

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

Landmark/District:	Dupont Circle Historic District	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agenda
Address:	1772 Church Street, NW	<input type="checkbox"/> Consent
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Concept
Meeting Date:	October 2, 2014	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Alteration
Case Number:	14-530	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> New Construction
Staff Reviewer:	Kim Elliott, Steve Callcott	<input type="checkbox"/> Demolition
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Subdivision

CAS Riegler Development, in partnership with St. Thomas Episcopal Parish, seeks conceptual design review for a project incorporating the existing church parish hall into a mixed-use building that will include apartments and a new church at the corner of 18th and Church Streets in the Dupont Circle Historic District. The residential component of the project has been designed by Hickok Cole Architects; the church has been designed by MTFA Architecture.

Property Description

The original Gothic Revival St. Thomas' Parish Church was designed by Philadelphia architect Theophilus Chandler and completed in 1899. Among many prominent parishioners during its history was Franklin Roosevelt who was an active member when he lived nearby on N Street while serving as Assistant Secretary of the Navy; he later attended services and served as an honorary warden while President. The church was almost entirely destroyed by arson in 1970. Following the fire, the congregation had the remaining gable end wall, altar and portions of side walls at the east end of the site stabilized to serve as the backdrop to a small park owned by the church and open to the public.

The parish hall was constructed in 1922-23. Its Gothic façade styling and granite cladding were obviously intended to complement the original church but the structure is otherwise utilitarian in design on its secondary elevations and interior. Its façade is composed of two parts – the three-story main block and a small two-story entrance cloister. As the parish hall was built within the period of significance for the Dupont Circle Historic District (1875-1931) and associated with an important center of religious and social life for the neighborhood during that period, it qualifies as a contributing building to the district. The congregation currently uses the parish hall for its services.

Church Street is one of a series of narrow streets in the historic district that were laid out by real estate developers in the late 19th century to break up and maximize the development potential of the area's large L'Enfant blocks. It was developed with rows of Queen Anne, Edwardian and porch-front houses, 2-1/2 and 3-1/2 stories high, between the 1890s-1910s. Anchoring the east end of the block at 17th Street are significantly larger apartment buildings, rising to 4-1/2 and 6-1/2 stories, from the 1920s. The context on 18th Street includes large rowhouses, mansions, and large-scale apartment buildings.

Proposal

While the project will technically result in one building above a single parking garage, it has been designed as two separate abutting buildings above grade: a residential building that incorporates the parish hall on Church Street and a new church facing 18th Street.

The street elevation of the residential building has been composed as three distinct masses. The parish hall would be retained with two floors added on top of it set back to be not visible from Church Street;

the cloister entrance element would also be retained with five additional floors added; and the main block of the new building rising six stories at the front property line with an additional set back seventh floor, clad in brick to relate in coloration and fenestration to the parish hall. Through a series of setbacks from the Church Street elevation and the eastern property line, the building's height would be 69'-5"; the penthouse would rise an additional 10'-6". The penthouse level is proposed to combine mechanical equipment and outdoor space for the 7th floor units.

The plans call for retention of the parish hall's façade, most of its side walls, and its floor and roof assemblies. The rear elevation and a small portion at the rear of the main block are proposed for removal, as is the stair behind the cloister.

The church is proposed as a monumental corner building with clear ecclesiastical imagery. The design calls for masonry cladding in limestone or precast stone, brick, and stone. The façade on 18th Street would feature three two-story projecting bays with large-scaled Gothic style tracery glazing and a large metal cross that would extend above the roof overhang. The north and south facades are proposed to each have a curved stone bay with a large rose window bisected by a large metal cross; the stone would be salvaged from the church ruins. The church building would be four stories, rising to a height of 65' with a 12' tall penthouse. In addition to the stone salvaged for the exterior, portions of the ruins would be incorporated into the interior of the new church.

Preservation Issues

The project raises three preservation issues for the Board's consideration: 1) the proposed treatment of the church ruins; 2) the compatibility of alterations and additions to the parish house, and 3) the compatibility of the residential and church buildings with the character of the historic district.

