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

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Property Address:	<b>926 N Street NW</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agenda
Landmark/District:	<b>Blagden Alley-Naylor Court Historic District</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Consent Calendar
ANC:	<b>2F</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Denial Calendar
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Concept Review
Meeting Date:	<b>March 22, 2012</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Alteration
H.P.A. Number:	<b>#12-160</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> New Construction
Staff Reviewer:	<b>Brendan Meyer</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Demolition
		<input type="checkbox"/> Subdivision

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The owner, The United House of Prayer for All People, seeks concept review for a new four-story, 12-unit residential building with ground floor commercial at 926 N Street NW in the Blagden Alley-Naylor Court and Shaw Historic Districts. Plans were prepared by Suzane Reatig Architecture.

### **Property Description and Context**

The existing lot at 926 N Street is occupied by a warehouse/loading dock facility built in 1953. In the historic district application for Blagden Alley-Naylor Court, approved by the Board in 1990, it was listed as a non-contributing building. It will be demolished to accommodate the new construction.

The 900 block of N Street shows a variation of building styles, construction dates and building types. This is a common context in cases where development took place over a long period of time and by different builders constructing projects one or two at a time. No one style, builder, or type dominates. This block features flat-front brick rowhouses from the 1870s, four- and five-story apartment buildings like the 65-foot tall Henrietta from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and a formstone clad 1870s twin-tower Gothic Revival church. Heights, roof forms, gaps and setbacks are varied. Many residential buildings exhibit storefront alterations c. 1900 at their ground floors. The Board most recently examined this block in October 2011 when it approved the concept plan for a 40 foot tall rowhouse structure for 934 N Street on the vacant lot immediately adjacent to this site.

### **Proposal**

The new building would consist of commercial space and apartment lobby on the ground floor and 14 residential units above, arranged in an H-shaped plan. The first and second floors will be standard height with the third floor extended with a mezzanine level so those residential units can have loft spaces.<sup>1</sup>

The front façade is broken down symmetrically with a central entrance bay with a large sun-screen flanked on either side by masonry bay. Each side bay includes a projection into public space that is mostly glazing. The central bay will set back about six feet from the projection faces. Scaled renderings illustrate a 50 foot height at the main roof line behind the projections.

While material selection has not been determined, the renderings show a contemporary composition. This includes large areas of glazing at the commercial ground floor and residential fenestration favoring symmetrically arranged gangs of spandrel panels and hopper, awning and fixed windows. The alley façade is a regular rhythm of small horizontal and vertical windows and operable vehicle doors. The vehicle door towards the front would accommodate air circulation in the commercial space (not vehicle circulation).

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<sup>1</sup> The plans use the convention of assigning “First Floor” to the first story above the ground floor.

## **Archaeology**

The vicinity of the project is very interesting because of the presence of alley dwellings. Square 368 was included as a case study for Borchert's (1982) research on alley life in the District. The first improvement of this lot was for 12 frame residences. However, the presence of the large garage structure at the south end of the parcel has likely obliterated remnants of the dwellings that preceded it. Alley dwellings typically did not have basements or subsurface features, so it is unlikely that intact remains are present beneath the garage. Archaeological investigations are not necessary for the proposed project.

## **Community**

The concept was originally filed and publicly noticed for review at the January Board meeting but postponed at the request of ANC 2F so that the ANC could submit a recommendation to the Board. The project was presented to the ANC on February 1 and the ANC's Community Development Committee (CDC) on February 22. The CDC took no action on the design but recommended the design be revised and return to the CDC's March meeting. The applicant has chosen to forego a third meeting and to instead present to the HPRB. The Blagden Alley/Naylor Court Association has also participated and has communicated to HPO that the design is dated and out of context.

## **Evaluation and Recommendation**

While working with the ANC and community, the concept has tried out several contemporary iterations. Throughout, the height, massing and form have substantially remained the same as components and materials have been rearranged for the sake of finding the right balance and emphasis. The current concept design is compatible with the size and hierarchical structure of buildings in the Blagden Alley-Naylor Court Historic District.

At a proposed height of 50 feet, 926 N Street would be the tallest structure on the south side of the block, but not out of context with its neighbors. Its immediate neighbors are 40 feet tall and the Henrietta Apartments across from 926 N is the tallest building on the street at 65 feet. The more critical issue for the site is its exceptional width of 68 feet. While the heights of the historic properties on this block vary, their proportions are generally more consistent. Most have a height to width ratio of 2 or 2.5 to 1. By breaking down the width of the façade into three roughly equal width components, the design reinforces the 2:1 pattern on the block by contributing side bays 48 feet tall and 24 feet wide.

This historic district is unique in the District for its focus on alley architecture and forms. While the street facing lots have been improved with formal residences typical of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century city, the interior of the square consists of informal spaces defined by large warehouses, garages, carriage houses and small alley-dwellings with an emphasis on accommodating vehicles of many periods. The concept design successfully evokes this character in a subtle and not overdone way. The front façade clearly and formally engages the street with a rhythm of projections and setbacks, while the same quality of materials wraps around the corner to engage the alley. The consistency in the quality of materials, and the generous use of vehicular doors on the alley side, activate this part of the building without stealing attention from the front.

As the design continues to be developed, it will be important to arrive at materials and construction details of the front and alley façades that keep the scale of the building compatible with its historic context. The three-story screen wall in the front center bay especially, and the fenestration generally, should be used to further break down the apparent width the composition. The symmetry of the front façade should also be reconsidered since symmetry focuses the eye on the center and tends to emphasize a building's

monolithic nature. Composing a side bay asymmetrically, then repeating it in the other side bay would establish a rhythm along the entire façade rather than anchor focus only at the center.

The HPO recommends that the Board find the concept for a new 14-unit residential building with the 50 foot height, massing and form as proposed to be compatible with the historic district and consistent with the purposes of the preservation act. Also, that the Board advise the applicant to return to the Board after further development of materials and components.

No part of this recommendation shall be construed as a recommendation for approval or disapproval for any necessary zoning relief or interpretation.