HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD
STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION

Property Address:	**1720 16th Street, NW**	**X**	Agenda
Landmark/District:	**Sixteenth Street Historic District**		Consent Calendar
			Concept Review
Meeting Date:	**January 27, 2011**	**X**	Alteration
H.P.A. Number:	**Referral from BZA**		New Construction
Staff Reviewer:	**Steve Callcott**		Demolition
			Subdivision

Pursuant to the city's zoning regulations (11 DCMR 1002.7), the Office of Zoning has referred an application to the Historic Preservation Review Board regarding the proposed relocation of the embassy of the Republic of Congo to 1720 16th Street, NW, a property located in the 16th Street Historic District. While the HPRB and HPO do not typically comment on proposed relocations, this application also includes plans for site alterations, including the creation of a circular driveway in public space, two curb cuts (one on 16th Street, one on Riggs Place), removal of portions of an original iron and brick perimeter fence, and alterations to a brick wall in the rear of the property facing the public alley.

Property History and Description
1720 16th Street, NW is a prominent mansion at the corner of 16th Street and Riggs Place, NW. It was constructed in 1892 by Supreme Court Justice Henry Brown, designed by William Henry Miller, a prolific residential and institutional architect from Ithaca, New York. Miller was the first student of architecture at Cornell University, and went on to design several buildings for its campus. Typical of the exuberance of Victorian residential design, the house freely mixes Arts and Crafts, Queen Anne and Romanesque elements, but is perhaps most noteworthy for its picturesque roofline of Flemish stepped gables and red terra cotta tile. It has an imposing presence on the street, and is one of the few surviving free-standing mansions from the 19th century in the historic district.

The house is commonly known in the neighborhood as the Toutorsky Mansion, after its mid-20th century owners Basil and Maria Toutorsky. Mr. Toutorsky, a Russian pianist and music teacher, operated a popular music academy in the building for many years, teaching piano and music appreciation to several generations of Washingtonians.

The house is featured in *Sixteenth Street Architecture, Volume 1* (1978), published by the U.S. Commission of Arts.

Proposal
The project calls for constructing a circular driveway from a new curb cut on 16th Street to a new curb cut on Riggs Place. Representatives of the embassy have characterized it as a largely ceremonial entrance to allow visiting dignitaries to be dropped off at the front door. The driveway would result in removal of portions of the original decorative iron fence. There is an existing garage facing Riggs Place, however, additional parking will be created in the rear yard through a new opening in the existing rear yard brick wall.

Evaluation
Creating an opening in the rear yard wall, facing the public alley, and paving a portion of the small rear yard for vehicular parking raises no preservation issues or concerns. The Board has regularly approved alterations to rear, alley-facing walls and fences to accommodate rear yard parking.

Conversely, the Historic Preservation Review Board has consistently denied curb cuts, driveways, and parking on or access through public space in the city's rowhouse neighborhoods, finding them to be inconsistent with the character of these historic districts. The Board has cited the continuous, uninterrupted quality of the public space as an important character-defining feature of the city's historic districts, where it forms a continuous greensward, or park-like strip, that runs in front of and unifies the architecturally diverse rows of houses. For properties such as the Toutorsky Mansion, the public space front yard is also an important part of the historic building's setting. Where parking pads and private driveways have been introduced (either illegally or prior to the designation of an historic district) they typically present a major intrusion on the streetscape of an historic district.

In denying curb cuts and vehicular access through public space, the HPRB has often cited the DC Comprehensive Plan. Policy HP-2.5.4 "Landscaped Yards in Public Space" states as a policy: "Preserve the continuous and open green quality of landscaped front and side yards in public space. Take special care at historic landmarks and in historic districts to protect this public environment from intrusions, whether from excess paving, vehicular access and parking, high walls and fencing, or undue disruption of the natural contours or bermed terraces."

The HPRB's policy in denying requests for curb cuts, driveways and parking in public space has been upheld by the Mayor's Agent and the DC Court of Appeals. The Mayor's Agent has upheld the Board's recommendation of denial for curb cuts, driveways and parking pads in public space in many of the city's rowhouse districts (336 Maryland Avenue, NE and 331 Constitution Avenue, NE on Capitol Hill, 1612 18th Street, NW in Dupont Circle, 2225 R Street in Sheridan-Kalorama, and 942 P Street, NW in Shaw). In *Gondelman v. District of Columbia Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs* (2002), the DC Court of Appeals upheld the findings of the Mayor's Agent that the applicants' request for a curb cut and excavation of the character-defining front yard berm to build a garage under a Kalorama Triangle historic district residence was inconsistent with the purposes of the preservation law. Based on the consistent recommendations of the HPRB with regard to these and other curb cut cases, the HPO has routinely advised potential applicants that requests for new curb cuts and parking in public space would not be approved.

Recommendation
<u>The HPO recommends that the DC Historic Preservation Review Board find the proposed curb cuts and creation of a circular driveway in public space at 1720 16th Street, NW to be inconsistent with the purposes of the DC Historic Landmark and Historic District Protection Act, and that this finding be conveyed to the Board of Zoning Adjustment.</u>