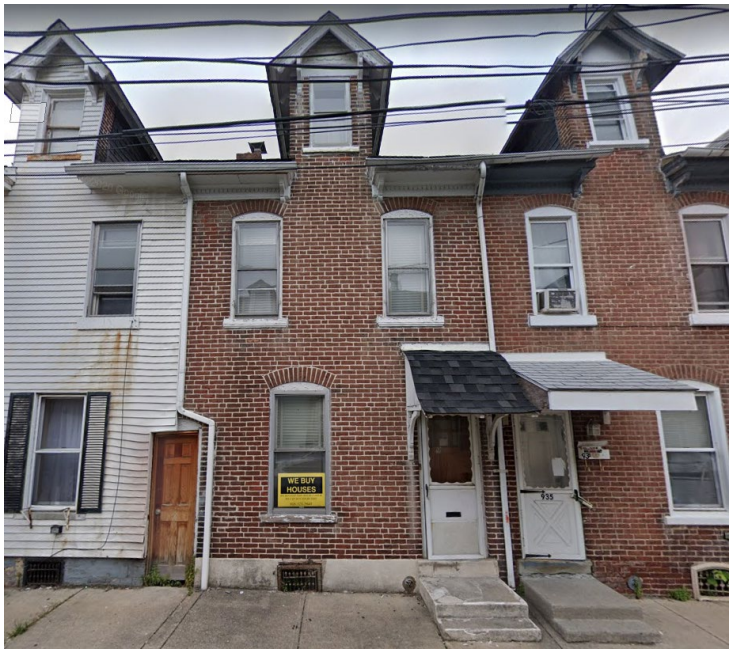
Historical Architectural Review Board
COA Final Review Sheet

HDC-2023-00005
Address: 937 North Street
District: Old Allentown Historic District
Applicant: Christine Steighner, Suntuity Solar
Proposal: Install solar panels

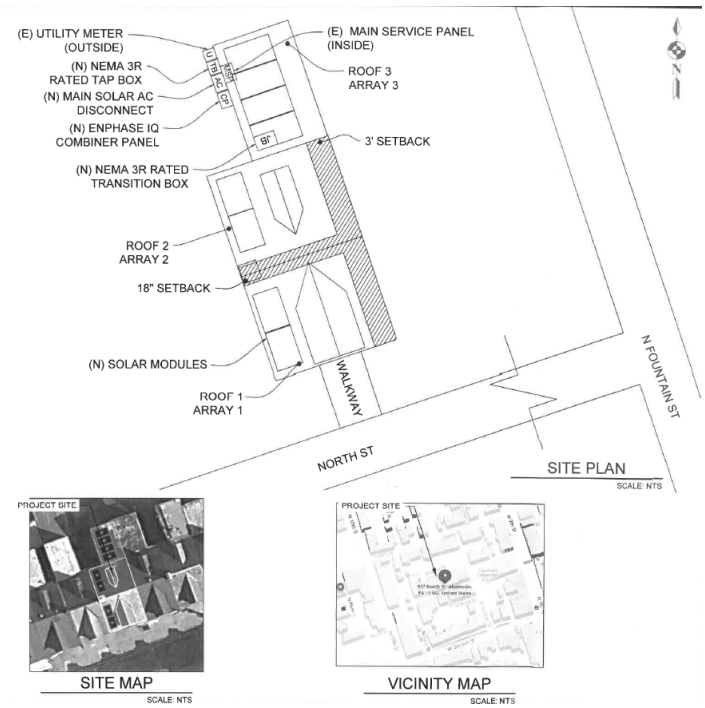
Building Description:
This two-and-a-half-story rowhouse, ca. 1892, is side-street vernacular in style. The roof is gable with slate shingles. There dormer front is bracketed with shakes, and the dormer cheek walls are covered with beveled slate. The windows are 1/1 sash with Eastlake frames, and the basement window has a decorative metal grille. The cornice retains four carved wood brackets. The main entry is a single, glazed door. There is a shared grocer's alley door and a concrete stoop with an asphalt-covered awning.

Project Description:
This application proposes to install solar panels on the roof of the property at 937 North Street. The two-and-a-half-story building is located mid-block and has a gable roof over the main block with a flat roof at the rear ell. Three solar panel arrays are proposed, including one at the front slope, one at the rear slope, and a larger array over the rear flat roof. The disconnect would be installed with the utility meter at the rear of the property.

