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

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|--------------------|--|---------------------------|
| Property Address:  | <b>2001 15<sup>th</sup> Street, NW</b> | Agenda                    |
| Landmark/District: | <b>U Street Historic District</b>      | Consent Calendar          |
| Meeting Date:      | <b>September 22, 2011</b>              | <b>X</b> Concept Review   |
| H.P.A. Number:     | <b>11-407</b>                          | Alteration                |
| Staff Reviewer:    | <b>Steve Callcott</b>                  | <b>X</b> New Construction |
|                    |  | Demolition                |
|                    |  | Subdivision               |

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WDG Architects, representing LDP Acquisitions LLC, seeks conceptual design review for construction of a nine-story apartment building at the corner of 15<sup>th</sup> and V Streets.

**Property History and Description**

Historically, the western half of Square 204 was occupied by the Portner Flats, the city's largest Victorian-era apartment building. The seven-story building was constructed by prominent Washington banker and brewer Robert Portner between 1897-1902, and included the first swimming pool and tennis courts for an apartment building in the city. The building was later converted to the Dunbar Hotel in the 1940s, becoming the city's most desirable temporary residence for African-Americans visiting the city during the segregated era. The hotel quickly declined and closed following integration; after being sold to the city in 1970, it was demolished in 1974.

The surrounding site is occupied by the Campbell Heights/Paul Lawrence Dunbar Apartments, a ten-story concrete residential building dating from 1978, and three-story brick garden apartments on V and U Streets. The Campbell Heights complex is located within but is non-contributing to the U Street Historic District.

On the north side of V Street from the site is St. Augustine Catholic Church, the mother church for African-American Catholics in the District, and its associated school buildings (formerly a convent). The limestone-clad English Gothic styled church was constructed in 1893 as St. Paul's for a predominately white congregation; the largely African-American St. Augustine congregation merged with St. Paul's in 1961 when the original St. Augustine's at 15<sup>th</sup> and M Street was demolished. On the west side of 15<sup>th</sup> Street is a row of seventeen three-story Romanesque houses designed by T.F. Schneider in 1892; on the northwest corner of 15<sup>th</sup> and V is the rear elevation of 2101 New Hampshire Avenue, an eight-story brick and terra cotta apartment building dating from 1925.

**Project Description**

The project calls for construction of a nine-story brick and glass bay apartment building at the northwest corner of the square. While it would read as a separate building, it would technically be an addition to the Campbell Heights Dunbar building connected at the first story by an enclosed passageway. Unlike the Campbell Heights building, which is set back from 15<sup>th</sup> Street, the new building would be constructed at the building lines on both 15<sup>th</sup> and V Streets, with projecting bays on each elevation.

The new building would be accessed from 15<sup>th</sup> Street at the base of an all-glass corner projecting bay. The V Street elevation would have a series of narrower bay projections in the same language; the public space along V Street would be divided into residential front yards for the ground floor units.

The design is contemporary in character, with full-height metal and glass projecting bays; the bays and punched openings within the masonry would be grouped into double-height windows. The building would be capped by a metal sunscreen element over a roof deck.

### **Evaluation**

Prior to submission of the concept, the HPO worked with the applicants to identify the important design principles that the new building should follow. The design was developed based on the following presumptions: 1) As the immediate context includes large (90 foot) contributing and non-contributing apartment buildings, a new building of this height could be compatibility accommodated at this location if appropriately scaled and detailed, as is found on the contributing large-scale buildings in the historic district; 2) the design vocabulary (contemporary or traditional) was less important than in ensuring that the building's scale, materials and articulation are compatible with its context; 3) as the new building will be seen from surrounding streets on all four sides, it should be designed as a building in the round, with equivalent architectural treatment and materials on all elevations, and 4) St. Augustine's Church is the most important architectural and cultural landmark in the immediate vicinity, to which the new building should be a respectful neighbor.

The applicants have worked to develop the design with these general principles in mind, and in response to suggestions by the HPO to unify and simplify the massing and design vocabulary. The use of brick as the primary material, the repeating projecting bays on the V Street elevation, and the punched windows organized into double height openings are all features that provide a scale and rhythm that is compatible with the surrounding historic buildings. The front (15<sup>th</sup> Street) elevation has similarly benefited from redesign and editing, with a stronger differentiated base and fewer competing elements.

As the design continues to be developed, the size and scale of the corner tower element should continue to be evaluated. The repeating projecting bays on the V Street elevation measure approximately 15 feet wide (very similar to that found on neighboring historic buildings); by contrast, the corner tower measures far larger, at approximately 22 x 26 feet. While it is not inappropriate for the corner tower to be the predominate element, its proportions are quite large and may not yet be of the proper scale to achieve compatibility with projections found in the historic district. The use of non-transparent, spandrel, textured or fritted glass should also be considered for the lower panel of all the projections; aesthetically, they would provide additional visual interest, scale and texture to the projections, while practically providing a modicum of privacy to the interior units without compromising the character of the design.

### **Recommendation**

The HPO recommends approval of the concept, with continuing study of the corner projection as outlined above, and delegate final approval to staff.