT: Eric Leighton <hr/> COMPANY NAME: Cecil Baker & Partners <hr/> PHONE # (215) 928-0202 ext 117 FAX # n/a		APPLICANT'S ADDRESS: 1107 Walnut Street, 2nd Floor <hr/> Philadelphia, PA 19107 <hr/> eleighton@cecilbakerpartners.com LICENSE # AC3805809 E-MAIL:	
PROPERTY OWNER'S NAME: Hewson and Virginia Baltzell <hr/> PHONE # (917) 684-1005 FAX # n/a		PROPERTY OWNER'S ADDRESS: 208 Rex Avenue <hr/> Philadelphia, PA 19118-3719	
ARCHITECT / ENGINEER IN RESPONSIBLE CHARGE: Eric Leighton <hr/> ARCHITECT / ENGINEERING FIRM: Cecil Baker & Partners <hr/> PHONE # (215) 928-0202 ext 117 FAX # n/a		ARCHITECT / ENGINEERING FIRM ADDRESS: 1107 Walnut Street, 2nd Floor <hr/> Philadelphia, PA 19107 <hr/> eleighton@cecilbakerpartners.com LICENSE # RA016375 E-MAIL:	
CONTRACTOR: Unknown at this time <hr/> CONTRACTING COMPANY: <hr/> PHONE # n/a FAX #		CONTRACTING COMPANY ADDRESS: n/a <hr/> <hr/> LICENSE # n/a E-MAIL: n/a	
USE OF BUILDING / SPACE: Multi-family residential		ESTIMATED COST OF WORK \$ Unknown at this time	
BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF WORK: Restoration and adaptive reuse of existing mansion as four condominium dwelling units and construction of four pairs of twins (total of eight semi-detached dwelling units), common driveway (with cul-de-sac) and parking.			
TOTAL AREA UNDERGOING CONSTRUCTION: 10,233 gsf renovation / 28,754 gsf new construction square feet			
COMPLETE THESE ITEMS IF APPLICABLE TO THIS APPLICATION:			
# OF NEW SPRINKLER HEADS (suppression system permits only): n/a LOCATION OF SPRINKLERS: n/a			
# OF NEW REGISTERS / DIFFUSERS (hvac / ductwork permits only): n/a LOCATION OF STANDPIPES: n/a			
IS THIS APPLICATION IN RESPONSE TO A VIOLATION? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/> YES VIOLATION #: n/a			
All provisions of the building code and other City ordinances will be complied with, whether specified herein or not. Plans approved by the Department form a part of this application. I hereby certify that the statements contained herein are true and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief. I further certify that I am authorized by the owner to make the foregoing application, and that, before I accept my permit for which this application is made, the owner shall be made aware of all conditions of the permit. I understand that if I knowingly make any false statement herein I am subject to such penalties as may be prescribed by law or ordinance.			
APPLICANT'S SIGNATURE 			DATE: 12 / 21 / 2020

