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

Property Address: **915 F Street NW** () Agenda
Landmark/District: **Equitable Co-Operative Building Association (Interior Landmark)** () Consent Calendar
() Denial Calendar
Meeting Date: **April 4, 2013** () Concept Review
H.P.A. Number: **#13-027** () Alteration
Staff Reviewer: **Brendan Meyer** () New Construction
() Demolition
() Subdivision

The applicant, owner Douglas Development Corporation, seeks concept approval for a five-story rear addition on top of the rear of the Equitable Co-Operative Building Association, a landmark that is also located in the Downtown Historic District. The landmark designation includes the interior banking hall. The massing concept was approved by the Board (6-0) in November 2012 as compatible with the landmark and historic district, and the Board directed the applicant to return after further development of the elevations. The design team has changed. Plans were prepared by Antunovich Associates.

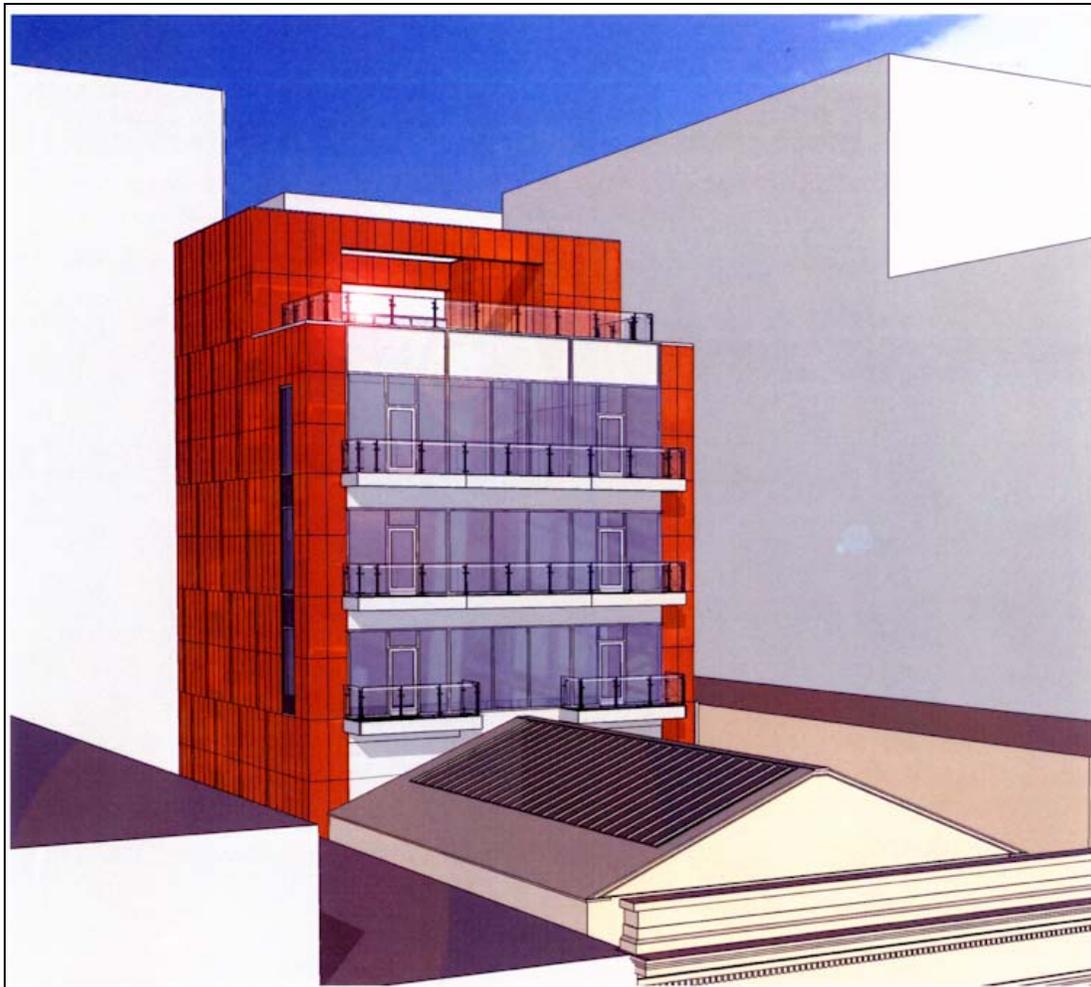


Figure 1 Rear addition at 915 F Street NW clad in glass and Cor-ten™ weathering steel

Property Description and Context

The Equitable Co-Operative Building Association is a monumental scaled, one-story bank building in the classical revival style. Built in 1912, it is a classic example of a “temple front” bank building, with a façade that features four marble Ionic columns *in antis* supporting a flat entablature. The tall front entry is protected by large sliding bronze doors and leads to an interior vaulted banking hall illuminated by a large skylight. Other decoration includes plaster Corinthian pilasters and cornice, mahogany wainscoting and millwork, and a Tennessee marble floor. The banking hall is protected by an interior designation.

The rear exterior is utilitarian. Its most prominent feature is a two-story, rear wing that houses the original Board Room and a non-original addition. Due to the tight confines of the narrow alley and surrounding taller buildings, the peaked roof of the banking hall skylight is not prominently visible.

Proposal

The applicant has selected a metal and glass cladding scheme for all elevations of the addition. The selected metal is a panelized weathering steel product called cor-ten that will install as unfinished steel but in 2-3 years oxidize to a stable layer of rust that acts as a barrier against destructive corrosion (Figure 1).

