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

Property Address:	2025 Massachusetts Avenue, NW	X	Agenda
Landmark/District:	Samuel Bryan House		Consent Calendar
Meeting Date:	January 27, 2011	X	Concept Review
H.P.A. Number:	11-110	X	Alteration
Staff Reviewer:	Steve Callcott		New Construction
			Demolition
			Subdivision

Architect Ralph Cunningham, FAIA (Cunningham/Quill), representing the Zients Family Foundation, seeks conceptual approval for exterior alterations to the rear elevation of the Samuel Bryan house, a landmark within the Dupont Circle and Massachusetts Avenue historic districts.

Property History and Description

2025 Massachusetts Avenue, NW was constructed in 1885 as the residence for Samuel M. Bryan. Bryan started his career in the Post Office Department, a position he left in 1872 to go to Japan to present a scheme for reorganizing the Japanese postal system. His plan was accepted, and he was subsequently appointed by the Emperor to negotiate postal treaties with the United States. When he left Japan in 1882, he was decorated with the Order of the Rising Sun and presented with a gift of \$12,000, which financed the construction of the subject property. Bryan then joined the Chesapeake & Potomac Telephone Company in its early years, serving as general manager and then president during the period when telephone service went from being a novelty to a crucial part of everyday life. He retired from C & P in 1899.

The house was designed by architect W. Bruce Gray, who formed a partnership with Harvey Page in 1879 and together designed some of the finest Victorian-era residences in the city, mostly in the Dupont Circle area. Their residence for J. Belden Noble, 1785 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W. (1880, demolished), was considered one of the city's best examples of High Victorian Gothic. Gray withdrew from the partnership with Page in 1885 but continued to practice on his own. Unfortunately, most of Gray's work, both designed together with Page and individually, has been demolished; while several of his rowhouse designs remain, the Samuel Bryan residence is the most notable survivor of his work. The house is featured in *Massachusetts Avenue Architecture, Volume 2*, (1975), published by the Commission of Fine Arts.

2025 is Romanesque in design, with a strong circular tower, round-arched entrance portal, an articulated one-story bay, and decorative stained glass windows. The rear elevation, facing Q Street, has a metal oriel bay that corresponds to the stair landing in the grand hall. A third story was added to the kitchen wing in the early 1900s, and a one-story rear

wing added in 1950. The house remained in residential use until the 1940s, and served as the headquarters for a church for the latter half of the 20th century. It is currently vacant.

Proposal

The proposal calls for conversion of the building into offices for a non-profit foundation that provides after-school mentoring services. The basement and first floor would house spaces for counseling, offices and a computer lab for students; the upper floors would house small conference rooms and foundation offices.

The exterior scope of work includes restoration of masonry surfaces, repair of original windows, and in-kind replacement of the slate roof. Several alterations are proposed at the rear of the building, which faces on to Q Street, in order to improve this elevation's street-presence and to provide an accessible at-grade entrance. The rear yard, currently a mound of broken asphalt paving, would be regraded and landscaped as an urban courtyard with a low perimeter wall, decorative paving, screened trash storage, and landscaping. A new at-grade entrance would be established in the rear wall of the kitchen wing. The one-story 1950 wing would be replaced with a two-story brick wing of the same footprint; it would be fenestrated with a two-story contemporary corner bay in a similar language as the new entrance.

Evaluation

The proposed exterior alterations are generally sensitive and compatible, distinguishable as contemporary alterations to the building, and limited to a secondary elevation. The changes will address long-standing design problems of the site, in which a grim parking pad and visible rear elevation will be made more open, inviting and beneficial to the urban streetscape. As the design continues to be developed and refined, the HPO has recommended that a second look be given to the scale of the new opening on the kitchen wing; with a slight reduction in size, the opening would be more in character with the residential scale of the building while still serving as a prominent entrance. Similarly, the HPO would encourage eliminating the application of new materials where they simply cover over original brick surfaces, such as the metal panels on the side of the kitchen opening and the applied brick at the base of the building.

Regretfully, this otherwise very sensitive and laudable preservation project will be marred by a needless alteration to the grand hall, in which the original stair, arcaded gallery and fireplace will be removed. While there is no interior designation of the property and the planned interior modifications are therefore not subject to regulatory review, the HPO nevertheless strongly encourages the applicants to reconsider their decision to remove these features. Specifically recognized in *Massachusetts Avenue Architecture*¹, the grand hall and its galleried stair represent one of the finest and most intact Victorian residential interiors in the city. That it is the last remaining residential interior designed by one of the city's foremost designers of Victorian architecture makes the loss particularly unfortunate.

¹ "The interior though more decorative is related in style to the exterior. The single greatest elements [of the interior] are the central living halls and galleried stair."



Hall and Galleried Stair, Samuel Bryan House, 2025 Massachusetts Avenue, NW
Massachusetts Avenue Architecture, Volume 2 (1975), Commission of Fine Arts

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Board approve the conceptual design for the exterior rehabilitation and alterations as consistent with the purposes of the preservation act, and delegate final design approval to the staff. The HPO also recommends that the HPRB encourage the applicants to reconsider their decision to alter the original hall.