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

Property Address:	13th & U Streets, NW	X Agenda
Landmark/District:	U Street Historic District	Consent Calendar
Meeting Date:	December 20, 2012	X Concept Review
H.P.A. Number:	12-432	X Alteration
Staff Reviewer:	Steve Callcott	X New Construction
		Demolition
		Subdivision

Architect David M. Schwarz, representing the JBG Companies (13th & U Lessee, LLC), seeks conceptual design review for construction of an eight-story apartment building with ground level retail at the southwest corner of 13th and U streets, in the U Street Historic District.

Property Description

The site includes lots 198-202, creating a 25,230 square foot parcel located in Square 237. The property currently includes a one-story non-contributing retail structure constructed prior to the designation of the historic district, and approximately two dozen surface parking spaces. The site abuts a 10 foot wide public alley at the rear. The U Street right-of-way is 90' wide and the 13th Street right-of-way is 110' wide.

The site is directly across 13th Street from the entrance to the U Street Metro Station and a four-story commercial building approved by the HPRB. To the north, across U Street, is the Ellington Apartments, an eight story mixed use residential and retail building, also approved as compatible with the historic district by the HPRB. To the west along U Street are three and four story contributing commercial buildings. To the south, across the alley, is Wallach Place, an intact and unified block of two-story houses constructed between 1885 - 1889.

Planning Considerations

The zoning on the site is ARTS/C-2-A. The project has been submitted to the Zoning Commission for a PUD and related map amendment from ARTS/C-2-A to ARTS/CR to allow for a building of this height and density. The Office of Planning found the proposed PUD to be not inconsistent with the Comprehensive Plan and recommended that the project be scheduled for hearing. The Zoning Commission agreed to accept the project for hearing at a set down meeting on December 10, 2012.

Proposal

The project calls for a symmetrically composed, tripartite, eight-story building clad in brick with precast detailing. The front U Street elevation would have a differentiated retail base with large storefront windows and a center entrance for the residential lobby. The façade above the first floor would have a shallow E-shaped plan with a central tower

element crowned with a pergola roof feature, slightly recessed hyphens with projecting balconies, and projecting wings at each end. The U Street elevation would rise to a height of 86', not inclusive of the decorative roof features or penthouse.

The 13th Street elevation would step down one floor (74'), and have rounded corners. The rear elevation would express the same center and end wings as the front elevation (albeit the end wings would be narrower), with ganged balconies between. The massing of the rear elevation would include setbacks at the seventh and eighth floors except at the end wings. The west elevation would include at-risk windows on the sixth, seventh and eighth floors above the smaller historic buildings.

The building would have approximately 135 units and 15,000 square feet of retail space with one level of below grade parking for approximately 48 cars accessed from the southeast corner of the site. Loading would be internal to the structure accessed from the public alley, portions of which would be widened to a width of 20 feet.

Evaluation

Since the designation of the U Street Historic District in 1999, the Board has reviewed numerous new construction projects within the neighborhood and particularly along 14th and U streets. When the first proposals for new construction were put forward, the Board often struggled with issues of size, height and contemporary design for new construction, particularly when they were proposed immediately adjacent to smaller scaled historic buildings. While there was substantial property that was vacant or occupied by non-contributing buildings, there was not yet a context for larger buildings.

One of the first large new construction projects reviewed by the Board was the Ellington immediately across the street from the subject property. Through the design review process, the design for this large new building was broken down into smaller-scaled vertical wings with light courts between and setbacks for the upper floors, resulting in a height and mass that successfully relates to its surroundings. The traditional materials and vocabulary – brick with precast trim in a light color palette, punched double hung windows, and a tripartite façade organization – also helped the project achieve compatibility with its surroundings despite being a substantially taller and more massive building.

The successful integration of taller buildings with the street's historic character has been a result of careful attention by the Board to many inner-related design characteristics. Among the most important have been *massing*, where buildings have often incorporated setbacks or a differentiated use of materials for top floors; the *rhythm* of fenestration and projections; elevations that express a strong *vertical emphasis* that relates to that of surrounding historic buildings; *proportions*, such as the ratio of masonry to glass; the *scale* of building elements, such as openings, storefronts and projections, and the use of *color, materials* and *detailing*. As is shown in the Ellington and many large historic apartment buildings, these characteristics can come together to create a design that is

urbanistically and architecturally compatible with adjacent smaller adjacent structures despite disparities in height.

The proposed design has many of design characteristics that are found in traditional apartment building design and which would result in a compatible relationship with its surroundings in this location. The design uses setbacks, changes in wall plane, and bay projections to articulate the massing, with setbacks for upper floors used on the south elevation that faces the rowhouses on Wallach. While substantially longer than it is tall, the composition has been organized with three vertically-oriented towers so that it doesn't look squat or horizontal; the corner balconies and paired windows help reinforce the vertical emphasis. The rhythm and proportions of fenestration on the residential floors is consistent with historic apartment buildings, while the first floor is designed and articulated to reinforce the street's pedestrian scale and retail character. The building's materials and detailing would include brick, cast stone lintels and sills, belt courses and cornice elements that reference the scale, character, and materials of the historic district. Collectively, the design characteristics work together to create a design that is compatible with its surrounding urban context.