Development Proposal

208-210 Rex Ave

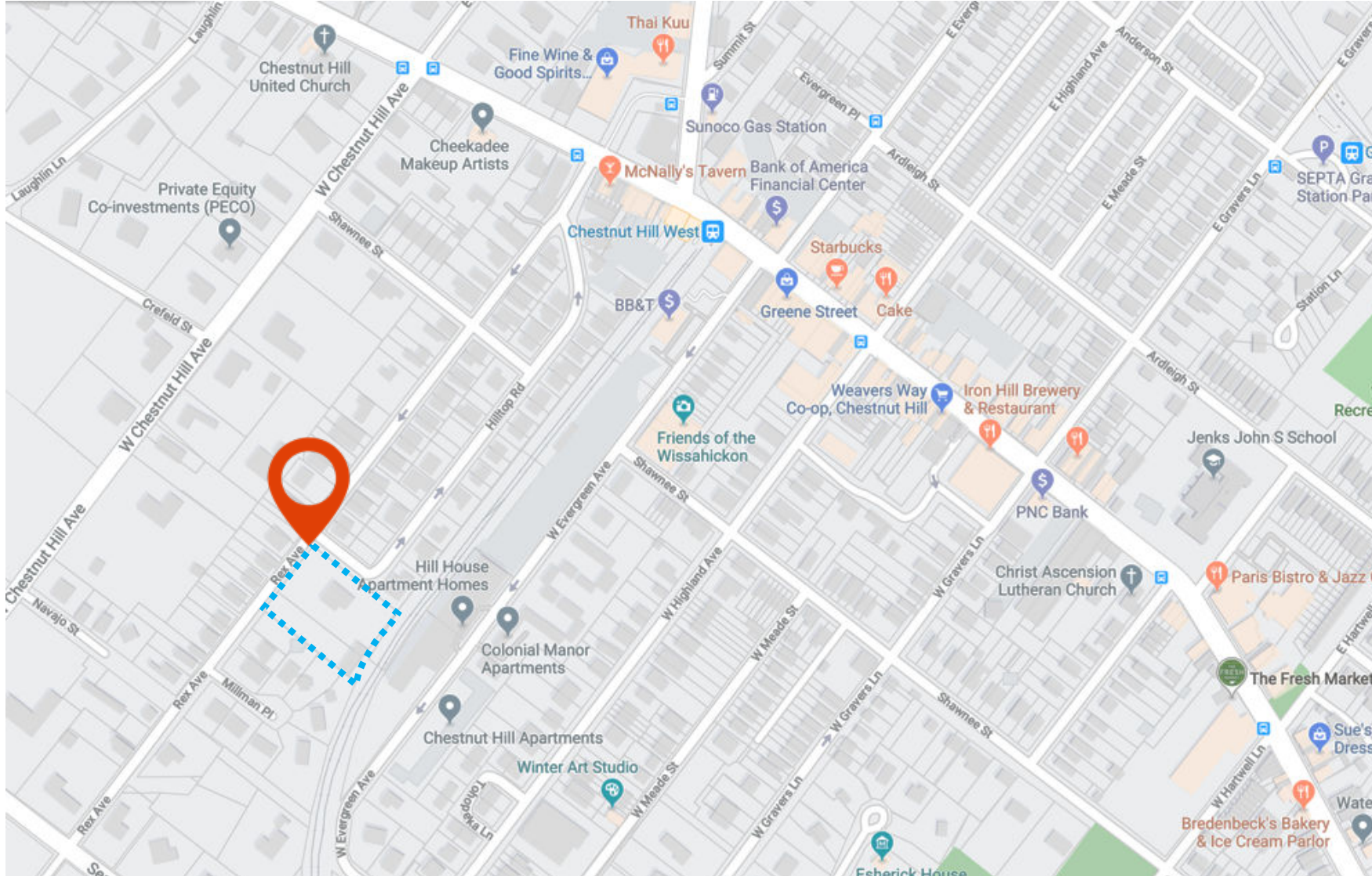
DEVELOPMENT CONCEPT

For discussion purposes only

January 9, 2020



208-210 Rex Ave – Location and Parcel Information



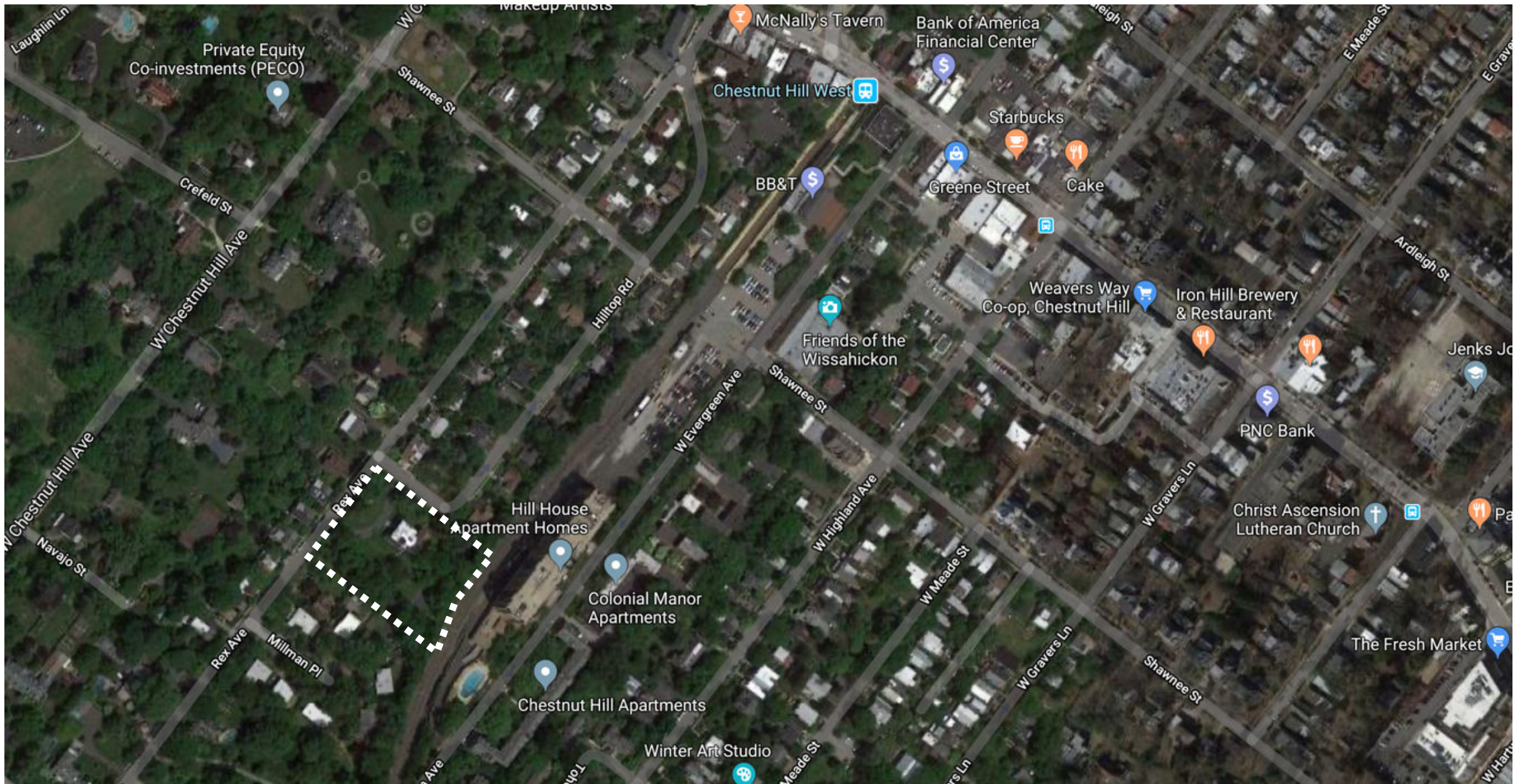
OPA Account #
092217910

Lot Area
59,059 SF

Current Zoning
RSD-3
Residential Single
Family Detached-3

Existing Structure
4,293 SF Footprint
7.27% Lot Coverage

208-210 Rex Ave – Satellite View



Rex Ave Street View from NW Corner
(Crefeld & Rex)