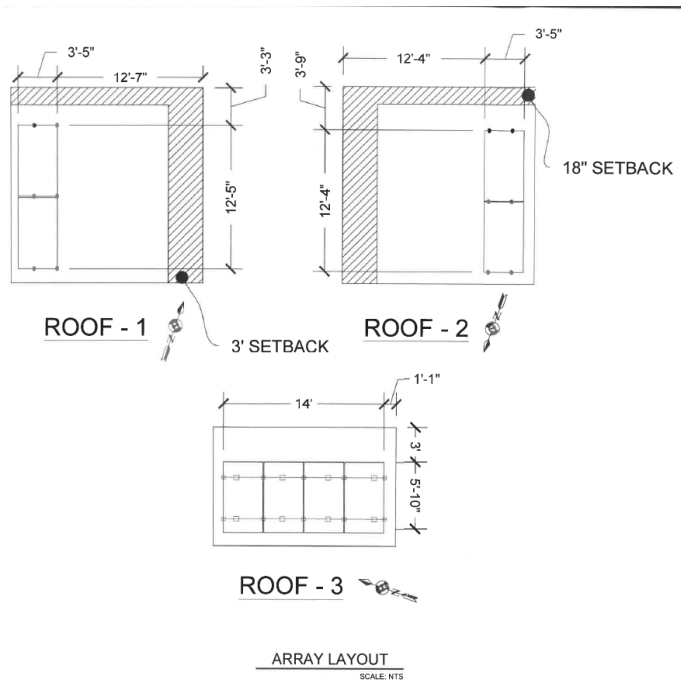


Front façade of 937 North Street, 2019.
(Google StreetView)


Rear of 937 North Street, 2023.
(Applicant)



Site plan.
(Applicant)



Array layout.
(Applicant)

Applicable Guidelines:

Chapter 3.10 – Solar Energy and Energy Improvements

3.10.3 Minimize visibility of solar panels, mounting equipment, and necessary mechanical equipment from the public right-of-way. For pitched roofs, locate solar collectors on rear roof slopes whenever possible. For pitched roofs where all slopes are visible, locate collectors as far back from the street as possible. For flat roofs, locate collectors as far back from the top of street-facing facades as possible.

3.10.4 Attach solar collectors or other equipment in the least invasive method feasible so that the alteration is reversible in the future.

3.10.5 Install solar collectors or equipment as flat as possible to the surface where they are installed. Placement parallel to the roof surface is encouraged. If a horizontal or vertical tilt is required for functionality, adjust the pitch to use the smallest angle possible.

3.10.6 Choose energy systems, mounting equipment, and necessary mechanical equipment in a color compatible with existing roof materials whenever possible and with non-reflective finishes.

Observations & Comments:

A solar panel array is proposed to be located on the west side of the dormer at the front slope and would have a 3-foot setback from the front façade. The solar panels would project 6-inches off the roof and would likely be visible from North Street. Staff recommends installing a mock-up of the proposed array at this location to determine visibility. The solar panels should be inconspicuous from the public right-of-way to comply with the guidelines.

At the rear, the property abuts Broome Street, which is a service alley that dead ends behind the building. While the solar array on the rear slope of the gable roof would be visible from the alley, this portion of the building is considered a non-contributing secondary façade and the visibility of the solar panels does not have an adverse impact on the district.

Staff Recommendation:
Approval, provided a mockup shows that the array on the front roof slope is inconspicuous from North Street, with the staff to review details, pursuant to Chapter 3, Section 3.10 Solar Energy and Energy Improvements.

HARB Discussion:

Although no property owner was present, Ms. Keller suggested that the HARB review the application, since it is nearly identical to the previous application.

The HARB discussed whether staff can generally approve solar panels located on primary facades of properties rather than referring applications to the board. Ms. Keller noted that the design guidelines state that locating solar panels on the roof facing the street or main façade should be avoided, adding that the HARB could consider allowing staff to approve inconspicuous panels located on those facades. Mr. Jordan read a section of the guidelines that recommend minimizing visibility on pitched roofs. He noted that not all roof slopes are visible and that the HARB would remain within the guidelines to approve panels not visible from the right-of-way. He contended that the HARB seems to agree that the current application could be approved but that there may need to be further discussion on the threshold for future staff approvals.

Action:

Mr. Hart moved to approve with conditions the application presented on 2/6/2023 for the installation of solar panels at 937 North Street, with the staff to review details, pursuant to Chapter 3, Section 3.10 Solar Energy and Energy Improvements, provided a mockup shows that the solar panels proposed at the front slope are inconspicuous from the right-of-way. Mr. Encelewski seconded the motion, which carried with unanimous support.