

HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION

Property Address:	901 16th Street, NW	X	Agenda
Landmark/District:	16th Street HD		Consent Calendar
Meeting Date:	May 23, 2013	X	Concept Review
H.P.A. Number:	13-324	X	Alteration
Staff Reviewer:	Kim Elliott / David Maloney	X	New Construction

The applicant Gensler Architects on behalf of Laborers International Union of North America (LiUNA) seeks conceptual design review for elevation alterations and penthouse alterations to their existing building as well as concept review for new construction on the adjacent lot.

Property Description

The LiUNA building sits at the northeast corner of 16th and Eye Streets and was designed by prominent architects Eggers and Higgins, the protégés of and successors to John Russell Pope. It was completed in 1959. This important corner was first home to the International Hod Carriers' and Common Laborers Union headquarters, also referred to as the Moreschi Building, named after their President.

The 8-story building reflects the evolving architectural development of Sixteenth Street in the mid-twentieth century, continuing the architectural distinction and continuity along 16th Street. It also illustrates the establishment of associations in the nation's capital within close proximity of the White House. Stylistically, the 8-story building reflects the era when Washington's dominant architectural forms were transitioning from classical to modern. The tripartite composition, tall pilasters and punched window openings reflect classical inspiration, while the green spandrel panels are excellent representatives of the modern commercial and office buildings of this era.



The building was designed in the round, with essentially the same facades on both street facades and the north façade facing the garden of the adjacent hotel. Both penthouses step in symmetrically from each side, maintaining a 45% setback angle, as was permitted by the zoning regulations of the time. An entry for underground parking is located on Eye Street. An empty lot sit adjacent to the building to the east.

One interesting aspect of the design is that it seems to echo in an abstract modern way Pope's 1915 Scottish Rite Temple farther to the north on 16th Street (below center). That pyramidal design was itself

derived from the ancient Temple of Halicarnassus in Turkey (see simulation below right). This helps to explain why the penthouses are treated with the same limestone cladding and are carefully integrated as part of the architectural composition.



Proposal

The applicant proposes to rehabilitate the existing building and construct a 10-story (plus penthouse) addition on the adjacent lot to the east. The new building would be connected architecturally and programmatically to the historic building, and the two record lots would be combined into one record lot.

As part of the project, the applicant proposes to:

- 1) convert the mechanical penthouse on the historic building to occupiable space, with access to the roof terrace;
- 2) insert new window openings in the lower penthouse facades;
- 3) build a connection to the new construction at the upper and lower penthouse enclosures; and
- 4) alter the facades of the historic building by replacing the green spandrel panels with vision glass.

Evaluation

The project represents a welcome opportunity to rehabilitate and expand this significant historic building. LiUNA has been a good steward of the building for many years, and it remains very well cared for, with excellent historic integrity. The massing of the new construction fits in contextually—it is shorter than its neighbor to the east, topping out at 120' (not including the penthouse), with a lower section similar in height to the historic building. A reveal between the historic building and the projection at the proposed addition helps differentiate the two structures.

One aspect of the massing that should receive careful attention is the penthouse on the addition, which will be visible behind the sculptural penthouses of the historic building. Any visual competition with the historic penthouses should be minimized. Possible solutions to explore include a stepped penthouse with a lower section that extends the plane of the building facades up to the full 130 feet, or rotating the penthouse 90 degrees so that visually it relates more clearly to the addition instead of echoing the alignment of the historic penthouses.

Similarly, the proposed connector piece between the existing building and new construction at the penthouse levels should be minimized so that the original square stepped-in masses are legible. Currently there is a 4' return at each corner before the connector begins, and the roof of the upper connector is 1'-1" below the top of the existing penthouse. Lowering the connector height and providing the maximum amount of corner return would help delineate the original form of the historic building. Specifically, the staff recommends that the upper connection be no higher than the top of the opening in the upper

penthouse. Choosing contrasting materials and detailing would also help differentiate the new construction.

The mass and solid form of the penthouses is an integral part of the design of the entire building, and any alterations to the penthouse should acknowledge that. While there may be room to accommodate larger doors and windows on the lower penthouse elevations, the overall mass should still read as more solid than void to maintain the hierarchy of the building form. Option 2 is the most successful to this end—relating to the existing window articulation and composition, but maintaining a solidity at the corners of the penthouse mass. The height of proposed windows should continue to be studied in terms of the effect on distant views of the building (for example, from Lafayette Square).

The window proportions and colorful green spandrel panels of the historic building are defining characteristics of this mid-century design and the staff finds it important to maintain these architectural features. This composition contributes to its monumental and institutional presence on 16th Street and marks an important transition in the history of 16th Street.

Additionally, since LiUNA is likely to be interested in temporary placement of banners on the building, HPO has recommended that a design for appropriate placement of future banners and any appendages be incorporated in the design development of the project.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Board

- *Find the subdivision, combining the two existing lots 824 and 61, consistent with the preservation law;*
- *Find the basic massing of the new building compatible, and ask the architect to return to HPRB to review the proposed new construction as the elevations are developed;*
- *Encourage the architect to reinforce the original penthouse mass and minimize the connection piece by examining the mass, material choices, and detailing of the new construction, for further HPRB review;*
- *Find the colorful spandrel panels to be a defining feature that should be maintained; and*
- *Advise the owner to incorporate a strategy for banner and signage elements into the new design.*