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

Landmark/District:	Capitol Hill Historic District	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agenda
Address:	700 Constitution Avenue, NE	<input type="checkbox"/> Consent
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Concept
Meeting Date:	March 22, 2012	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Alteration
Case Number:	12-150	<input type="checkbox"/> New Construction
Staff Reviewer:	Amanda Molson	<input type="checkbox"/> Demolition
		<input type="checkbox"/> Subdivision

CapHill Partners, LLC, with drawings prepared by BBG-BBGM, requests concept approval for exterior alterations and a rear addition to 700 Constitution Avenue, NE in the Capitol Hill Historic District.

Property Description

The Eastern Dispensary Casualty Hospital was established in a former residential building on this site in 1904. A large addition, located at the northwest corner of 8th Street and Constitution Avenue, NE, was designed by Harry McQuary and constructed in 1928. The original hospital building was demolished in the 1950s, with a substantial addition to the 1928 wing built in 1956 and smaller additions in the 1960s. These additions include the four-story wing that extends along Massachusetts Avenue, north onto 7th Street, and north onto 8th Street. The additions are typical institutional buildings of their era, designed in a spare Colonial Revival style.

In 1972, the building was altered to include a new entry from 8th Street and a remodeled entry at the corner of 8th and Constitution. It is likely that this renovation also introduced the current one-over-one metal windows and box cornice that obscures the original. Several years later, a new patient “tower” was constructed further to the north along 7th Street (now known as the Specialty Hospital of Washington).

During the second half of the twentieth century, the building carried the names of Rogers Memorial Hospital, Capitol Hill Hospital, and MedLink Hospital at various times. However, the 1928 and 1950s/1960s portions of the building have been mostly vacant for a number of years. The square also includes the historic Parish of St. Monica and St. James, which was constructed in phases beginning in 1880 and is separated from the subject property by an alley entered from 8th Street.

The Board has a lengthy history of reviews at this site, having seen complex proposals to redevelop the property in 2000 and 2005. Those projects, unlike the current proposal, included replacement of the Specialty Hospital of Washington wing and new construction on the north side of the square along C Street and 8th Street.

Proposal

The current proposal does not affect the 1970s Specialty Hospital of Washington, which remains in operation under separate management. Under a ground lease, the applicants seek to convert the remainder of the property to residential use as apartments. The 1928 portion of the building will be restored, the non-contributing 1956 additions retained and altered, and a new rear addition constructed with access to underground parking below.

Restoration

The boxy, corrugated metal cornice cover will be removed, hopefully revealing the original, intact cornice beneath. If, by chance, the original cornice has previously been removed or has suffered from damage, an in-kind replacement will be fabricated using historic photos as a guide. The metal, one-over-one windows will be replaced with new multi-light, aluminum-clad wood windows to match the original pane configuration and profiles. Because this building is considered a “large building” under the Board’s window standards, the use of aluminum-clad wood is acceptable as an alternative material to wood.

Historic photos will also guide restoration of the main entrance to the 1928 wing, located on Constitution Avenue. The inappropriate canopy cover will be removed, a new canopy reminiscent of the original will be installed, and the masonry opening will be returned to its original proportions. Likewise, the projecting emergency room entrance on 8th Street will be removed and the opening restored to an expanse of masonry and windows. The later additions along Massachusetts Avenue, the rear elevation, and on the roof will also be removed.

Alterations

Though work on the 1928 portion of the building will be restorative in nature, some alterations are planned for the 1956 additions. A series of projecting bays are proposed along 7th Street, Massachusetts Avenue, and 8th Street. Echoing the Colonial Revival style of the building, the bays would be of masonry construction with precast lintels and sills. Stopping short of the cornice by one floor, the roof of each bay would serve as a small balcony for fourth floor units.

At the basement level, window wells would be added for light. The main entrance to the building would be shifted to nest within the recessed portion of the 1928 and 1956 wings along Massachusetts Avenue, turning the original entrance at 8th Street and Constitution into a door dedicated to serving one interior unit directly. The design of the new entrance incorporates a terrace area and wheelchair accessible ramp, along with a second set of doors leading outside from the lobby.

Having removed the large, tiered roof penthouse on the western-most 1956 addition and two other roof penthouses on the eastern-most 1956 addition, a new mechanical penthouse will be added (extending along the Massachusetts Avenue elevation). It will be constructed of brick with a precast band near the roofline. A much shorter (4’) elevator override will be located on the 8th Street elevation roof.

