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

Landmark/District:	Capitol Hill Historic District	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agenda
Address:	330 7th Street, NE (Northeast Library)	<input type="checkbox"/> Consent
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Concept
Meeting Date:	April 26, 2012	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Alteration
Case Number:	12-303	<input type="checkbox"/> New Construction
Staff Reviewer:	Amanda Molson and Andrew Lewis	<input type="checkbox"/> Demolition
		<input type="checkbox"/> Subdivision

The District of Columbia Public Libraries (DCPL) with plans prepared by Bell Architects, requests concept approval for a rear addition to the Northeast Library, located at 330 7th Street, NE in the Capitol Hill Historic District.

Property Description

Constructed in 1932, the Northeast Library was the first District public library branch to be built entirely with public funds. The library building was designed by Albert L. Harris, the city's Municipal Architect at the time, and was built by the Boyle-Robertson Company. The Georgian Revival style building includes stone quoining at the corners, multi-light, arched windows on the first story and in the attic dormers, and a pediment roof form capping the central block. The interior features a paneled wood mezzanine railing in the lobby, period display cases and bookcases throughout, and elaborate wood door surrounds and fireplace mantels.

The library is sited at the corner of 7th Street and Maryland Avenue, NE, and an existing ramp extending along the Maryland Avenue sidewalk provides accessibility to the building. The library is bounded to the west by a rowhouse and to the south by a public alley that currently leads to a partially-submerged garage at the rear of the building.

Proposal

The applicants wish to construct a three-story addition atop the existing rear garage, retaining the existing footprint. The addition would be reachable via the ramp from Maryland Avenue and would provide space for a new staircase and a reconfigured elevator. The applicants state that relocating the staircase to the rear of the building will allow the library to meet code requirements, improve accessibility, and alter the programming layout, while reducing the impact of these changes on historically significant interior spaces.

The addition would be contemporary in design, featuring a system of glazed panels and metal framing on the north-facing and south-facing elevations, with a solid brick wall facing the neighbor's backyard to the west. Several existing rear windows would be replaced by doors opening into the addition. The plans show mechanical equipment placed on the roof of the new

addition, with a brick parapet wall on the rear and glass walls on each side providing some screening. On the lower level, the existing garage doors would be replaced with windows and a door, and the driveway from the alley would be replaced with green space.

Evaluation

The size of the addition is subordinate and deferential to the historic building, and views are rather limited due to its location at the rear of the building and the addition's significant setback from Maryland Avenue. The use of a streamlined, contemporary design clearly differentiates old from new. The applicants have stated their understandable desire to have the new addition read as a welcoming, light-filled space that draws visitors to the new staircase, as opposed to relegating this area to a dark corner of the building.

The proposal is generally compatible with the character of the historic building and the historic district, but a few adjustments could enhance the design further. At present, the addition lacks a distinguishable design transition between the masonry main block and the wholly contemporary glazed panel system, resulting in an addition that reads as somewhat disconnected. The addition also appears incomplete at the top, lacking a cornice or other defining termination element. Previous plans submitted to the HPO did not show the rooftop mechanical units or the equipment screening devices in elevation, instead showing the roofline of the new addition below the cornice of the library's roof. In the most recent set of drawings, however, a brick parapet wall and glass screening panels extend above the cornice. These factors taken together result in a somewhat abrupt transition between the historic building and the new addition, in which they struggle to transition gracefully into one another.

There are certainly a number of ways to address these issues, but moving the mechanical equipment off the roof of the addition altogether (possibly into the present driveway area) would be one solution. This would decrease the height and allow the addition's roof to remain below the historic building's existing cornice. The visual transition between the library and the addition might be made smoother by the simple addition of a vertical expanse of brick at the meeting point, which could also be used to create a simple cornice around the top of the addition to unify the two spaces through the use of materials.

Interior Rehabilitation

The interior of the library is not formally designated and is not subject to HPRB review. However, it is considered eligible for the DC Inventory and is being reviewed by the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) in accordance with Section 9(b) of DC Historic Landmark and Historic District Protection Act, which requires District government agencies to "take into account" the effects of their undertakings on eligible and historic properties and to provide the SHPO an opportunity to comment. The draft regulations that guide the review process direct agencies to "seek and consider" the views of the public in a manner consistent with the nature and complexity of the undertaking and its effects on historic properties. They also encourage agencies to use HPRB meetings as means to solicit public comment. Therefore, a summary of the proposed interior rehabilitation is provided below.

As previously mentioned, relocating most of the vertical circulation to the rear addition is proposed to meet code requirements, improve accessibility, and provide additional space for programming needs without significantly altering the primary interior spaces. The most

substantial interior alterations required to meet these goals include the removal of three existing stairs, the non-historic entry vestibule, mechanical chases and a few original walls – most of which enclose the current stairways or are located in secondary areas. A few new openings will also be introduced to improve sight lines and improve circulation. While some of these alterations will result in the loss of limited historic fabric, the majority of the original bookcases, display cases, wainscoting, door surrounds, window seats, fireplace mantels and other character-defining features will be preserved, restored and/or replicated. The essential form and character of the three large reading rooms on the first floor will also be retained and the aforementioned mezzanine, once considered for removal, will be adapted with recessed glazing to serve as a conference facility. The second floor will feature a more open layout to provide additional space for programming needs but the basic layout of the three large reading rooms will also be retained on this level. For these reasons, the SHPO believes the interior rehabilitation will be unlikely to have an “adverse effect” on historic properties.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Board approve the concept as consistent with the purposes of the preservation act and delegate final approval to staff with the condition that the exterior design concerns outlined above are addressed.