Rex Ave Street View from West, Directly
facing Mansion



Rex Ave Street View from West facing Mansion via Driveway



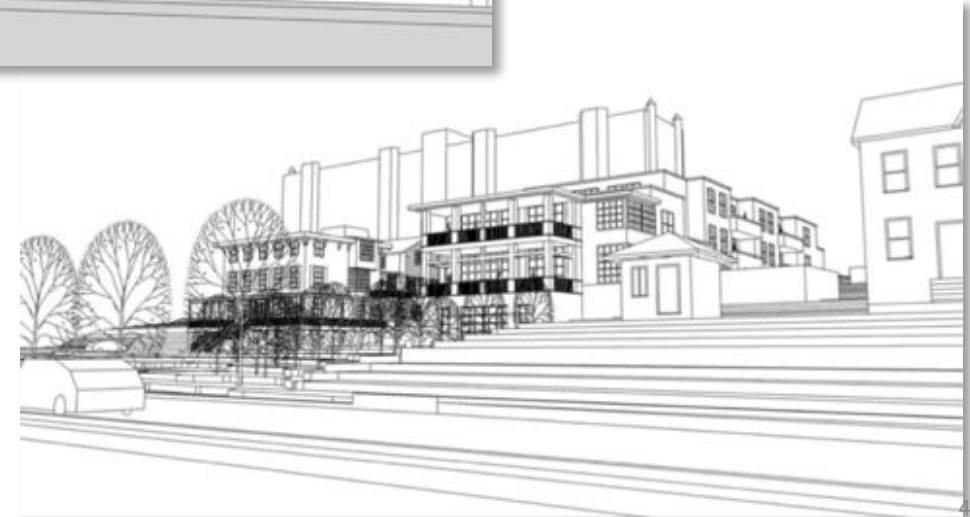
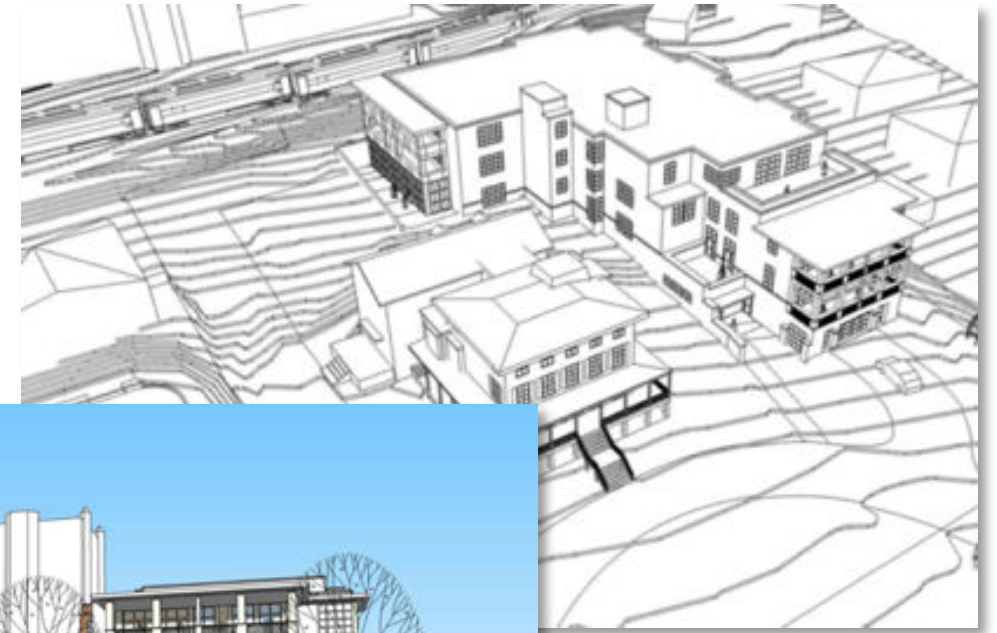
Site Development History

We understand and respect the community's desire to preserve the Hirst-Duhring Mansion at 208-210 Rex Ave due to its architectural history, character, and association with noted architect H. Louis Duhring.

In 2018 a design was proposed which many thought appeared to detract from the mansion's presence instead of complementing it. As we understand it, the design (shown to the right) was generally not well received when presented to the community due to a variety of reasons.



Prior development plans in 2018 did not have neighborhood support due to its overuse of the site.





Attempting a Thoughtful & Considerate Design

“ Our neighborhood is a mix of single-family housing styles: detached homes, *twins*, center-hall colonials, pre-20th-century house, split levels and the *occasional mansion*.

“ Our houses are *owner occupied* and we tend to stick around for a while, because we have found an ideal place to live.

Source: STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY VALUES: REX AVENUE

In partnership with **Cecil Baker + Partners Architects**, it has been our goal to conceptualize a thoughtful design that harmonizes the desires and values of the community along with its historic nature. Key design principles include:

- Restoration of the existing mansion
- Keeping density & design consistent with neighborhood
- Working with the slopes of the property versus eliminating them
- Applying complementary materials & color palette consistent with area
- Minimizing impact to available street parking
- Including ample greenery & landscaping
- Effectively managing stormwater



Proposed Project

Four (4) Condominiums in Mansion

Adaptive reuse of mansion that converts the residence into 4 unique bi-level units

Four (4) New Paired Twins (8 Residences)

New construction of complementary structures at a height of 38 ft above average grade

Private Drive & Parking

Off-street deeded surface & garage parking (14 surface, 8 garage)

Relevant Data

Lot Area	59,059 SF
Mansion Footprint	4,293 SF
Mansion Lot Coverage	7.27%
Twin Home Footprint (ea)	1,438 SF
Twin Home Footprint (total)	11,504 SF
Twin Home Lot Coverage	19.48%
Total Footprint	15,797 SF
Total Lot Coverage	26.75%
Lot Area per Unit (12 Total Units)	4,921 SF

Proposed Project Rendering

cecil baker + partners
ARCHITECTS



Corner of Crefeld St. and Rex Ave.

