

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

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Property Address:	<b>1355-57 U Street NW</b>	<b>X</b>	Agenda
Landmark/District:	<b>U Street Historic District</b>		Consent Calendar
Meeting Date:	<b>April 28, 2016</b>	<b>X</b>	Concept Review
H.P.A. Number:	<b>15-311</b>	<b>X</b>	Alteration
Staff Reviewer:	<b>Anne Brockett</b>		Subdivision

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The Board reviewed this project in July 2015 when the proposal included subdividing two lots and adding 4 floors plus a mechanical penthouse above two 2-story rowhouses. The Goldstar Group, working with Antunovich Associates architects, now seeks concept review to add 7 floors plus a penthouse at a greater setback than previously proposed.

The two historic buildings stand about 28 feet in height and are surrounded by similarly scaled residential and commercial buildings on this half of the square. To the east are a 2-story historic commercial building (Hamilton Printers), a 2-story non-contributing commercial building, and a 31-foot wide private alley belonging to the Ellington apartment building. To the west are a 15-foot wide alley and the rear elevations of the 2- and 3-story buildings that face 14<sup>th</sup> Street. At the rear is a wide alley (formerly Park Place), the recently constructed Langston Lofts, and Hamilton Playground. The proposed addition would be visible on all sides.

#### **Project Description**

The revised design attempts to respond to HPRB's comments, which indicated that while the proposed height might be compatible, the delineation and massing needed refinement. The Board also offered a willingness to consider additional height with an increased setback, the desired outcome being a structure that reads as an independent, mid-block building rather than as an addition to the rowhouses.

As previously proposed, the original main blocks of the rowhouses would remain with demolition occurring behind that line. At the last meeting, the design called for two floors added at a setback of 32 feet, two additional floors at a 44 foot setback, and a double height mechanical penthouse above that. The current proposal does away with the progressive setbacks, rising up 7 stories at a 48' setback with a penthouse above. The previous proposal stood about 85' tall; the current proposal rises to approximately 109 feet.

A specific materials palette has not been determined in an effort to focus the discussion on the proposed massing, form, and scale.

#### **Evaluation**

The proposal is incompatible in height, scale, proportions and massing with the historic district and the two-story rowhouses to which they are being added. The scale of the addition is out of character with the buildings to which it is being added and the surrounding historic low scale buildings. While there are certainly examples of high density, large construction projects in the U Street Historic District, there are important distinctions that allowed these to achieve a level of compatibility which the Board felt comfortable supporting. Generally, these development projects were determined compatible based partly on their large underlying sites, which allowed tall additions to spread out over a much greater area. Where they have been approved, these large additions have created a proportional balance between horizontal and vertical that remains absent from this proposal. Not insignificantly, many of these projects were also built on vacant land (i.e. The Elysium) or took advantage of vacant lots or non-contributing buildings which were

demolished and combined with occupied lots (i.e. Portner Place, the Louis). Such projects understandably had less impact to historic resources.

Of the closest non-historic buildings, the Langston Lofts directly behind the subject property is approximately 70' tall and the Ellington Apartments stands 86' tall, as does the project across the street at 13<sup>th</sup> and U Streets. As well, if an addition here is to read as distinct from the buildings below, it would require a greater setback to more clearly read as distinct from the U Street corridor.

**Recommendation**

*The HPO recommends that the Board find the addition to 1355-57 U Street to be incompatible with the character of the historic district in height, scale, proportions and massing, and inconsistent with the purposes of the preservation act.*