



Brandon M. Scott  
Mayor

COMMISSION FOR  
HISTORICAL & ARCHITECTURAL  
PRESERVATION

Tom Liebel, Chairman

STAFF REPORT



Chris Ryer  
Director

February 9, 2021

**REQUEST:** Construct rear/rooftop addition with front deck/balcony

**ADDRESS:** 223 E. Churchill Street (Federal Hill Historic District)

**APPLICANT:** Jim Shetler, AIA, Trace Architects

**OWNER:** Andrew Germek

**STAFF:** Walter W. Gallas, AICP

**RECOMMENDATION:** Approval with final details to be reviewed and approved by CHAP staff

**SITE/HISTORIC DISTRICT**

General Area: The property is located in the Federal Hill Historic District on the south side of E. Churchill Street in a block bounded by William Street on the west, Warren Avenue on the south, and Battery Street on the east. (*Images 1-2*). Comprising about 24 city blocks with street names retained from its original colonial settlement, Federal Hill is located just south of the Inner Harbor. At its northeast corner, Federal Hill Park rises steeply from Key Highway overlooking the downtown skyline. The neighborhood retains intact streets of largely residential properties reflecting the eras in which they were built and the economic status of their early residents.

Site Conditions: The existing property is a narrow two-bay two-story masonry house with a shallow side-gabled roof. The three windows at the façade are 6/6. The first floor window and the front door with transom have jack arches. Along the east side of the house is a narrow walkway accessing the rear, and which has an easement enabling access to the rear yards of houses on Warren Avenue (*Images 3-5*).

The house appears on the 1890 Sanborn map, looking like the smallest house on the block, with two stories and a one-story rear addition (*Image 6*). While the rear addition seemed to disappear and then reappear over the decades, the footprint of the house remained essentially the same into the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century (*Images 7-9*). At some point a second floor was added at the rear (*Image 5*).

## **BACKGROUND**

January 12, 2021 – In response to the plans submitted, the Commission voted unanimously to approve the following motion: Disapproval with recommendation to redesign to further reduce visibility of addition and deck at front of elevation.

## **PROPOSAL & APPLICATION OF GUIDELINES**

This application is a request to construct an addition which extends the existing second floor to the rear, adds a new third floor behind the ridgeline of the historic house, and includes a recessed balcony at the front. The proposal also widens the building on the side elevation on the second and new third floors. This side bump-out is set back approximately 12 feet from the façade of the house and extends over the walkway. The original plans have been revised to remove the balcony cantilevered over the ridgeline. The 3-foot wide balcony is behind the ridgeline, fronted by a glass railing and in a recessed area that is covered and has walls on either side (*Images 10-13*).

Staff applied the following guidelines from the *Baltimore City Historic Preservation Design Guidelines*:

### **1.18 Alterations and Additions**

- Retain historic character defining features when planning alterations and additions to a historic building.
- Design alterations and additions to be compatible and sympathetic to the character of the historic building.
- Design additions to be compatible with the existing historic structure in massing, height, form, and scale. Place additions on a secondary elevation.
- An addition may be contemporary in design, or it may replicate the historic character of the main building. Where an addition replicates the historic character of the main building, create subtle difference to clearly distinguish it as a later structure.
- Avoid incompatible architectural features in new additions, such as bay windows, when they are inconsistent with the character of the historic building.

The design is a contemporary one. The addition is most visible from the front when viewed looking down the side walkway. The majority of the addition is at the rear, and so it partially meets the design guidelines.

### **2.1 Guiding Principles for New Design**

- Avoid demolishing historic buildings, structures, and landscapes when designing new construction projects.
- Contemporary architectural design that reflects its current time, place, use, and culture is accepted, provided that the design is compatible with the character of the historic district.

The addition does not mimic a historic style. Rather, it makes a bold contemporary statement. As to its compatibility with the character of the historic district—the design is a full story taller in the rear. It partially meets the guidelines.

## 2.2 Site Design

- Retain established property line patterns, street and alley widths, setbacks, primary and secondary building orientation, and landscape elements.