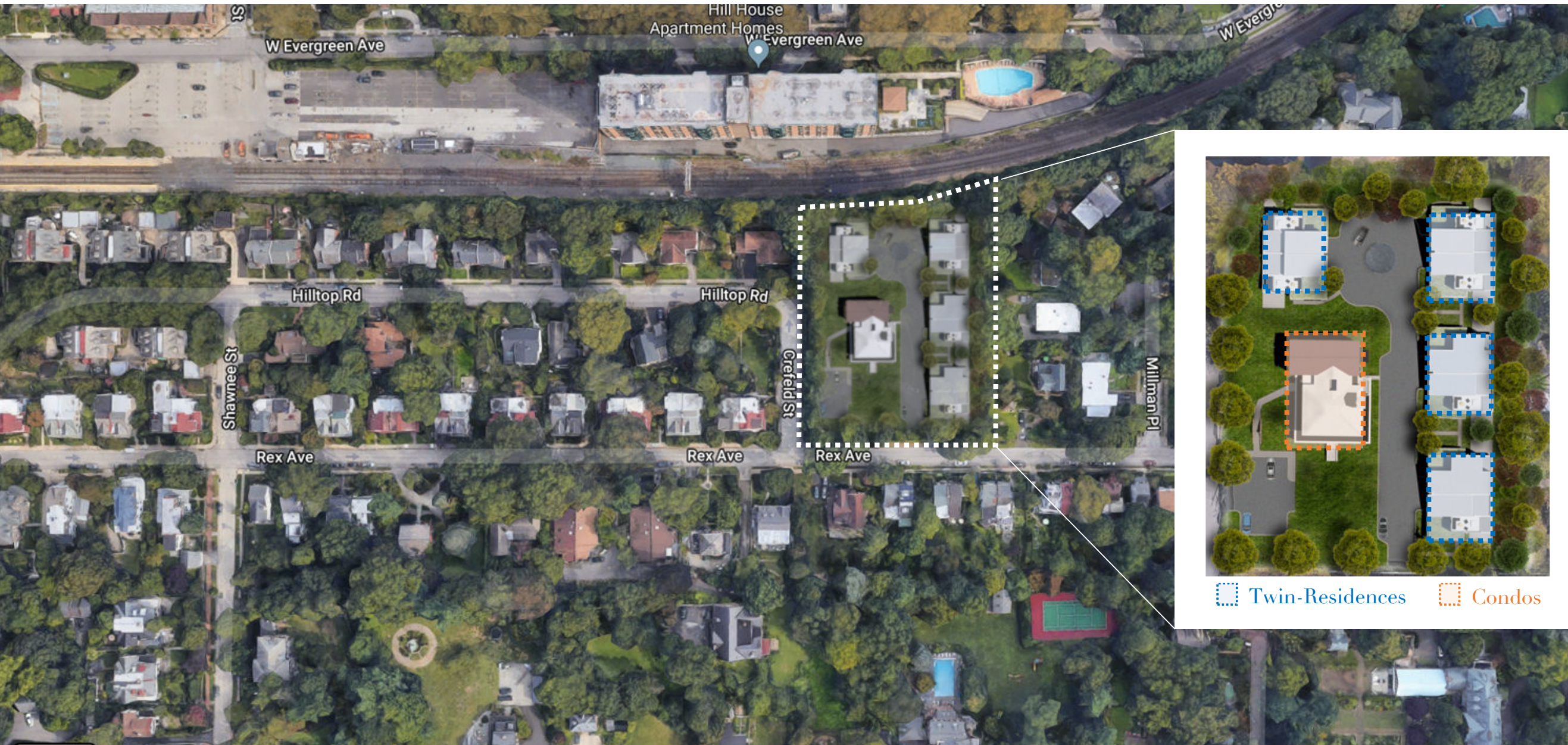
Draft 09.24.2019



Satellite View – Current



Satellite View – Proposed (Expanded)