As the design continues to be developed, there are areas that might benefit from further study and consideration. The ganging and design of the balconies on either side of the central tower on the rear elevation collectively result in a very large scaled element that could be better broken down in size and scale. It is also not entirely clear why the rear wings are expressed at a thinner proportion than on the front elevation (two window bays wide on the rear vs. three window bays window on the façade), and if this is the best resolution for the rear elevation. Finally, color renderings are always prone to distortion from copy machines, resulting in the brick alternately appearing brown, orange and tan in different renderings. Material samples should be provided and, at the appropriate time, a field mock-up of the materials should be constructed for final approval.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Review Board find the proposed concept compatible with the character of the historic district.

U Street Historic District: Building Heights



* = Project approved by HPRB

** = Project approved by HPRB, but not yet constructed

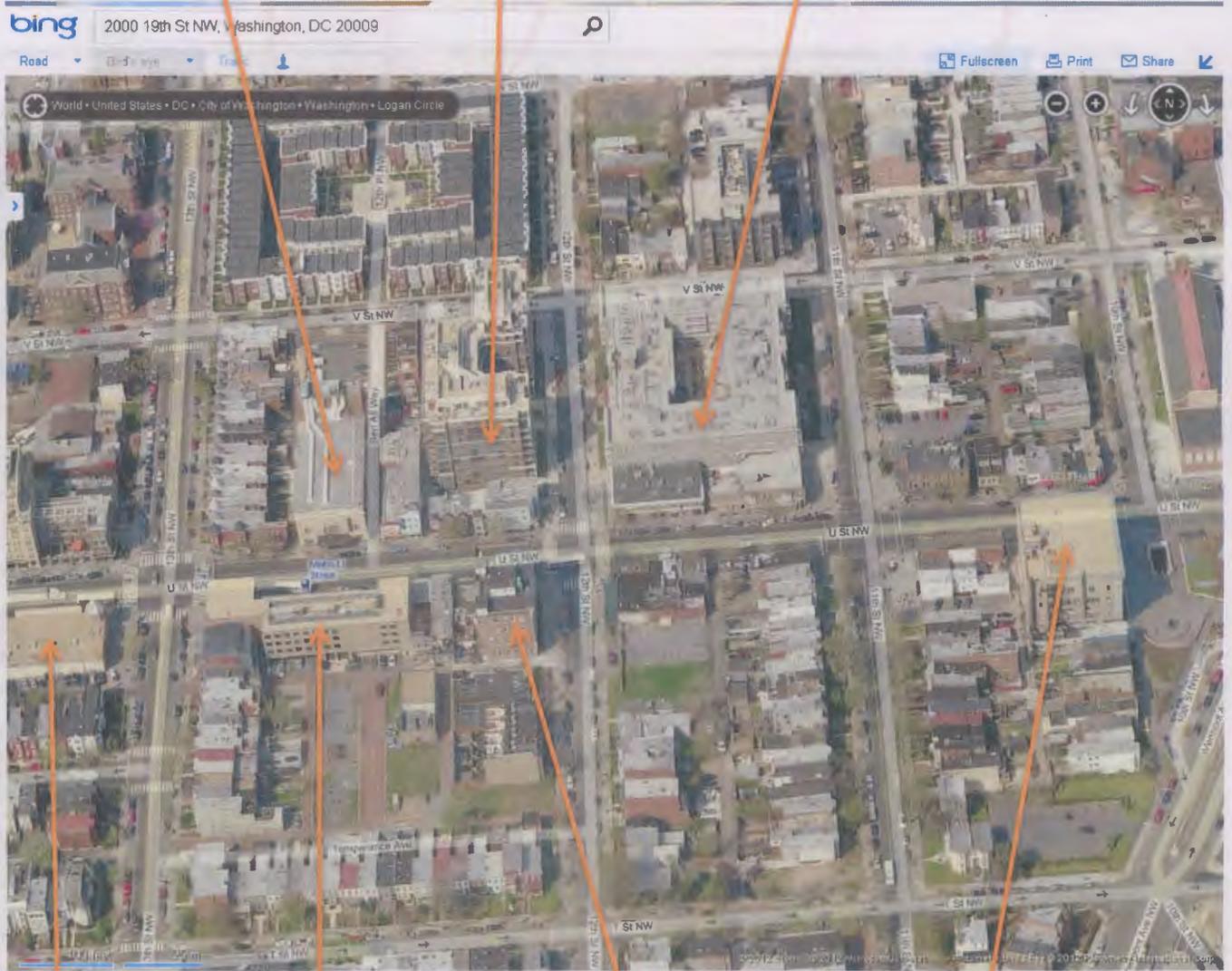
Red = historic building

U Street Historic District: Building Heights

Howard Theater
(45')

2020 12th Street Apartment
(100')

2001 12th Street, NW
(50')



Proposed
(86')

13th & U Office Building*
(50')

True Reformer Building
(60')

Prince Hall Masonic Temple
(65')

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Red = historic building