As stated in the architect’s narrative accompanying the application, “Our plan is to increase the existing dwelling from 800 square feet to 1,400 square feet by building to the existing property line and adding a third floor.” The existing building and the site have always presented constraints. This plan works within those constraints, and thus meets the guidelines.

## 2.3 Scale and Form

- The scale and form of new buildings must be compatible with the height and depth of surrounding buildings. Where there is a variation of building height within the immediate neighborhood, the new building should generally relate to the predominant pattern.

All of the houses on this block are two-story houses, with one exception. 221 E. Churchill Street, the abutting neighbor on the west side of 223 E. Churchill, is three stories high, but is only a half story taller, because it is built at street grade, and 223 E. Churchill has a raised first floor. The early Sanborn maps label 221 E. Churchill as a store. The scale of this proposal is somewhat mitigated by being adjacent to the three-story house. The bulk of the mass of the addition is at the rear. The removal of the balcony suspended over the ridgeline is an important step in the right direction. The third floor recessed area with its sidewalls and roof is visible when looking at the front elevation. The design mostly meets the guidelines.

## 2.4.5 Roofs

- Design new roofs to complement the orientation, pitch, complexity, and scale of roofs on surrounding buildings.

The roof of the third floor addition is flat, which is compatible to roof forms in the neighborhood and meets the guidelines.

## 2.5.1 Doors and Windows

- Design doors and windows to be compatible with the placement, scale, type, and operation of doors and windows and their openings in surrounding buildings.

The windows at the front of the third floor addition will be large sliding glass doors. Glazing will also line the narrow strip of the addition that hangs over the side walkway. At the east elevation, an existing window about midway back on the first floor of the original building will be removed and infilled and a new window opening created farther to the rear. A window in the existing first floor rear addition will be replaced with a new window in the same opening. At the rear, a new glass sliding door at the first floor and a new narrow fixed pane window will be inserted in the new addition. These are contemporary treatments to a contemporary addition. The windows and doors meet the design guidelines.

## 2.5.2 Materials

- Choose building materials that are compatible with the color, size, texture, scale, and quality of building materials used in surrounding buildings.

- Cover and finish exterior wall with quality materials that are compatible with surrounding buildings.

The proposed cladding for the addition is stained reverse batten cedar siding. CHAP staff will want to confirm the color. The materials meet the guidelines.

### **1.8.9 Roof Decks**

- Where permitted, new roof decks must not be visible from the street-front grade along any primary elevation. Locate roof decks at the rear of a building whenever possible to minimize visibility.
- Provide access to roof decks from the rear of the property whenever possible. Do not construct rooftop pop-ups or doghouses to access roof decks.

In the original plan, the balcony at the third floor extended over the ridgeline at the front. In the revised plan the balcony is behind the ridgeline. It will have a glass railing. It is accessed from interior stairs. The roof deck guidelines say new roof decks must not be visible from the street-front grade along any primary elevation. Based on sightline studies provided by the architect, the balcony will not be visible from the street, but portions of the sidewalls and roof over the recessed balcony will still be visible. The plan partially meets the guidelines.

### **NEIGHBORHOOD COMMENTS**

The Federal Hill Architectural Review Committee received copies of the revised design. The committee chair indicated to CHAP staff that the committee supported the revised plans. He said the revision seemed to address members' issues about setting the addition behind the ridgeline.

### **ANALYSIS**

The house is very small with 9-foot interior widths. Rooms are tiny; circulation is problematic; more space is needed, according to the applicants. The design solution is a contemporary one. The new construction climbs the back of the old house and approaches the crest of the roof at the ridgeline. The primary focus of review has been how to handle the balcony/deck at the front, understandably an amenity the owner would like to have. The present design of the balcony is the third iteration, narrowing the balcony to 3 feet in depth, moving it behind the ridgeline, and recessing it. The CHAP staff and commissioners have suggested other treatments for the balcony including sinking the balcony and using the ridgeline as the top edge of the balcony rail. Another recommendation was to remove the sidewalls and roof surrounding the balcony. These design changes will present new water management issues, says the architect in response:

In renovation work, especially small and tightly spaced residences, the building tells us what it wants to do. We never want to fight it. The balcony sits at the level of the ridge, but just behind it. At this level, water flows easily down to [the] existing roof and into the existing gutter. There is no depressed area causing the need for an interior drain, extensive flashing and complicated roof form. It also provides a continuous space across the width which clearly delineates the simply shaped new addition from the existing building. –James Shetler, email January 27, 2021

CHAP design guidelines state that roof top decks *must not* be visible from the street-front grade along any primary elevation. The sightline studies show that some of the new construction will be visible, mainly the walls and roof surrounding the recessed balcony. As a building addition with a rooftop component, the plans meet most of the design guidelines.

**RECOMMENDATION**

**Staff recommends approval with final details to be reviewed and approved by CHAP staff.**



**Eric Holcomb,  
Executive Director**

DRAFT

## MAPS AND IMAGES

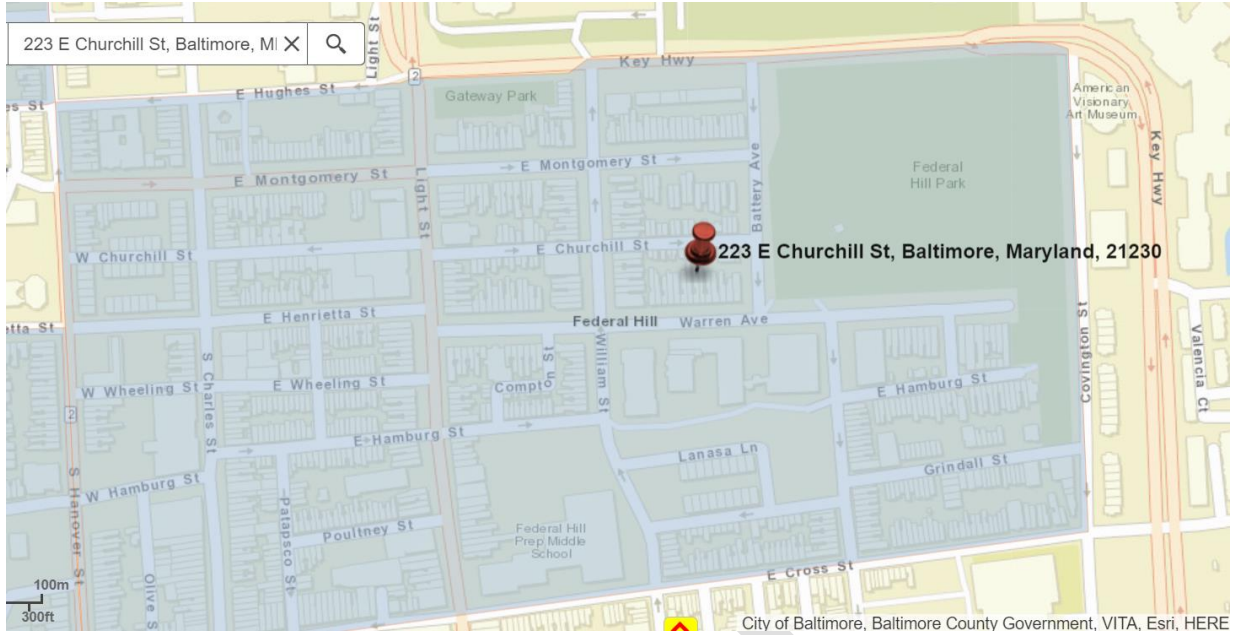


Image 1: 223 E. Churchill Street in the Federal Hill Historic District.