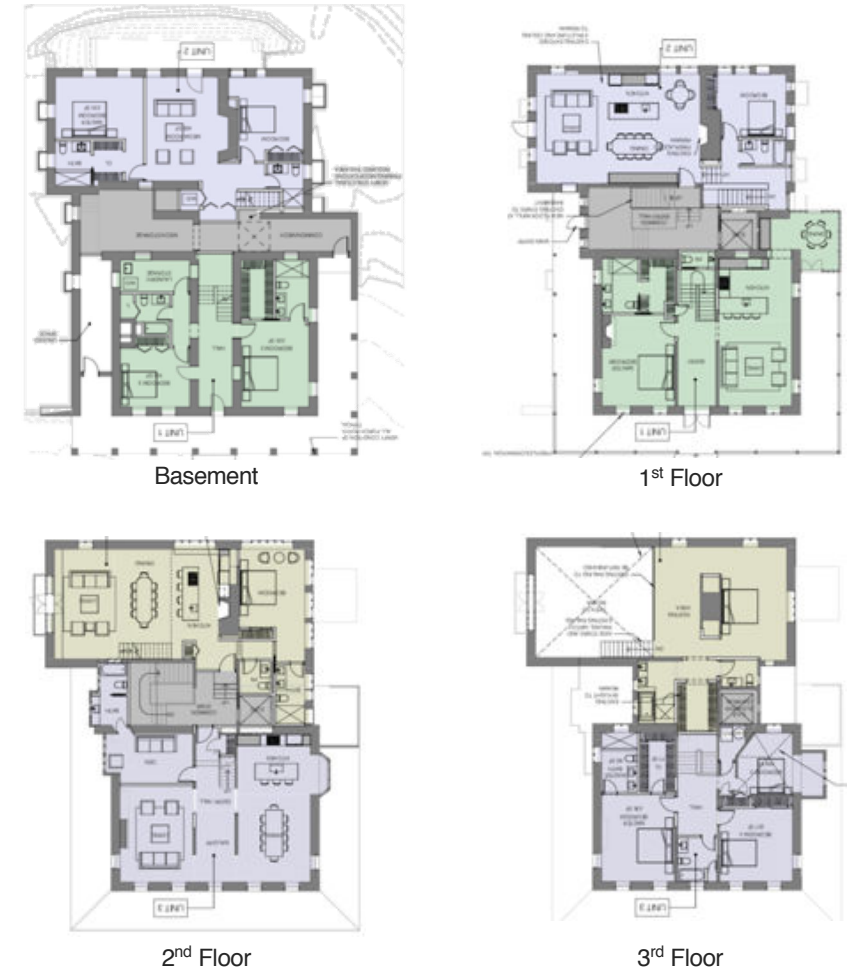
The Mansion Units

This design repurposes the Hirst-Duhring Mansion to create 4 uniquely designed, highly desirable homes while preserving its architectural heritage.

These bi-level homes are comprised of three, 3-bedroom units and one, 2 bedroom unit. These homes range from 2,300 to 2,700 square feet of living space with a shared elevator in the common corridor. All owners will have deeded parking spaces in an off-street surface lot to be accessed via Crefeld St.



Unit 1 – 2,641 SF
Unit 2 – 2,629 SF
Unit 3 – 2,670 SF
Unit 4 – 2,293 SF



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The Twin Residences

The eight (8) twin residences are comprised of two different types, A & B, as noted in this plan.

Type A (3,764 SF) is the common 4 floor design with a basement that are mirrored in the twins (homes 5 thru 8) located at the top of the hill.

Type B (homes 2 & 4; 3,085 SF) is a 3 floor design with a basement configured to accommodate the steep grading on the site while also respecting height.

The use of glazing on the top floor is intended to minimize the perceived height of the homes with respect to the mansion.



