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

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Property Address:	<b>650 New York Avenue, NW</b>	<b>X</b>	Agenda
Landmark/District:	<b>Mount Vernon Square Historic District</b>		Consent Calendar
Meeting Date:	<b>October 25, 2012</b>	<b>X</b>	Concept Review
H.P.A. Number:	<b>12-305</b>	<b>X</b>	Alteration
Staff Reviewer:	<b>Steve Callcott, David Maloney</b>	<b>X</b>	New Construction
		<b>X</b>	Demolition
		<b>X</b>	Subdivision

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Douglas Development Corporation, represented by Shalom Baranes Associates (architects) and EHT Traceries (preservation consultants), seeks concept review for a project involving historic building renovation, relocation, and alteration, and construction of a new office building in the Mount Vernon Square Historic District. The project will also involve combination of multiple lots into a single lot.

When reviewed in May, the Board found the general preservation approach, the proposed building relocation, and the extent of new construction to be appropriate and compatible for the site. Since the rear portions of many of the L Street structures had already been removed, the Board found that some additional removal would be consistent with the purposes of the preservation act but the Board encouraged retention and reincorporation of the facades into the new construction. The Board also encouraged further development of the scheme that relocated the New York Avenue building to the east of the site rather than to the west, further development of the design of the new construction, and asked that the project return for further review.

**Property Description and History**

The property is located in Square 450, bounded by New York Avenue on the south, 7<sup>th</sup> Street on the west, L Street on the north and 6<sup>th</sup> Street on the east. The site contains several vacant parcels as well as 15 contributing buildings along its frontages on New York Avenue (three buildings), L Street (six buildings), and 7<sup>th</sup> Street (nine buildings). They include several Victorian-era mercantile buildings, a carriage warehouse, a livery stable, a pre-Civil War residence later converted to a commercial building, several warehouses, the original Barker Lumber Company Building, and the Art Deco-styled Walker Thomas Furniture store.

**Revised Proposal**

As requested by the Board in May, the plan reflects the requested relocation of 639 New York Avenue so that it will be located to the east of the new tower, adjacent to 621-625 New York). The other relocated structure, 632 L Street, would shift to the west to abut 638-1/2 L Street.

Further research and survey has been conducted on the historic buildings, and all are now shown as being stripped of their non-original paint and restored to an approximate original condition. The extent of demolition remains the same as previously presented, with non-original rear portions of several of the 7<sup>th</sup> Street buildings and additional rear sections of the already partially demolished L Street buildings being removed. The two relocated buildings would be retained in their entirety.

While further work has been done in figuring out how to save and weave together the historic buildings with the new construction (resulting in a mid-block atrium with bridges connecting different levels), the exterior expression of the new construction has not substantially changed. With the relocation of 639 New York Avenue to the east side of the tower, a new small-scale (four-story) element has been designed in its former location to provide a height transition to the historic buildings to the west. This has resulted in a somewhat narrower tower (approximately 78 feet wide, reduced from about 91 feet).

As before, the New York Avenue elevation of the tower would be clad in a skin of terra cotta fins. To the east, the skin of the tower includes flatter piers of terra cotta, while on the west would be the curved glass “saddlebag.” On the rear, a one-story masonry façade element for the new parking and loading entrances would fill in an existing gap in the street wall; compositionally, the L Street elevation appears otherwise unchanged, with large panels of glass floating above and set back about 20 feet from the retained historic buildings.

The three-story infill building on a vacant site on 7<sup>th</sup> Street has been redesigned with a greater proportion of glazing and to include the terra cotta found elsewhere on the project.

### **Evaluation**

The changes that have been made since previously presented improve the overall composition and the scope of preservation. With 639 New York moved adjacent to 621-625, it creates a sufficient critical mass of historic buildings to anchor the east end of the site, while the introduction of a new four-story element adjacent to 649 provides a balancing counter weight on the west. The narrower width of the tower results in a strong vertical proportion and slimmer profile that feels less weighty than the previous scheme. Additional progress has been made in documenting the historic buildings and planning for their rehabilitation, and redesign of the structure and parking and loading issues has resulted in a plan that retains the two relocated buildings in their entirety.