Evaluation

Church ruins

Since this project was first proposed, the question as to whether the ruins are in and of themselves a contributing and thus a protected resource to the Dupont Circle Historic District has been an on-going point of discussion. Clearly, the 1970 fire destroyed the church to such an extent that it lost integrity as a building, but the issues of what level of protection should be afforded to the ruins and what is an acceptable level of treatment for their reuse have no direct precedents. In its review of a previous proposal for a reconstructed church on this site in 2010, the Board accepted that a new building could be constructed on the park site. However, the plan called for retaining the ruins *in situ*, thus not requiring a determination as to whether the ruins were specifically protected.

The ruins are not cited in the original district nomination or mentioned in any of the subsequent expansions. This type of omission is not uncommon for designations of the 1970s, which were often not as precise as current practice requires and didn't include a detailed list of contributing and non-contributing resources.¹ By contrast, the recent nomination for the Meridian Hill Historic District specifically cited the stone retaining wall of the long ago demolished Henderson Castle as a contributing object to that historic district.

As cited in a submission to the Board, the National Register of Historic Places documents several listings of churches and chapels now classified as ruins. However, these are not precisely analogous situations as those properties were specifically listed as ruins, retain a good deal more of their original building forms, and are part of larger rural sites that provide a stronger sense of original context and setting. The comparison to the Henderson Castle wall is also not quite analogous, as this isn't a ruin but

¹ The Dupont Circle Historic District was first identified in 1964 and designated under the preservation act in 1978. It was expanded both geographically and in its period of significance in 1985 and 2005.

a fully intact object and an important representative feature of Mary Foote Henderson, the seminal figure in the development history of that district.

The condition of the ruins must also be considered. The extent to which the ruins may have been reconstructed or altered during their stabilization in the early 1970s is not well documented, but it appears that some reconstruction and patching of missing stone in alternative materials took place. No structural report has been produced, but photographs and onsite observation illustrate deterioration, vandalism and poor quality repairs; the gable wall also appears to be leaning out-of-plumb.

The ruins and the park to which they have served as a backdrop are evocative and unique features that the neighborhood has been able to enjoy and appreciate for four decades. While the loss of the ruins as visual features and the park as an urban repose are lamentable, any project that incorporates them and permits construction is going to alter their current condition and public visibility. As fragmentary objects – and ones showing evidence of deterioration – it seems reasonable that the congregation should be permitted to salvage and reuse these artifacts from the original church in its new building. This type of reuse is not without historical precedent, as it has not been uncommon for congregations to take elements of their building with them – religious iconography, alters, stained glass windows, even corner stones – when deconsecrating a church or relocating to a new structure.

Parish Hall alterations and additions

The proposal calls for retaining approximately 80% of the existing parish hall, including the north, east, and west facades, and the majority of the floor and roof assemblies; the rear 20% of the building would be removed. Given the utilitarian character of the rear and interior of the building, the extent of removal would not compromise important character-defining features of the structure or the building's aesthetic contributions to the historic district, and would not qualify as demolition as defined in the historic preservation regulations.² The Church Street façade will be restored, and the east side wall's original masonry openings reestablished and filled with industrial sash windows to replicate their original condition.

The two-story addition atop the main block of the parish hall has been designed with substantial setbacks -- 17' for the first additional floor; 14' for the second -- to ensure that they will not be visible from street view. The additional floors are compatible as they would not alter the perceived massing, height or roofline of the parish hall or introduce apparent additional height immediately adjacent to the rowhouses to the east. Some greater license with typical preservation standards is taken for the five additional floors set atop the retained façade of the cloister. With a setback of approximately 6 feet from the cloister wall, these floors will clearly be visible. The compositional goal is to have this link read both as the primary entrance to the apartment building and secondary to the primary mass to the west; inset balconies and a high proportion on glazing are proposed to give it a lighter weight than the primary mass to the west.