The front façade mostly consists of a glass curtain wall with glass balcony railings and metal spandrel panels, enclosed on each end by column of cor-ten panels. The cor-ten material turns onto both side elevations which, save for a narrow column of windows at the south edges of the side walls, are unfenestrated. The side walls are patterned with a staggered rhythm of thin, inset cor-ten panels, each one story in height. The rear elevation rests on a base of large masonry units and repeats the organization of the front façade but without balconies. The roof is occupied by a partially covered terrace with a glass railing on the F Street side. The penthouse on top of the roof has four corner towers connected by cross-pieces, houses the elevator over-run, stairs and mechanical equipment, and shelters a large skylight over the 7th floor.

The height of the addition, including penthouse, has been reduced from 105 feet to 98 feet above alley level. It would be set back 69 feet from the façade, preserving the existing skylight that is integral to the integrity of the historically designated banking hall (Figure 2).

Evaluation

The proportions and geometries ascribed to the front façade of the addition are not a primary concern to the evaluation of compatibility of the addition. Although, introducing some depth where the cor-ten meets the curtain wall, by pushing back the curtain wall minimally and creating a reveal of cor-ten, would recreate an *in antis* pier-column relationship like that in the historic bank façade and the landmark Old Masonic Temple at 901 F Street NW.

Cor-ten is an ambitious material choice for an addition to a historic landmark, but is currently popular with contemporary designers. A notable recent use of it was to clad the Barclays Center basketball arena in Brooklyn, New York.¹ A smaller local example that has only started to weather was recently constructed at 705 6th Street NW, but was not reviewed by the Board because it is not in a historic district. One technical criticism of the material that should be considered at 915 F Street is that as water runs off the material an orange oxidation stain can spread to surrounding materials and

¹ New York Times, August 27, 2012, “Constructing a Façade both Rugged and Rusty,” p. A20. Web accessible.

surfaces like concrete and glass.¹ In that respect, wind-borne water coming off the cor-ten and landing on the historic banking hall skylight—one of the most character defining features visible from the landmark interior—could be stained by spots of rust.

In addition to these technical concerns is the question of whether a brut material with a strong industrial aesthetic is appropriate in the context of the Downtown Historic District which is characterized by commercial buildings that tried to convey a degree of success and sophistication by using finished, and often luxurious, materials. While a strategy of material contrast between a historic building and its modern addition is sometimes useful as a way to distinguish between the old and new, contrast can also have a very conspicuous result.

HPO has encouraged the designers to mitigate the introduction of a tower addition behind the small scale buildings of F Street by designing the material to blend into its background. Whether that means to replicate the rear or front of a building that is in the distance behind 915 F Street, those materials were traditionally masonry brick, stone or stucco and occasionally terra cotta. A characteristic of masonry is that as it is seen from farther away, any jointwork becomes less pronounced. That is opposite of the effect of the pronounced seams in the cor-ten, effectively making the addition appear closer to the viewer than it actually stands. For as much as the cor-ten sections will be visible above 915 F Street, selection of a different material is recommended.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Board direct the applicant to revise the elevation materials to an alternative, preferably masonry material, and delegate final approval to staff.

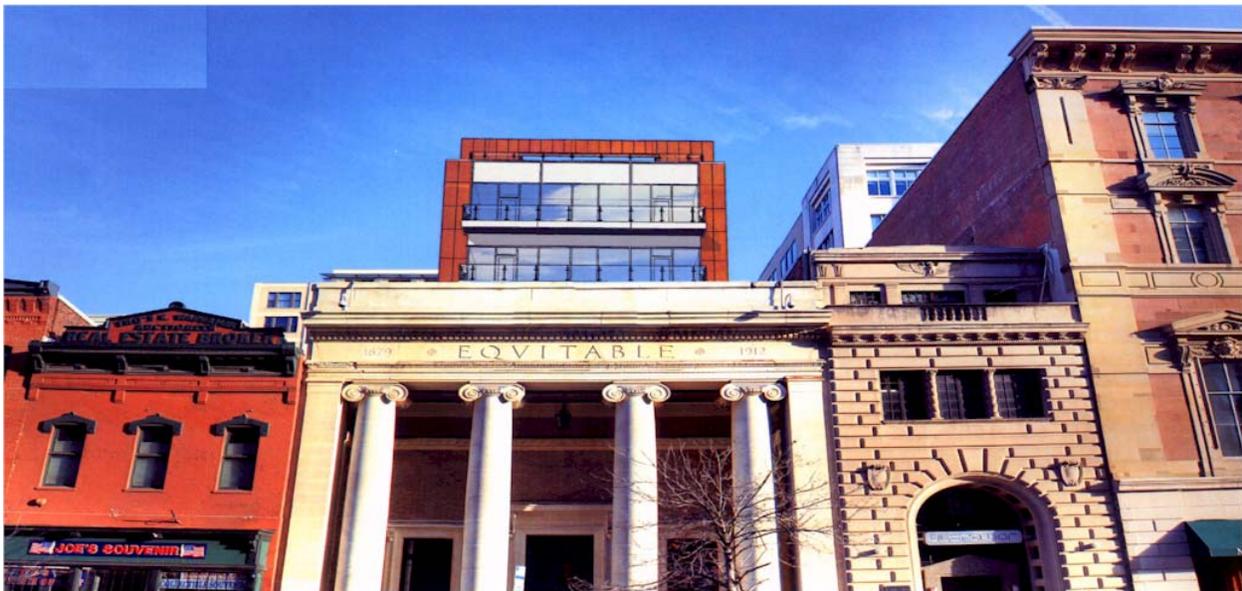


Figure 2. Proposed view from F Street NW showing existing taller buildings on either side of the proposed addition.