Less progress has been made on the L Street elevation, where the only discernible change is the introduction of a one-story masonry façade at the garage entrance. While this provides some continuity at the street level, the comments made by the Board in the previous review suggested a desire for greater study and evolution of this elevation. Currently, the extent of the new construction combined with the modest set-back and scale of the large floating panels could either result in a dynamic composition or appear simply overwhelming for the small-scale historic buildings underneath. Some study of

options that include additional masonry, increases the height of new masonry garage façade, and pulls the projecting sheet of glass in from the east corner would be welcomed.

As the design continues to be developed, additional study should also be given to the base of the saddlebag and the atrium infill, particularly as it will be seen from the north along 7<sup>th</sup> Street (the overhead view on page A12 is not fair to judge as it is a perspective that would never be seen, and the view of page A14 is too small to evaluate). The architectural effect of the saddlebag sitting on piloti might be more effective if the base it was sitting on (the atrium) had a more direct relationship to the mass above, rather than simply appearing to ooze out and fill in the gaps behind the 7<sup>th</sup> Street historic buildings.

On the New York Avenue elevation, the proportions and compatibility of the new four-story in-fill piece would be enhanced by lowering the base by one floor, which is more consistent with the historic buildings on the street and enhance its role in the composition as a transitional element from the tower to the historic buildings, and continued study of the masonry/glass proportions.

### **Recommendation**

*The HPO recommends that the Review Board:*

- *Find the proposed lot combination subdivision to be consistent with the purposes of the preservation act;*
- *Find the proposed relocation of 639 New York Avenue and 632 L Street to be consistent with the preservation act in the context of this project because it will result in the full retention of those structures and a compatible new setting;*
- *Find the proposed height and mass of the new construction to be generally compatible with the character of this location within the Mount Vernon Square Historic District;*
- *Find the proposed design, materials and façade compositions to be acceptable, but that the design continue to be studied, as suggested above;*
- *Determine whether the project should return to the Board for further review or delegated to staff.*

APPENDIX A  
Applicant's Project Summary

**DOUGLAS DEVELOPMENT SQUARE 450**  
**655 New York Avenue, N.W.<sup>1</sup>**

**HPRB PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

**Introduction and Background**

Douglas Development Corporation (Douglas Development) submits this application for concept review to the Historic Preservation Review Board (HPRB) for a commercial office and retail building at 650 New York Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. (Square 450, Lots 4, 6, 33, 34, 40, 803, 804, 805, 806, 807, 808, 809, 810, 811, 812, 813, 814, 815, 816, 817, 818 and 821).<sup>2</sup> The site is bounded by New York Avenue on the south, L Street on the north, and 7th Street on the west. The property is located in the Mount Vernon Square Historic District and includes buildings that contribute to the character of the district.

**Description of Project**

Douglas Development proposes to construct a 11-story commercial office and retail building that will incorporate 13 historic buildings into the redevelopment. Two historic buildings will be relocated on the site and 11 contributing structures will be rehabilitated. The new building will include a total of approximately 407,706 square feet of gross floor area, or a blended floor area ratio of 7.10 FAR. The height of the building will vary to respect the historic structures on the site but will reach a maximum height of approximately 130 feet. The architect for the project is Shalom Baranes Associates.

The mass of the new building will be centered in the development site, with the main entrance along New York Avenue. The historic buildings along New York Avenue, L Street and 7th Street will continue to convey the qualities of the historic streetscapes and the district. The main mass of the new building is rectilinear in form but includes a large undulating projecting bay at the interior of the square along the western elevation, which projects over the rear portions of some of the historic buildings. The facades of the new structure are treated in glass and metal, and feature terra cotta "fins" to provide architectural interest to the design. Parking and loading facilities will be located along L Street, with entrances located in the facade remnants of what were once auto-related industrial structures.

In addition to historic preservation approvals, Douglas Development will submit an application for zoning relief from the Board of Zoning Adjustment. While the exact areas of relief are still being calculated, the applicant anticipates seeking relief from the minimum requirements for courts, roof structures and extension of a zone boundary line.

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<sup>1</sup> Originally submitted as 650 New York Avenue, N.W., the proposed address has been changed to 655 New York Avenue, N.W.

<sup>2</sup> Lots 805 and 821 have been added to the development site since the initial HPRB submission on March 23, 2012.