Compatibility of residential building:

The height, mass, and architectural vocabulary of the residential building is compatible with the character of the historic district. As is illustrated on this and many blocks throughout Dupont Circle, it is not uncommon to have rowhouse blocks anchored by taller buildings. The design appropriately concentrates most of the mass and height on the main block of the new building at the west side of the site closest to the church, and incorporates set-backs at the 4th, 5th, 6th and 7th floors to pull the bulk of the building away from Church Street and the rowhouses. The addition over the parish hall is successful because it is set back far enough from the façade so that it is not visible from the street. The lighter material palette (metal and glass window wall system) on the upper floors and within the hyphen is used effectively to minimize the perceived mass of the residential structure.

² DCMR 10-C, Section 305

The height of the primary mass of the residential building along Church Street is broken down through detailing, decorative brickwork, window composition, and precast window trim which closely relate to the architectural qualities of the parish house, while the two other compositional elements are designed in a metal and glass wall system that are lighter and contrast with the parish house. The cloister hyphen marries the two forms together and uses a solid/void relationship that references the open entry cloister at the ground level.

The design has gone through numerous revisions over the last few months and the current design reflects a reduction and shift in the overall mass away from the rowhouses on Church Street. As the design continues to be developed, the applicants should address the following:

- At the 6th floor, individual balconies have been eliminated to reduce the building envelope, and a public terrace has been introduced. It appears that this terrace would not be visible from the street, but the visibility of additive elements (furniture, umbrellas) should be evaluated.
- The penthouse level is intended primarily for mechanical equipment but includes mezzanines and roof terraces for the 7th floor units. Although this floor will be only slightly perceptible from Church Street, it will be visible from other vantage points and adds to the overall building mass. Reducing the size of the mezzanines to the minimum needed for roof access should be evaluated.

Compatibility of church building:

While the site can support a building of the height and program proposed, the church design needs additional study and development to improve its compatibility with the historic district. As proposed, the mass of the building feels heavy and boxy, made up of a variety of overlapping surface planes, strongly contrasting materials, and disparate window types and elevations that haven't yet come together into a harmonious composition. Specific suggestions for further study include:

- The boxy quality of the design could be relieved with greater variation in mass, articulation, surface depth and shadow.
- The choice of limestone as the primary façade material is compatible with the historic district; it is a material that can be seen on many other prominent buildings along 18th Street and around Dupont Circle. However, the use of limestone, a contrasting brick and the reused granite from the ruins may be too many materials when all are used interchangeably as overlapping wall planes. Alternatively, it might be worthwhile to study using the limestone as the primary wall cladding material and the brick and/or granite as detailing accent materials.
- How the building sits on the ground and expresses itself at the pedestrian level should continue to be evaluated. The use of storefront glazing on the side elevations (which open to offices rather than public spaces) should be rethought, perhaps substituted with smaller repeating openings that are more articulated. Differentiating the first floor through a material change, change in articulation of material, and/or introduction of a belt course should also be evaluated.
- Strengthening the verticality of the long 18th Street elevation should be studied. Narrowing the middle lancet window to the same dimension as the two flanking windows, balancing the area between them with masonry, and organizing the roof level projection and glazing in some alignment with the projecting bays could provide greater verticality to the building while also celebrating the public space at the terrace. An earlier version of the design where the solid corner at 18th and Church Streets extended to the full height of the building and was integrated with the roof, and the Church Street elevation fenestrated with tall thin windows should perhaps be revisited.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Board make the following findings:

- 1. The reuse of the ruins in the new church is an acceptable preservation treatment;*
- 2. The extent of alteration to the parish hall does not compromise its character, does not constitute demolition as defined in the preservation regulations, and is consistent with the purposes of the act;*
- 3. The residential building is compatible in height, mass and architectural character with the parish hall and the historic district, and should continue to be refined as outlined above;*
- 4. The church building is compatible in height and general size, but further work is needed to improve its relationship to historic district; restudy of the massing, materials use, building base and strengthening its verticality is recommended.*