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

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Landmark/District:	<b>Capitol Hill Historic District</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agenda
Address:	<b>420-430 3<sup>rd</sup> Street, NE and 208, 214, and 236 Massachusetts Avenue, NE</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Consent
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Concept
Meeting Date:	<b>April 25, 2013</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Alteration
Case Number:	<b>13-107</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> New Construction
Staff Reviewer:	<b>Amanda Molson</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Demolition
		<input type="checkbox"/> Subdivision

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The Heritage Foundation, with plans prepared by Nelson Architects, PC, and Cunningham Quill Architects, PLLC, requests ongoing concept review of new construction at 420-430 3<sup>rd</sup> Street, NE and site alterations on the side elevation of 236 Massachusetts Avenue, NE. The parcels are located in the Capitol Hill Historic District.

**Property Description**

The Heritage Foundation currently owns its main headquarters building at 214 Massachusetts Avenue, NE, a multi-story building used for residential purposes at 208 Massachusetts, a multi-story building used for office space and ground-floor retail space at 236 Massachusetts, and a mid-block surface parking lot entered from 3<sup>rd</sup> Street. The applicants also own the vacant parcel at 426 3<sup>rd</sup> Street, NE, which was occupied by the Unity Baptist Church building until its demolition was approved by the Board in 2011 due to a loss of integrity. Additionally, the applicants have more recently acquired the apartment building located at 428 3<sup>rd</sup> Street, NE and a narrow vacant lot directly to the north of the apartment building.

Not included in this project are the Armand's Pizzeria building at 226 Massachusetts Avenue, NE or the multi-unit residential building at 412 3<sup>rd</sup> Street, NE, both of which are under separate ownership.

**Proposal**

The Board previously reviewed this project in February, at which time the majority of the concept proposal was approved and delegated to staff for final approval. This prior approval included: demolition of the non-contributing apartment building; a subdivision to create six new lots on 3<sup>rd</sup> Street; the proposed massing, footprint, and design direction of the new townhouses; rear alterations to 208 and 214 Massachusetts Avenue, NE; the garage entrance structure fronting 3<sup>rd</sup> Street and the underground parking garage; door and canopy alterations facing Massachusetts Avenue and penthouse expansion at 236 Massachusetts Avenue, NE; and public space alterations on Massachusetts Avenue and at the corner of 3<sup>rd</sup> Street and Massachusetts Avenue, NE.

The applicants are returning to the Board for final approval of the remaining two elements of the plan: final detailing and materials for the six new townhouses and the garage face, and public space alterations along 3<sup>rd</sup> Street in order to create a new sidewalk café area.

### *Townhouses*

The applicants have developed detailed elevation drawings for all of the townhouses and the public space front yards of each. Brick and mortar samples commensurate with those of neighboring buildings have been selected for building faces, lead walks, and retaining walls. Wood or aluminum-clad wood simulated divided lite windows are planned, with mansard roofs to be treated in either true or faux slate. Window and door headers will be either brick or cast stone, with variations in and across the houses. Period-appropriate cast iron railings and newel posts are proposed for the main entrances. At the Board's suggestion, the brick corbeling on the garage entrance cornice has also been simplified. The end result is quite compatible with the character of the historic district and will introduce six thoughtfully-designed new homes to the streetscape.

### *3<sup>rd</sup> Street Outdoor Café*

At the February meeting, the Board members expressed varying opinions regarding the proposal to remove a section of the retaining wall and berm along 3<sup>rd</sup> Street in order to provide access and outdoor seating for a café at the basement level of the building. Some Board members felt that flexibility was warranted, and other Board members felt that the berm should be retained. The Board did not approve the public space alterations as proposed but did leave the door open to looking at alternative proposals.

The applicants are presenting the Board with four options for this space – two (Options A and C) that maintain most of the retaining wall and place seating behind a planted area and two (Options B and D) that remove a section of the retaining wall and place seating between the seating and a raised planting bed. Options A and C differ in that the access cut through the berm is located either in line with the service door (A) or in line with the main entrance doors (C). Options B and D differ in that the seating area is either along the sidewalk's edge with a shallower planting bed (B) or set back slightly with a deeper planting bed (D).

All of the options are an improvement over the plans presented to the Board in February in that the previous proposal removed all of the berm, except a shallow planting area abutting the building. Options A and C retain the continuity of the existing retaining wall and of the portion of the berm that sits closest to the sidewalk. However, these options also place the seating area below the grade of the sidewalk. Options B and D locate seating at the same grade as the sidewalk, but both entail the disruption of the retaining wall and the berm immediately behind it.

Options A and C most closely align with the Board's design guidelines and with previous Board decisions. Though the actual materials in the existing retaining wall may not be particularly significant, the continuity of topography is an important feature of the public space on this residential block. The Board's design guidelines for basement areaways and windows discourage substantial alterations to existing topography, particularly the creation of sunken terraces:

*3.1 Basement entrances and areaways should be subordinate to and not dominate the setting of historic property unless significant alterations to the site or street have fundamentally changed the original condition.*

*3.2 Lowering the front yard of historic property to provide an at-grade entrance is generally not appropriate. New entrances should be designed to minimize disruption of existing topography.*

*3.3 It may not be possible to provide an exterior stair on properties where the first floor is close to grade, where the building is close to the sidewalk, or where the basement stair would be exposed at eye level from the sidewalk. In such instances, the extent of excavation may alter the relationship of the building to grade, overwhelm the site, or become such a prominent element that it detracts from the property's character.*

*3.4 Basement areaways should be kept to a minimum size, typically projecting no more than 36" from the face of the building. The creation of large sunken patios or outdoor living areas in front of a primary elevation of historic property is not appropriate.*

Additionally, the Board's more general guidelines on landscaping recognize the significance of retaining walls and the berms they support:

*Almost all walls located in front or rear yards in historic districts are retaining walls. As such they contribute significantly to the character of the property and its neighborhood...Existing fences and retaining walls that contribute to the appearance of historic buildings, their landscapes and neighborhoods should be maintained and if necessary, repaired or replaced in-kind.*

The Board has provided some flexibility on this topic in two recent Capitol Hill cases – the Maples project at 619 D Street, SE and the Edmonds School project at 901 D Street, NE. In both cases, sunken basement-level terraces were approved by the Board on rather large buildings not unlike 236 Massachusetts. However, these terraces were substantially set back from the sidewalk, rather shallow in their projection from the building, and heavily buffered from street views by landscaping.

### **Recommendation**

*HPO recommends that the Board:*

- *Approve the proposed detailing and materials for the townhouses and garage;*
- *Find both Options A and C for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Street sidewalk café to be acceptable, enabling the applicant and future tenant to decide between the two;*
- *Delegate final approval to staff.*