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

Property Address:	1341 14th Street, NW	X	Agenda
Landmark/District:	14th Street Historic District		Consent Calendar
Meeting Date:	January 26, 2017	X	Concept Review
H.P.A. Number:	17-081	X	Alteration
Staff Reviewer:	Steve Callcott	X	New Construction
			Demolition
			Subdivision

Metropolis Development Company, with plans prepared by Bonstra/Haresign Architects, seeks conceptual design review for construction of a seven-story retail and residential building in the 14th Street Historic District. The project would have its primary residential frontage on Rhode Island Avenue; its frontage on 14th Street would incorporate the one-story commercial building popularly known as the former location of Barrel House Liquor.

Property Description and History

1341 14th Street is a one-story brick commercial building that was built in 1925. Remaining elements of its original exterior appearance include its formed metal cornice and parapet. It was originally constructed as a small auto showroom, a building type that was proliferating along 14th Street in the 1920s. The building was occupied by a variety of dealers over the next two decades.

The building is more notable for its distinctive storefront that features an enormous beer barrel composed of tinted aggregate concrete flanked by narrow projecting plate glass storefronts originally set atop a back-painted black glass base.¹ The composition is capped by a stepped ziggurat open-letter neon sign reading “Barrel House” atop a smaller sign neon sign reading “Liquor.” The storefront was designed by Albert Starr in 1945, when Sammy’s Barrel House, located at 1345 14th Street, moved into the property.

The storefront is an example of mimetic architecture, a style of building design that literally expresses the product being sold in the building’s design. The style was popular in the 1920s-1950s, particularly for road side architecture in which it was used to attract the interest of passing motorists. The Barrel House storefront is a rare, unusual and well-executed example of the building style for the District of Columbia.

1341 14th Street is a contributing building to the 14th Street Historic District, dating from within the period of significance (1880-1940). While the storefront technically falls outside of the period of significance, it is more noteworthy and unusual than the building itself and worthy of preservation.

¹ The concrete work in the barrel resembles the work of Washington concrete maker John J. Earley, however, no evidence has been found to attribute the work to Earley.

The vacant site on Rhode Island Avenue was occupied by three, 19th century two-story brick rowhouses that were demolished in 1955. It has since been used as a surface parking lot for the Barrel House.

Proposal

The project calls for retaining the building at 1341 and its distinctive 1945 façade and “Barrel House” neon sign; the “Liquor” sign will be removed. The storefront will be restored based on historic drawings and photographs.

A new seven-story building would be built on the vacant site and atop and behind 1341. The massing, heights and setbacks would be modulated to set back the upper floors. On Rhode Island, the building would rise six stories and have a projecting metal and glass bay set within a shallow brick projection; the seventh floor would be set back five feet from the street face. On 14th Street, the building would rise four floors above the retained building, and also be composed of a metal and glass bay set within a masonry enframing wall. The sixth and seventh floors would be setback approximately 15 feet from the street face. A penthouse level would cap the building, with setbacks on all sides.

The building would be clad in two colors of brick, darker on the six-story main mass and lighter on the seventh story. The penthouse would be clad in metal panels. Wood or a material with a wood appearance would be used as accent panels within the masonry.

Evaluation

The restoration of the distinctive 1940s storefront will retain and enhance an unusual and much-appreciated architectural icon in the neighborhood.

The new construction has been developed to incorporate the historic building into the composition in a compatible manner and to relate to the project’s varied contexts. The more assertive massing and height is expressed on Rhode Island Avenue, a street that is lined by robust 3-1/2 story rowhouses and which has a tall five-story apartment building across the street. On 14th Street, the massing and height have been modulated to align with the height of the adjacent four-story commercial building and stepping up back from the street face. While the project’s overall height is several stories taller than the adjacent historic buildings, this type of juxtaposition of smaller and larger buildings is common on 14th Street; it is a streetscape that is characterized by the interplay between buildings of different heights and masses rather than being one that has a uniformity of height.

The use of brick as the building’s primary material relates well to the neighborhood and provides a contextual balance to the higher proportion of glazing. While the brown brick reads a little glum in the renderings, earth tones such as are shown are characteristic of the masonry colors in the historic district; the precise materials and colors should be selected based on samples viewed on site.

As the project continues to be refined, the public space plan on Rhode Island Avenue should provide an appropriate balance between paving and landscaping; the east alley elevation should continue to be developed; and the preservation plan for the storefront should be developed in consultation with HPO.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Review Board find the concept to be compatible with the character of the historic district, and delegate final approval to staff.