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

Property Address:	1328 14th Streets, NW	X Agenda
Landmark/District:	14th Street Historic District	Consent Calendar
Meeting Date:	February 23, 2012	X Concept Review
H.P.A. Number:	12-032	Alteration
Staff Reviewer:	Steve Callcott	X New Construction
		Demolition
		Subdivision

Architects John Torti and Sarah Alexander (Torti Gallas and Partners), representing Atlantic Services Group (owners Richard Dubin and Irwin Edlavitch), return for on-going conceptual review for construction of a six-story residential and retail building on a vacant site in the 14th Street Historic District.

When reviewed in December 2011, the Board found the general height, massing and architectural direction for the project to be compatible with the historic district, but directed the applicants to continue studying the treatment of the sixth story and penthouse. These elements were cited as being poorly integrated into the design, resulting in an overly complicated building profile. The Board suggested increased setbacks for the top floor and looking at grouping and reducing the mechanical and egress penthouse elements. The Board also asked that further thought be given to the side and back of the building (including the loading docks), which will be prominent from Rhode Island Avenue.

Proposal

The revised design calls for a change in material and articulation of the sixth floor, eliminating the use of metal panels for brick piers with precast trim. The setbacks of the sixth floor remain the same: 6'6" from the front and rear elevations, 3'0" from the north (Rhode Island Avenue) side elevation, and essentially flush with the south side elevation.

In the previous design, the large shared roof deck resulted in a building code requirement for two stairs and two elevators accessing the roof. In the revised design, the deck has been significantly reduced in size, resulting in the elimination of the rear stair and the elevator closest to the south party wall. The remaining stair has been moved further in from the north side of the building to lessen its visibility, and lowered in height. The building has also been redesigned to have individual HVAC units, substantially reducing the large central mechanical penthouse in height and footprint.

The side elevation facing Rhode Island Avenue has been revised to include three windows on the fourth and fifth floors, rather than two. Minor revisions have also been made to the rear elevation to increase the use of brick in and around the loading dock.

Evaluation

While the proposal does not incorporate the Board's recommended solution that the sixth floor be more substantially set back, the revised design, the use of brick on the sixth floor and penthouse level, and the reduction in the size of the penthouse elements all significantly improve the compatibility of the design. As discussed in the previous review, one of the defining characteristics of the street's auto showroom buildings is the simplicity, strength and forthright quality of their block-like forms. In using the same brick as the rest of the building, unifying the design of the sixth floor with the underlying building, and simplifying the clutter of roof top elements, the form and massing of the upper floors are less complicated and more consistent with the building's architectural precedents.

In an earlier design move, the applicants had established a strong cornice line at the top of the fourth floor to relate to the heights of surrounding buildings; this cornice continues around the sides and rear as a narrower horizontal dividing line, with the fifth floor designed as a classical attic story above the cornice. With the change in architectural treatment, however, the sixth floor has compositionally become more fully integrated into the overall design, with it now serving as a recessive attic story. As the design continues to be refined, the applicants should look at eliminating this continuous band around the sides of the building to allow the five story base of the building to read as a single element.

Also worthy of further study is the treatment of the ground floor retail and residential entrances. As proposed, the apartment building entrance is within a projecting storefront, indistinguishable from the adjacent retail storefronts. Architecturally, it is a confusing use of commercial iconography for a residential entrance. A more appropriate location for the residential entrance would be within the large punched opening at the southern end of the elevation. Flanked by a strong masonry surround, this location provides clear separation from the retail storefronts, would support a separate residential canopy, and would balance the egress exit from the apartment building at the opposite end of the building.

Recommendation

The staff recommends that the Review Board find the revised design to be compatible with the character of the historic district, with the recommendations for design refinements outlined above, and consistent with the purposes of the preservation act. The HPO recommends that final approval be delegated to the staff.