
**HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD
STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION**

Property Address: **1011-1015 M Street NW**
Landmark/District: **Shaw Historic District**
ANC: **2F**

Meeting Date: **April 4, 2013**
H.P.A. Number: **#13-064**
Staff Reviewer: **Brendan Meyer**

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The applicant, Community Three Development, LLC, seeks concept approval for construction of a new 9- and 6-story, 80-unit, mixed-use building at 1011-1015 M Street NW. The site is currently a surface parking lot in the Shaw Historic District. Plans were prepared by Community Three Development LLC in conjunction with Torti Gallas Urban.



Figure 1. Proposed 80-unit building, Option A. Corner building is 1017 M Street NW and is not part of this project.

Property Description and Context

The project site is a collection of several building lots currently used as a surface parking that wraps around 1017 M Street NW, a contributing 2-1/2 story rowhouse in the Shaw Historic District; 1017 M Street is not part of the project. The site is essentially square with 75 feet of frontage on M Street and 78 feet of frontage on 11th Street.

The Shaw Historic District is a medium-sized historic district primarily oriented along the 11th and 9th Street corridors. M Street cuts across the south end of the historic district and is a general transitional zone between the taller mixed-use buildings of downtown to the south and shorter commercial and rowhouse buildings to the north. This transition is apparent in the difference in historic building stock on either side of M Street and has also been formalized in modern zoning overlays. For example, the Downtown Development district (DD), promotes, among other goals, the preservation of historic buildings in downtown. The overlay was specifically tailored to ensure a compatible relationship between new construction on the south side of M Street (within the DD) and the smaller scaled historic buildings on the north side. While the DD allows for heights up to 110 feet, it requires that a building constructed on a lot fronting M Street between 7th and 10th Streets shall be limited to a maximum height of 60 feet to a depth of 40 feet from the lot line on M Street.

Interspersed among the two- and three-story rowhouses along the north-south streets of the historic district are occasional taller historic apartment buildings like 1126 11th Street NW and most notably, The Plymouth (b.1903), a 7-story, 80-foot tall historic landmark at 1236 11th Street NW.

There is moderate potential for historic archaeological resources related to 19th and 20th c. occupation on Lots 5-7. No previous archaeological investigations in the project area have been conducted. Expected deposits would likely comprise features that would have extended beneath the surface such as wells, privies, and cisterns that could remain below the level of more recent development.

Proposal

The applicant has submitted a concept plan with two options, A and B. The applicant's preferred option is A; option B was developed at the request of the HPO.

Both options break down the building into two distinct masses so as to read as two separate buildings. Option A places the taller block (9 stories at 90 feet) on M Street and runs it all the way to the north property line. This taller block would be 60 feet wide and exhibits strong characteristics of the classical revival style. It houses the main entrance for the residential units and leaves a 15-foot setback from the east property line open as a vehicular loading zone. It rests on a two-story rusticated base and has six stories of buff colored brick with a 4-story hexagonal projection on either side of the central bay. The building is capped with a deep cornice of thin mutules and a tall attic story fenestrated with windows for the 9th floor units. The deep cornice returns around to both the east and west elevations a short distance and then runs the length of the side elevations as a simple frieze band under the attic story.

The shorter block (6 stories at 60 feet) is on 11th Street and butts into the taller block. It would be 78 feet wide and presents a more informal style than the taller block. A simple two-story commercial street front is the base on which a regular rhythm of three-story projected bays alternate with sections of red brick. The top story consists of a tall fenestrated frieze under a cornice of thin mutules, but with proportions more modest than those of the taller block. Other miscellaneous aspects include a small rooftop terrace, shown in the roof plan for the taller block (but not in the elevation drawings).

Parking is included in the basement level and will be accessed via the east-west alley adjacent to the site on the north.

Option B essentially switches the two massings around so that the buff colored tall classical block is on 11th Street and the shorter red brick informal block is on M Street (Figure 2). One notable item that stays anchored in place in both options is the simple commercial storefront on 11th Street, the consequence of which is the formal rusticated base on the buff colored building in Option A is reconfigured as a more commercial base in Option B.

Evaluation and Recommendation

The original submission by the applicant--Option A--satisfies the Board's criteria for new construction in many ways.¹ The scale, proportion, rhythm, materials and detail & ornament are nearly superlative replications of historic apartment house forms that can be found in the Shaw Historic District and many others. Most crucially, the oddly shaped lot is divided into two logical pieces that are each rendered independently. The result is a single building program on the inside with the look of two buildings on the outside. From there, the facades are composed with a confident balance of forms borrowed from surrounding neighbors such that the new construction blends with the character of the corner building at 1017 M Street without obtusely using its height and lines as a datum.

However, in perhaps the most fundamental criteria—height—Option A puts the height where it is less appropriate. In the hierarchy of L'Enfant plan streets, 11th Street is the wider and more dominant of the two, with a right-of-way width of 111 feet. The secondary street is M Street with a right-of-way width of only 90 feet. Historically buildings in Washington derived their maximum height as a proportion of street width, with taller buildings sitting on wider streets. Additionally, the pattern of development of apartment houses at the beginning of the 20th century, an appropriate era to reference for Shaw, is that tall apartment houses radiated north out of the central city along major avenues and streets like Connecticut Avenue, 16th Street, 13th Street and 11th Street, leaving the east-west streets as domains of smaller buildings.

Today, the taller buildings of downtown approach the south side of M Street and transition down from there. The north side of M Street is characterized by smaller buildings and rowhouses. Swapping the massings around as shown in Option B puts the taller section on 11th Street and is consistent with the surrounding pattern of building heights. This is perhaps difficult to discern from the perspective renderings, but the advantage of Option B becomes apparent when visiting the site and experiencing the distinct difference in character between narrower and more intimate M Street and wider and bustling 11th Street. Option B results in 8-10 fewer units than Option A and requires some minor alterations to ornament and proportions, but is the more historically compatible option.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Board find the concept "Option B" to be compatible with the character of the Shaw Historic District and consistent with the purposes of the preservation act, and delegate final approval to staff, and:

- 1. Encourage the applicant to coordinate with the HPO staff archaeologist in order to investigate archaeological resources prior to construction.*

¹ *District of Columbia Historic Preservation Guidelines: New Construction in Historic Districts* (1997) lists 12 design principals upon which compatibility should be judged: setback, orientation, scale, proportion, rhythm, massing, height, materials, color, roof shape, details & ornamentation, and landscape features.



Figure 2 Option B