Image 2: Overhead view of 223 E. Churchill Street (blue outline), December 11, 2019





*Image 3: 223 E. Churchill (arrow), looking west on Churchill, December 20, 2020*



*Image 4 & 5: 223 E. Churchill Street, existing front and east elevations, December 20, 2020*



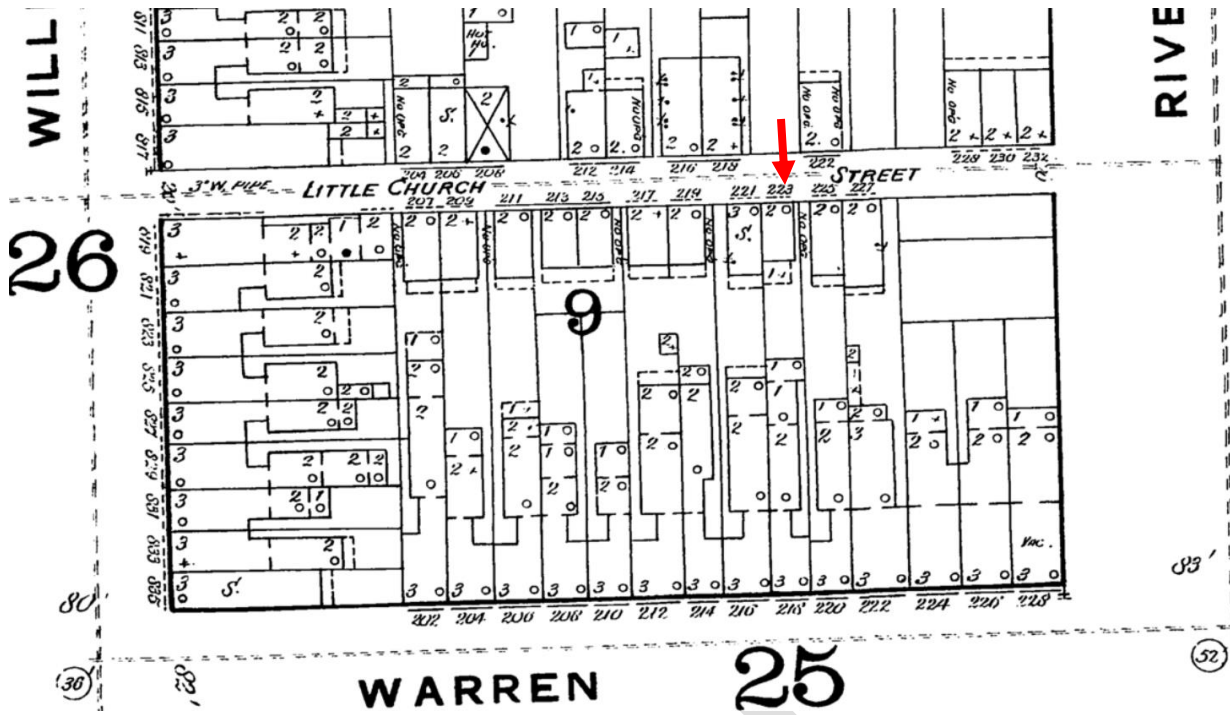