Home Type A B



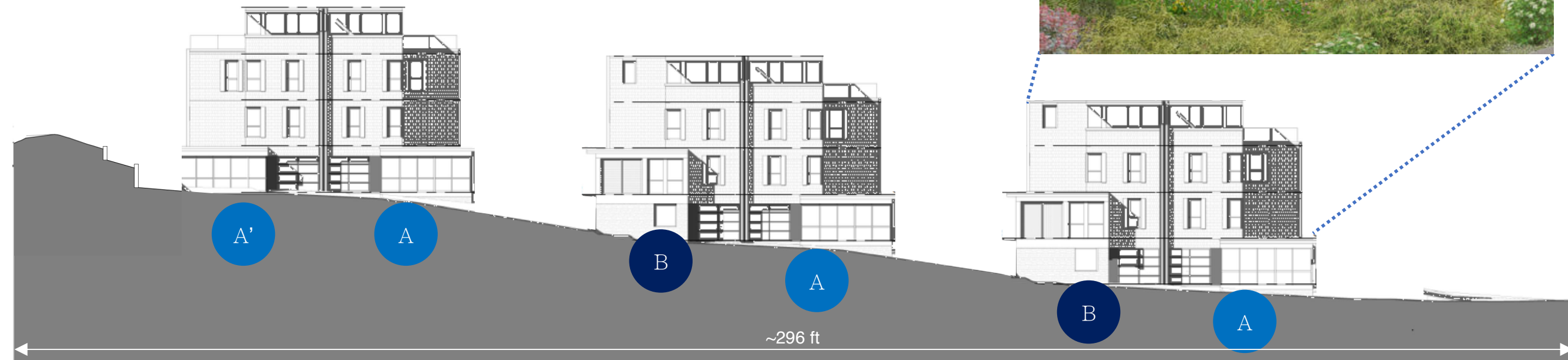
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Twin Home Section View to Illustrate Site Grading

Given the steep slopes of the site, to come up with a viable program, it was required to either design into the slope or to utilize them.

It was decided to use the slope to maintain the character of the lot. By doing so we were able to gain approximately 9 ft of elevation per twin set which then levels off at the top of the hill. Each building has a height of 38 ft above average grade.





