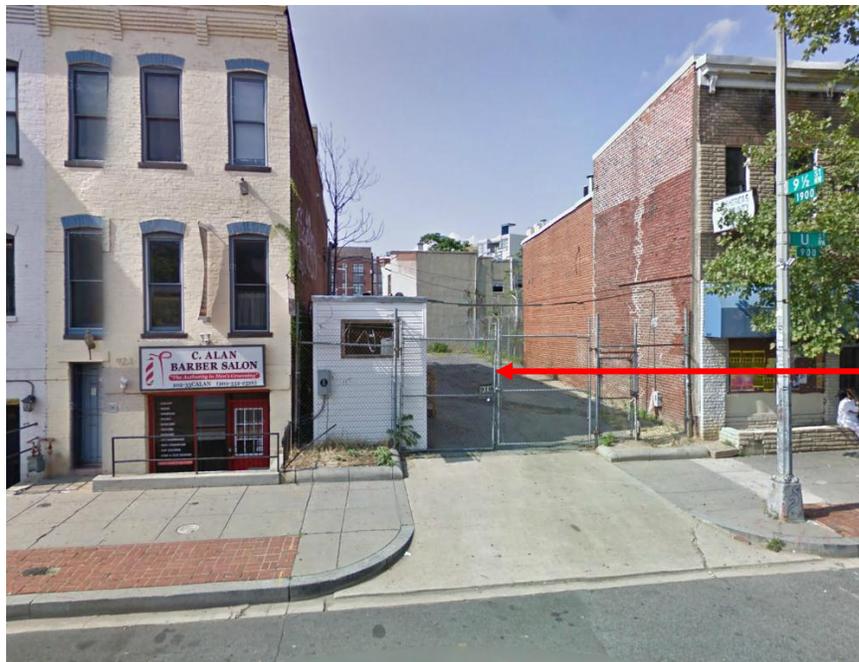

**HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD
STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION**

Property Address:	919 U Street, NW	X Agenda
Landmark/District:	Greater U Street Historic District	Consent Calendar
Meeting Date:	March 22, 2012	X Concept Review
H.P.A. Number:	12-208	Alteration
Staff Reviewer:	Jonathan Mellon	X New Construction
		Demolition

Edit Architects, representing owner Ian Hilton, seeks conceptual review for construction of a one-story commercial building on a vacant lot in the Greater U Street Historic District.

Property History and Description



919 U Street

919 U Street was once the site of a two-story brick rowhouse built in 1884 for owner Diller B. Groff, and is part of a block of U Street that consists of modest two-story residential buildings that were converted to commercial use through the 20th century. The wider context which includes later commercial buildings of varying heights and vacant lots, results in a varied streetscape with the likelihood of considerable change to come as the area further develops.

Proposal

The proposal calls for the construction of a one-story steel structure enclosed by (but not structurally attached to) the existing party walls on each side, with new front and rear walls. Shipping containers are to be used for the cladding of the front elevation, as well as to segregate the interior uses.

The front elevation would consist of a combination of corrugated shipping containers flanking a recessed aluminum and glass storefront system with glass entry door, and open take-out window with an angled metal canopy. The design calls for the first floor to be topped by a shipping container with a centered internally illuminated sign. The remainder of the site would consist of an open summer garden enclosed by a 7-0' wood fence and topped by a partially covered metal truss roof system. Although the primary view of the site will be from U Street, the rear / side will be visible from Vermont Avenue.

The applicant has stated that the proposal is considered a temporary use for the site until such time as a long term redevelopment of the site can take place.

Planning Considerations

The site is located within the Uptown Arts Overlay District which “was established to encourage retail, entertainment and residential uses that require pedestrian activity; an increased presence and integration of the arts and related cultural and arts-related support uses; a design character and identity of the area by establishing physical design standards and adaptive reuse of older buildings in combination with new buildings.”

The Uptown Arts Overlay District requires, among other things, that 50% of the surface area of the ground floor elevation of a structure be devoted to “clear” glass windows and entrances:

- 1903.4 Not less than fifty percent (50%) of the surface area of the streetwall(s) at the ground level of each building on a lot that fronts on a pedestrian street shall be devoted to display windows and to entrances to commercial uses or to the building; provided:
- (a) The windows shall use clear or low-emissivity glass, except for decorative or architectural accent; and
 - (b) Entrances to the building, including entrances to shops and the main lobby, shall be separated by not more than forty feet (40 ft.) on average for the linear frontage of the building.

The applicant has worked with the HPO to revise the proposal so as to have the primary (front) elevation comply with this requirement.

Evaluation and Recommendation

The use of shipping containers for temporary retail and arts uses is an increasingly popular option for activating vacant urban sites. Particularly in the recent recession when many redevelopment projects have been put on hold, shipping containers have been used to provide an affordable and visually compelling temporary solution. Successful examples can be found in cities such as London and New York, where they have served

to enliven once barren streetscapes; a similar proposal is in the works for a site adjacent to the Washington Nationals stadium –

“Organizers will test a concept that has won accolades in New York and London - turning refurbished shipping containers into instant designer storefronts, creating an open marketplace that is part foodie festival and farmer’s market, part entertainment venue and beer garden, and part shopping district. Playing off the success of London’s BoxPark and Brooklyn’s Dekalb Market, the project will utilize the ultimate green idea - recycling - by turning salvaged shipping containers into architecturally imaginative shops.”



Proposed Site (Between N & M Streets, SW), Washington, DC



BoxPark, London, England



DeKalb Market, Brooklyn, New York

By making the design choice to use shipping containers for the cladding of the structure, the proposal has sought to add to the developing design character of the Uptown Arts District. The use of corrugated metal for the front façade -- an unusual material not typically associated with buildings in Washington -- will contribute to the varying streetscape of U Street. The proposal is also consistent with the Office of Planning's (OP) Temporary Urbanism Initiative which seeks to transform vacant spaces into vibrant destinations. Temporary Urbanism helps meet several objectives established by the District of Columbia through the Creative DC Action Agenda and the Retail Action Roadmap including supporting creative entrepreneurs, activating commercial corridors and highlighting their retail potential, providing residents with unique services and activities, and promoting neighborhoods.

The proposed new construction is not incompatible with the character of its location and the Greater U Street Historic District. The design successfully relates to many of the important characteristics for achieving compatibility set forth in the HPRB's *New Construction in Historic Districts* design guideline. The building follows the established street wall on this block, has a clear frontal orientation to the street, and its height and massing are within the established range found on this street. While the use of corrugated metal is a departure from the largely masonry facades of U Street, the façade will have texture and visual interest with a composition that is characteristic of the district, and fenestration proportions that allow the structure to relate to its historic neighbors.

The HPO recommends that the Review Board determine the proposed conceptual design to be consistent with the purposes of the preservation act and delegate final approval to staff.