

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

Property Address:	801 Pennsylvania Avenue SE	X	Agenda
Landmark/District:	Capitol Hill Historic District		Consent Calendar
Meeting Date:	June 30, 2011		Concept Review
H.P.A. Number:	11-224	X	Alteration
Staff Reviewer:	Anne Brockett		New Construction

Architectural Historian Andi Adams, representing Verizon Wireless, seeks the Board’s permit review for installation of antennas on the roof of this contributing building within the Capitol Hill Historic District. The building at 801 Pennsylvania was constructed in 1882 as a Haines department store. Enormously scaled at the time of its construction, the building is still one of the more prominent edifices in the immediate vicinity.

Project Description

The project seeks to add 15 antennas to the roof. Because of the building’s height and corner location at a very wide intersection, these roof appurtenances would be visible from all sides. The prominence of the site, however, is what makes its use for antennas possible. Wireless companies seek to lease roof space where their antennas have no obstructions in order to receive and transmit signals.

The antennas have been proposed either with or without “stealth” covers, which shield the antennas behind solid walls that appear much like penthouses. On each of the three sides of the building where the antennas are proposed, they would be set back approximately 10 feet from the edge of the roof and will stand 8 feet above the top of the parapets. Setting the antennas back further would necessitate making them taller to reach Verizon’s goals for wireless coverage.

The material of the stealth walls is patterned to look like brick and can be designed in any color. The proposal shows the stealthing with either a painted or unpainted cornice band and the applicant seeks feedback from the Board on whether or not to match the underlying building. For reference, the existing antennas (AT&T installations permitted in the 1990s) demonstrate what the antennas would look like without stealthing.

The equipment cabinets associated with the antenna installation will be located on a platform in the alley (as approved by the Public Space Commission) rather than on the roof as is typical.

Evaluation and Recommendation

The proposed stealth covers take the form of small penthouses or stair towers, not uncommon on commercial rooftops. Grouping and stealthing the antennas within a small architectural form that is not unusual for this type of building seems a more compatible and appropriate way to accommodate them, rather than leaving them exposed. The HPO supports coloring the stealthing the same color as the building.

The applicant has worked with HPO to refine the proposal to the extent possible; the antennas on the south side have been pushed back from the 8th Street face of the building considerably and the stealthing will be no taller than the antennas themselves.

This project has also been reviewed by SHPO under the federal Section 106 process because of the requisite FCC license. It was found to have no adverse effect on the characteristics of the building which qualify it for inclusion in the National Register in a manner that diminishes the building's historic integrity. Moreover, the antennas will be mounted on sleds and are not permanently affixed to the roof, making the alteration fully reversible.

Should the Board approve the installation of antennas, the HPO strongly recommends that this be the last visible telecommunications equipment approved for this property. Because of the extensive existing rooftop equipment including HVAC systems, elevator overrun, ductwork, and existing and proposed antennas, any additional antennas - stealthed or unstealthed - will be simply be overwhelming. Three penthouse-like structures is at the limit of what would be found on a historic rooftop of this size and any more would appear out of character and incompatible.

The HPO recommends that the Board approve the proposed antennas with stealthing as consistent with the purposes of the Act.