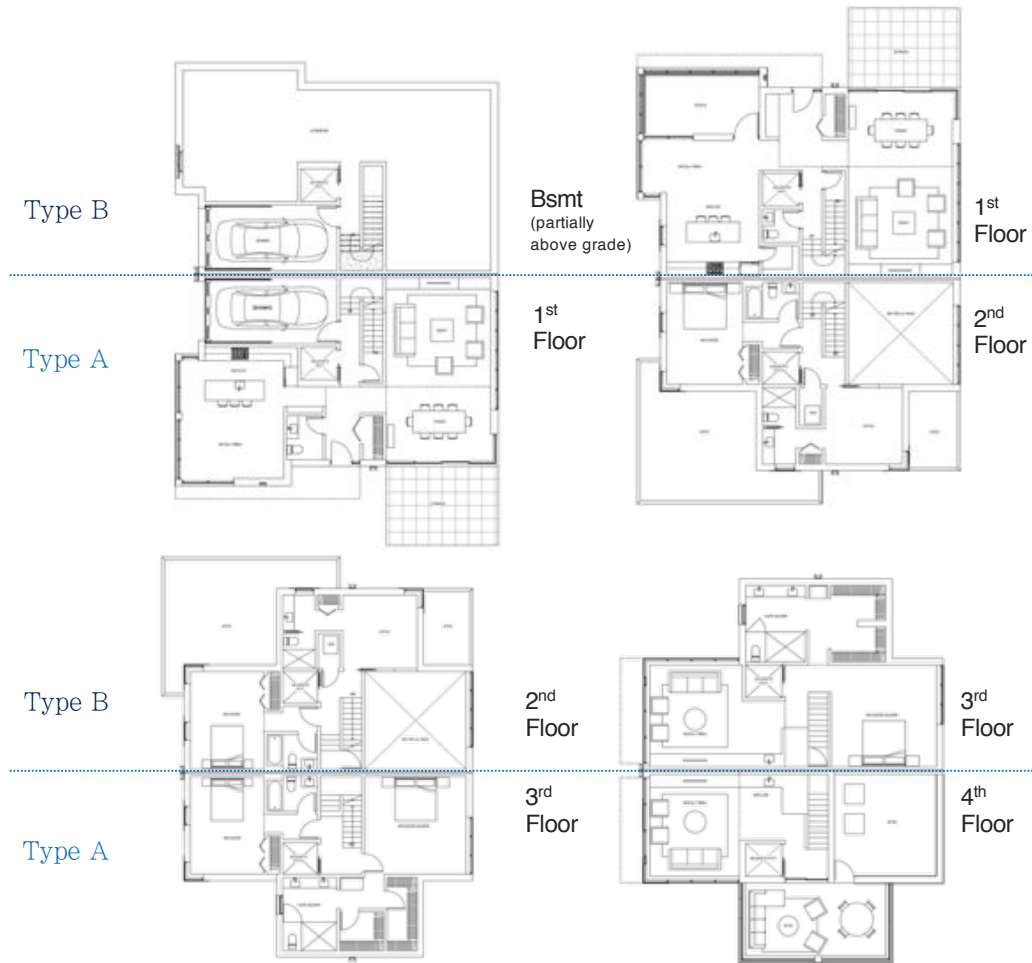
The Twin Residences

Homes include open floor plans spanning 3,085 and 3,764 square feet of living space respectively.

These homes will include 4 beds/4.5 baths in Type A homes or 3 beds/3.5 baths in Type B homes.

All residences come with a 1 car garage, an elevator, outdoor terraces, large glass enclosed living areas and deluxe modern touches.

Also available are 6 additional, potentially deeded, spots located on the private drive.



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ARCHITECTS

Draft 09.24.2019

A Word from the Architect

How to respond to our beautiful architectural heritage where current economic realities make the structure no longer sustainable?
How to create a new use to transform old bones into a vital new organism?
Where may the line be drawn between that which adds to the new life versus acknowledging those realities that are no longer commensurate with a crucial new use?

Here at the corner of Rex Avenue and Crefeld Street we are faced with just such a conundrum. The Hirst-Duhring Mansion is clearly an asset that enriches a neighborhood, and is, indeed, one of the flagship moments in Chestnut Hill. As a large residence it has no single family or institutional takers. Inevitably it will suffer the vicissitudes that come with economic withdrawal.

It sits in a burgeoning residential district and at best should reinforce and solidify current trends.

We started with the Mansion. Quickly determined that there was no benefit to altering the historical exterior - to the contrary, it enhances the economic value of the real estate. On the interior the basic center hall layout and grand rooms to the rear are an asset to subdividing the Mansion into four residences, each 2,500SF (+/- 200SF), a size that is in the valuable crosshairs of comparable restoration projects. The new layouts shall benefit from some of the historic fabric - yet will offer every convenience of contemporary cosmopolitan living. All four will be highly desirable new homes. The site plan in the immediate environs of the Mansion will be restored but also incorporate parking for two cars per residential unit, a marketing requirement.

In order to justify the substantial costs to the restoration of the Mansion we are proposing that the balance of the site be developed as Twins. We are proposing that this unit type is compatible with the immediate neighborhood as well as creating a “village” of like-sized residences. The architecture attempts to be sympathetic to the Mansion, creating a project identity and specifically avoiding the feel of a Gated Community. Each residence includes a garage with site parking to allow for guests in order not to burden the community with additional parking.

The steep site is terraced to create a cascade of twins, with the gaps between as entry/terraced gardens. The materials we are currently suggesting are stone at the base, ideally compatible with that of the Mansion, and cedar shingle above. Eave projections respond to the iconography of the mansion. We are on that narrow ledge of slavish replication and creating a palette of independent contemporary architecture. This is our great challenge.

— cecil baker



Thank you!

It is our hope that the time and efforts of all involved have produced a design that aligns with community values, incorporates our development principles, and will be constructively welcomed by the neighborhood and community. We look forward to working together with you all on this project.

For questions, comments or discussion, please feel free to reach out to anyone on our team.



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Matt Kocent

Associate

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610.574.1246



Supplemental Graphics



PROPOSED SITE PLAN - PARCEL BOUNDARY DIAGRAM
208-210 REX AVENUE

