
**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:	February 28, 2013	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 on-going 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.

When reviewed in December, the Board complemented the quality of the design but expressed concern regarding the proposed height, mass and the treatment of its edge conditions as it related to its surrounding context. The HPRB asked the applicants to: 1) continue studying the height, massing, setbacks and reveals along the perimeter of the building and particularly on the north elevation; 2) revise the 13th Street elevation to better address the scale of buildings across the street and on Wallach Place; 3) provide further detailing to the retail base; and 4) further differentiate the retail and residential entrances.

Revised Proposal

The design has been revised to respond the concerns raised by the Board. While the building's height has remained the same, changes have been in the massing on the north (U Street), east (13th Street) and south (alley) elevations to recess the top floor, help lower the building's apparent height and weight, and provide a greater unity between the three elevations. On the north elevation, the top floor has been recessed an additional five feet in the hyphen elements between the three towers, and the projecting balcony railing eliminated. On the 13th Street elevation, the rounded corner elements have been lowered by one floor (topping out at the sixth floor rather than the seventh) and the projection on the eighth floor reduced in width by 16 feet. On the rear (alley) elevation, the east tower has been increased in width by one window bay so that it mirrors the width of the corresponding mass on the north elevation, and two vertical banks of balconies have been eliminated to reduce the large expanses of these elements shown in the previous design.

Evaluation

The revisions illustrate how relatively small changes in massing can substantially change the perceived height, weight and bulk of a large scale building. While harder to appreciate in photographs of the model, in comparing the previous and current perspective views from the east along U Street (A-16), the elimination of the balconies

and relatively modest recess of the eighth floor between the hyphens illustrates how these changes result in a very different reading of the building. In the previous design, the viewer's eye was drawn straight to the building's top; the structure reads emphatically as an eight story building. However, with the increased set back of the top floor, the hyphens now visually step down resulting in greater variety and ambiguity to the building's overall height, and at the same time improving the verticality and sculptural quality of the towers. A similar effect results from the changes in massing and height as seen from the south on 13th Street (A-18, North 13th Street Perspective). By dropping the height of the projections to the top of the sixth floor, a datum line is established lower on the building which serves as a visual bridge between the surrounding three-story rowhouses and the eight story building. The result is a building which reads lower, lighter and more varied at its roofline, and which relates more compatibly with its surrounding context.

The change in width of the tower element on the rear elevation closest to 13th Street, to have the same proportions as the front towers, is also an architectural improvement. This end of the building will always be experienced in the round, and the consistent width of the north and south towers is appropriate for a classically-inspired design. After considering and studying options for widening the mid-block west tower on the rear elevation, it has been decided to maintain it at the narrower dimension previously proposed. While achieving a precise balance between the two towers on this elevation might be the ideal classical solution, widening this mid-block tower results in a more substantial impact on the abutting houses, as well as internal inefficiencies to the building, that all parties are eager to avoid. The differences between the narrower and wider tower options in this mid-block location are minor to the public perception of the building and its architectural composition.

The elimination of one vertical tier of balconies on each side central section of the rear elevation has improved the scale and composition of the north elevation. The slight decrease in the proportion of the elevation that is open balconies is more elegant and residential.

The applicants acknowledge that further development will be needed to refine the building's base, articulate the storefronts and entrances, and distinguish the residential and commercial entrances. Work on these is ongoing and will be presented to the Board for review when ready.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Review Board find the revised concept to be compatible with the character of the historic district and consistent with the historic preservation law.