Image 6: 223 E. Churchill (then Little Church) Street, 1890 Sanborn map

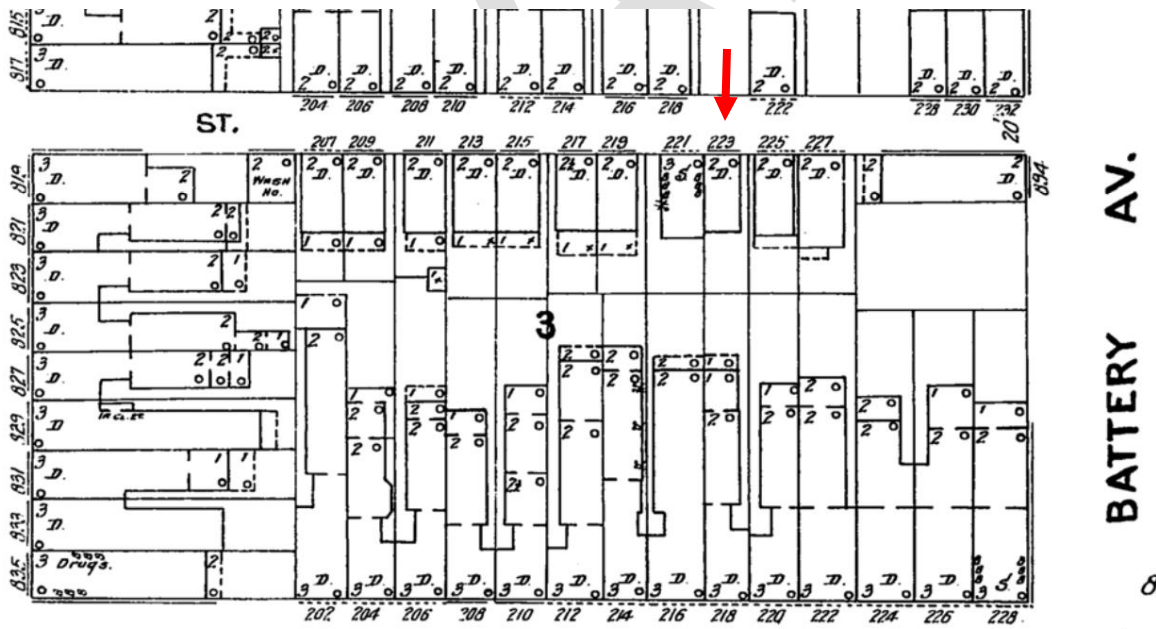


Image 7: 223 E. Churchill (then Church) Street, 1901-1902 Sanborn map

223 E. Churchill Street (Federal Hill Historic District) – Construct rear/rooftop addition with front deck/balcony

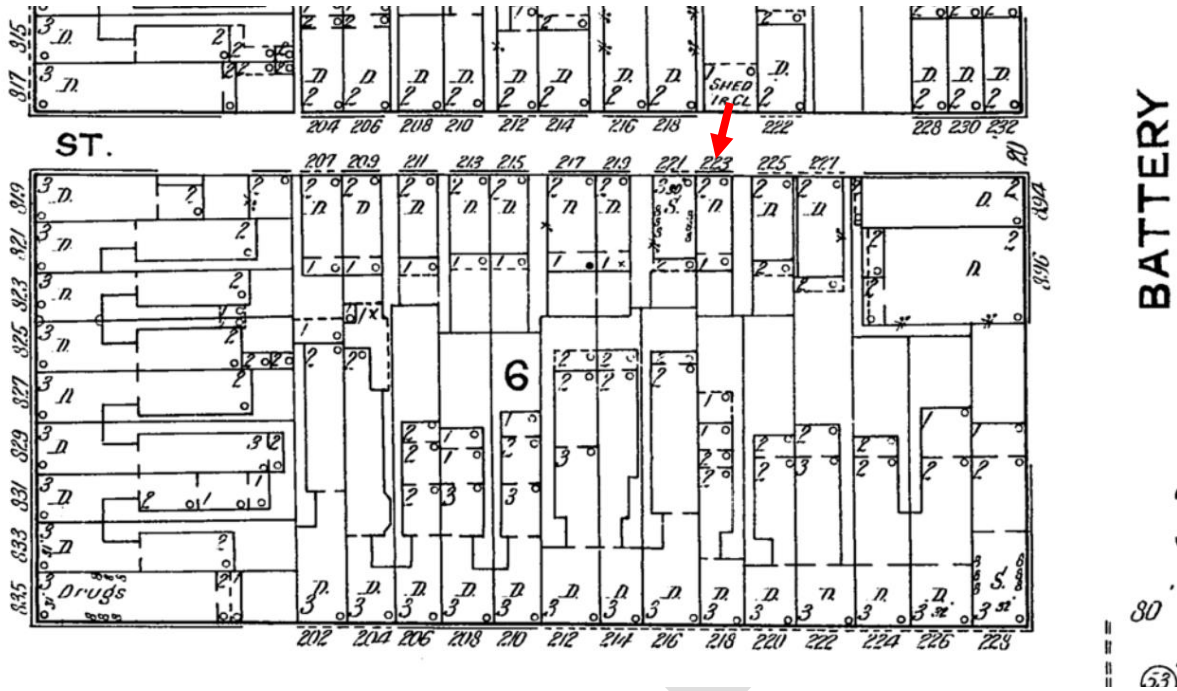


