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

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Property Address:	<b>1785 Massachusetts Avenue, NW</b>	<b>X</b>	Agenda
Landmark/District:	<b>McCormick Apartments</b>		Consent Calendar
Meeting Date:	<b>May 23, 2013</b>	<b>X</b>	Concept Review
H.P.A. Number:	<b>13-323</b>	<b>X</b>	Alteration
Staff Reviewer:	<b>Steve Callcott</b>		New Construction
			Demolition
			Subdivision

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Hartman-Cox Architects, representing the American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research (AEI), seeks conceptual design review for a penthouse addition and exterior and interior alterations to the McCormick Apartments, more commonly known as the headquarters of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. The property has recently been purchased by AEI and will be renovated to serve as their office and meeting space.

**Property History and Description**

Designed by the French born (but American educated) architect Jules Henri de Sibour, 1785 Massachusetts Avenue was constructed as a luxury apartment building in 1915, and is among the finest examples of Beaux-Arts inspired architecture in the city. The building served as the Washington home of several notable residents, including financier and industrialist Andrew Mellon while he served as Secretary of the Treasury in the Harding, Coolidge and Hoover administrations, and then in the 1930s when he was building his extensive art collection and planning the founding of the National Gallery of Art.

On the primary floors, the building originally contained one apartment per floor with grandly-proportioned and detailed public rooms, bedrooms, and servants' quarters. While serving as an office building for the past 70+ years, it remains remarkably intact inside and out. The building is a contributing structure to the Massachusetts Avenue and Dupont Circle Historic Districts, and listed as a landmark on the DC Inventory of Historic Sites. It is one of only 75 buildings in the city that is listed as a National Historic Landmark, a distinction reserved for buildings of the highest level of national significance.

**Proposal**

Exterior work will include masonry repointing, repair of original windows and metal work, and a metal mesh installed around the original basement areaway guardrails for code compliance. A one-story addition is proposed within a portion of the site's private alley to the east, and a light well within the alley would be filled in at each level for a second fire stair and elevator. A new stair and accessible entrance with a retractable exterior lift is proposed on the P Street elevation, where an existing window sill would be lowered to allow for conversion to an entrance.

A new penthouse would be constructed on the roof for mechanical equipment and access to a roof top terrace. The outside edge of the penthouse would be set back 22' from the outside edge of the building (23' on P Street) to tie in with the building's existing structure. The penthouse would be 13' tall around the outside edges, with a central core (housing elevator overruns) would

rise to 18'6". It would be designed as a secondary mansard roof, with pedimented dormers and French doors, and finished in synthetic slate with copper trim.

The significant interior spaces are being preserved and restored, with modifications limited to secondary and support spaces. The elevator around which the decorative central stair wraps would be removed to allow the stair to be open; the stair would be capped by a new skylight. The National Trust will retain a perpetual conservation easement on the exterior and much of the interior of the building, which will also allow for occasional public access.

### **Evaluation**

The proposal has been developed with the sensitivity and thoughtfulness that a building of this caliber warrants. The interior modifications will preserve the building's distinctive plan and significant features and finishes. The modest additions within the alley and light well will be virtually imperceptible from exterior view and will not affect important character-defining features of the building. The mesh being added to the areaway railings is reversible and will have minimal visual impact on the building, particularly if foundation plantings around the areaway are maintained. The precise gauge and visual appearance should be selected so as to be as visually transparent as possible.

Various options for a universally accessible entrance were evaluated. Accessibility through the existing front door – with its shallow landing, flared stone stairs, tight location to the corner, and interior stairs leading from the vestibule to the lobby – would be impossible without significant alterations that would compromise the quality of the entry sequence. Converting the window immediately adjacent to the front door, in the first opening on 18<sup>th</sup> Street, was also studied but was visually awkward in this location and resulted in plan inefficiencies. The proposed location on P Street leaves the front entrance and surrounding fenestration unaltered, while creating a new secondary entrance that is supported in plan by providing a fully accessible public entrance with direct access to the building's auditorium.

A variety of options for the penthouse have also been studied. The footprint has been dictated by the building's existing structure and the goal of tying into that structure so as to not compromise the decorative ceilings and other finishes in the fifth floor Mellon apartment. With a generous setback of almost 2:1, the penthouse will not be visible except from several blocks away, such as from Dupont Circle and 18<sup>th</sup> Street just below Q Street. While alternative designs were evaluated that provided a sharper contrast with the underlying building, these options looked discordant and drew undue attention. Conversely, the proposed design quietly and harmoniously extends the materials, form and rhythm of the underlying roof in a manner that is uniquely appropriate for a high-style Beaux-Arts building.

### **Recommendation**

*The HPO recommends that the Board find the proposed concept compatible with the building and consistent with the purposes of the preservation act and delegate final approval to staff.*