Addition

A shallow rear addition will be added in the rear. Rather than introducing yet another addition that mimics the Colonial Revival style of the 1928 wing, the applicants have selected a more

contemporary design. The break between old and new is announced with a vertical row of windows, which then turns the corner (and becomes less visible) using a palette of terra cotta rain screen panels. The vertical expanse of fenestration is used again in the rear addition to create breaks in the massing, with the windows on the rear elevation planned as casements. A second terrace would be located at the base of the new addition, in an area currently occupied by a non-contributing addition that will be removed. In front of the terrace, a vehicular ramp, accessed from the alley entered off 8th Street, will lead to two levels of parking. While one level will be provided in the existing basement, the second will be excavated below the building.

Evaluation

The proposed restoration work is consistent with preservation standards for the treatment of contributing buildings, and the removal of non-contributing later additions raises no preservation concerns. The applicants should consult with HPO in evaluating the condition of the exposed, original cornice, and, in particular, in the design for a replacement if the original is missing or heavily damaged. HPO will also review specifications for window and door replacements, masonry work, and any building signage to ensure that they meet the Board's standards.

The planned basement window wells are generally consistent with the Board's design guidelines (*Preservation and Design Guidelines for Basement Entrances and Windows*), in that they have reduced to the minimum projection needed to allow for egress and do not dominate the landscape. However, not shown on the plans are any railings that might be needed around the periphery of the wells for safety, a requirement that would make this alteration more visually obtrusive. Pursuant to the Board's guidelines, decreasing the depth of the window wells or providing an alternative means of protection (such as a grate) should be utilized if code requirements require a railing.

In reviewing new construction projects and changes to non-contributing buildings or wings, the Board has cited the standard in the preservation law that they be "not incompatible" with the character of the historic district, a more flexible standard than is required when dealing directly with changes to historic fabric. The most obvious change in overall massing will be the new projecting bays. The applicants have moved away from an earlier proposal to construct narrower and more numerous bays that were more reminiscent of small-scale Victorian-era bayfront rowhouses than of an expansive former hospital designed in the Colonial Revival style. The most recent set of plans is more successful by widening the proportions of the bays and reducing their number. The effect breaks down the monotonous expanses of masonry on the non-contributing additions, while also grounding the bays with more visual weight and respecting the innate horizontality of this building.

The rear addition is clearly differentiated from previous additions to the building and is compatible in overall design and materials. The use of terra cotta rain screens complements the masonry building, and the casement windows and vertical expanses of glass provide relief to the long expanse of wall.

Although utilizing the original entrance at the corner of 8th and Constitution would be ideal, the applicants have stated that certain accessibility and internal complications arise with this solution. The proposed main entrance off Massachusetts Avenue replaces an incompatible later

addition and is recessed from the contributing portion of the building. The metal railings shown in the rendering should be streamlined for better consistency with the character of this rather simple building.

The applicants have stated that they anticipate removing the existing metal fence surrounding the public space, which raises no preservation issues considering that it is of more recent vintage. Should a fence become necessary at a later time, a design more in keeping with the character of the neighborhood should be explored.

The Board has long been concerned about the visibility of mechanical penthouses, particularly in neighborhoods like Capitol Hill where they have never been part of the character of the historic district. The proposed mechanical penthouse along Massachusetts Avenue is replacing an eyesore and reducing that mass in height and footprint, arguing for some flexibility. However, this is an opportunity to significantly improve the present situation, and the applicants should continue to explore reductions to the penthouse in height as design development continues. To this end, HPO would discourage the introduction of amenity spaces or roof decks to the roof plan; both would only serve to worsen attempts to limit the new mass. It is understood from the applicants that no new cell phone antennas are proposed for the roof, and they are reminded that any future antennas would be subject to HPO review and permits.

Although archeological investigation is not required as part of this private development project, the City Archeologist evaluated the existing site and proposed plans as a courtesy, in light of the excavation needed for the parking garage. Her assessment, based on map research, was that three row houses were present by 1857 and appear to have been replaced by a brick dwelling around 1884. That dwelling became part of the hospital around 1904 and was used until it was demolished between 1957- 1962. An addition after the 1960s, apparently with a basement, covers the footprint of the 1884 building. It is this area that will be excavated to create multi-level sub-ground parking. Because the 1880s structure was demolished so late (1957-1962) and now is covered by a building with a basement, it is unlikely that any remains from the earlier occupations survive intact. Accordingly, archaeological testing is not warranted or recommended for this project.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Board find the concept to be consistent with the purposes of the preservation act and that final approval be delegated to staff. However, this recommendation should not be construed as constituting approval for any necessary zoning relief.