Image 8: 223 E. Churchill (then Church) Street, 1914-1915 Sanborn map

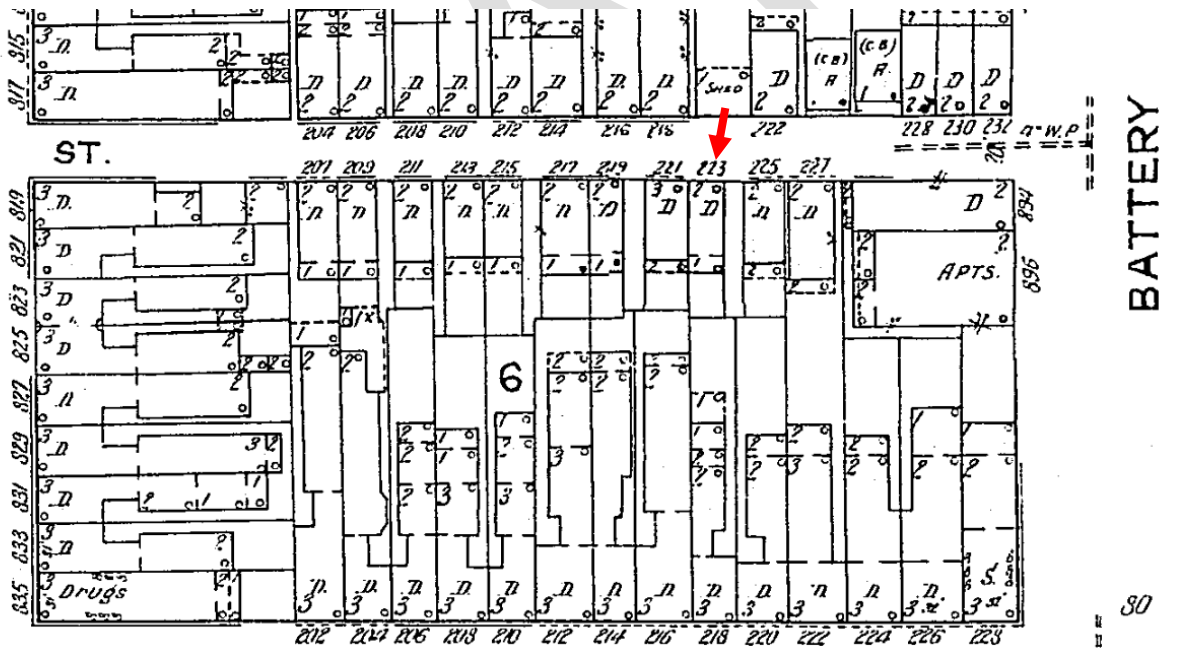
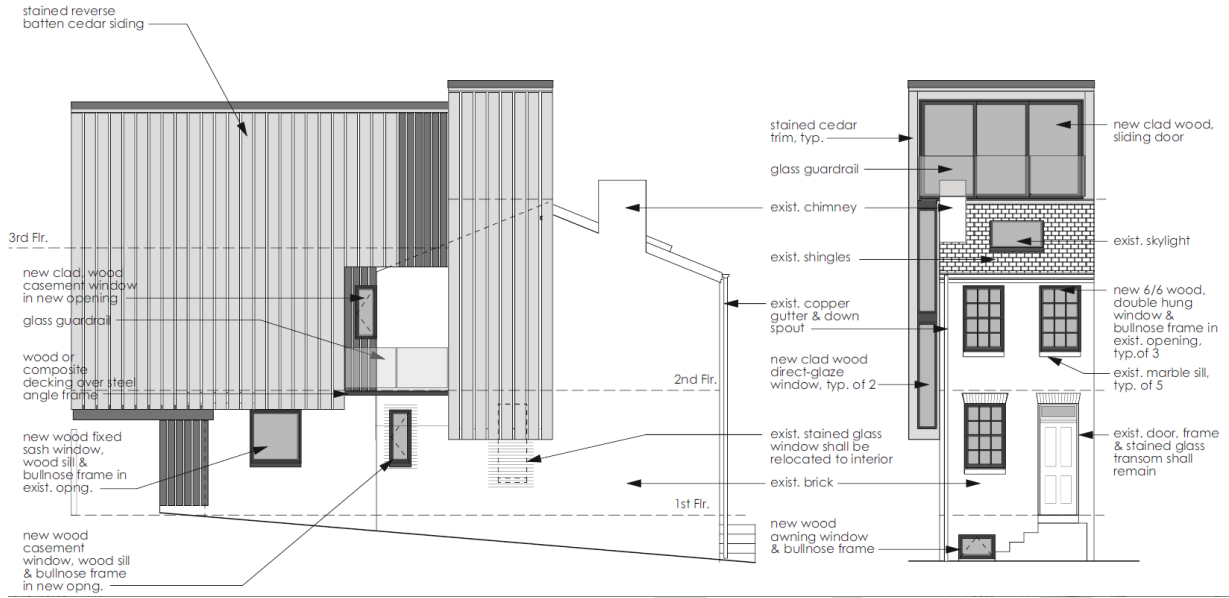
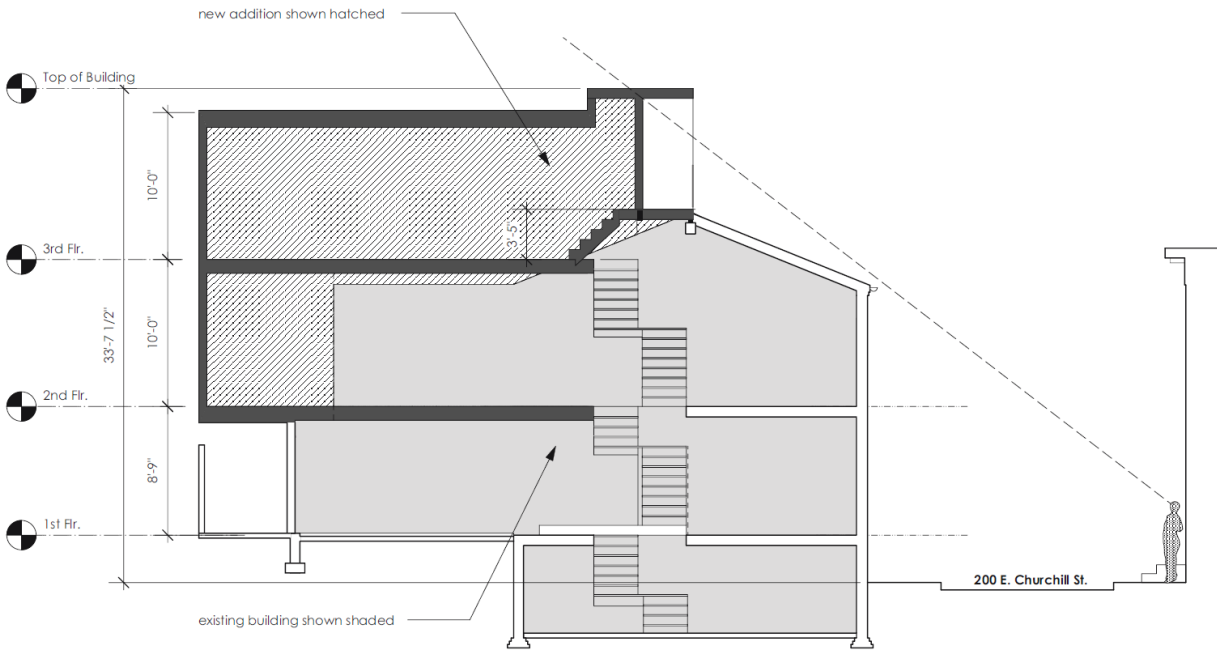


Image 9: 223 E. Churchill Street, 1914-1953 Sanborn map

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**Image 10: 223 E. Church Street – Proposed East and North Elevations**



**Image 11: 223 E. Churchill Street – Building Section – Sightline Study**





Image 12: 223 E. Churchill Street – Existing (left) and Proposed Rendering (right)



Image 13: 223 E. Churchill Street – Existing Conditions (left) and Proposed Rendering (right)

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