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

Property Address:	915 F Street NW	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agenda
Landmark/District:	Equitable Co-Operative Building Association (Interior Landmark)	<input type="checkbox"/> Consent Calendar
		<input type="checkbox"/> Denial Calendar
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Concept Review
Meeting Date:	November 29, 2012	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Alteration
H.P.A. Number:	#13-027	<input type="checkbox"/> New Construction
Staff Reviewer:	Brendan Meyer	<input type="checkbox"/> Demolition
		<input type="checkbox"/> Subdivision

Architect Sacha Rosen (R2L Architects), representing building owner Douglas Development Corporation, seeks conceptual review for a five-story rear addition to the Equitable Co-Operative Building Association, a landmark that is also located in the Downtown Historic District. The landmark designation includes the interior banking hall. A two-story rear addition received concept approval from the Board in January 2012.

Property Description and Context

The Equitable Co-Operative Building Association is a monumental scaled, one-story bank building in the classical revival style. Built in 1912, it is a classic example of a “temple front” bank building, with a façade that features four marble Ionic columns *in antis* supporting a flat entablature. The tall front entry is protected by large sliding bronze doors and leads to an interior vaulted banking hall illuminated by a large skylight. Other decoration includes plaster Corinthian pilasters and cornice, mahogany wainscoting and millwork, and a Tennessee marble floor. The banking hall is protected by an interior designation.

The rear exterior is utilitarian. Its most prominent feature is a two-story, rear wing that houses the original Board Room and a non-original addition. Due to the tight confines of the narrow alley and surrounding taller buildings, the peaked roof of the banking hall skylight is not prominently visible.

Proposal

A five-story addition (instead of the previously approved 2-story addition) is proposed for construction on top of the existing two-story rear wing. With the penthouse, it will rise to a height of 105 feet. It would be set back 69 feet from the façade, preserving the existing skylight that is integral to the integrity of the historically designated banking hall. The front façade of the tower addition would be a glass curtain wall with full width balconies at each floor, the entirety framed by masonry end walls.

Evaluation

While the applicants acknowledge that the front façade needs further development, they seek the Board’s comments regarding the proposed height and massing of the proposed addition. Without question the geometries of the site—historic building height, height and setback of new addition, and the width of F Street—guarantee that the rear addition will be substantially visible. While the visibility of a roof addition often results in it being incompatible with a building or historic district, the Board has found some exceptions to this general rule.

In downtown locations, where low-scale historic buildings are intermixed with much taller historic and modern buildings, the roofline of a block is often dominated by the larger buildings. Unlike

many neighborhoods that are more uniform in height, small scale buildings in the Downtown Historic District often coexist next to or have a back drop of taller buildings. In instance where a proposed rear addition is setback far enough, massed in such a way that it is divorced from the smaller historic building visually, and can coexist with an established context of taller buildings, the Board has found such proposals consistent with the overall character of the historic district.

The proposal meets these criteria that the Board has applied in other instances, including several projects within this block. The addition would be set back almost 70 feet from the façade, a sufficient building depth to retain visual space above the building for it to read as an independent structure and to physically retain the building's distinctive skylight. While the design remains to be developed, it is massed at the very rear of the site as a simple tower that would co-exist compatibly against the backdrop of the YMCA and Mather buildings to the north and the Masonic Temple/Gallup Building project to the east. On the south side of the 900 block of F Street, the Board has approved several projects that have resulted in similarly-sized towers behind and beside the small-scale buildings on this block face.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Board:

- *Find the massing concept for a five-story rear addition on top of the existing two-story rear wing to be compatible for the landmark and its context within the Downtown Historic District;*
- *Direct the applicant to continue developing the design for the addition and return to the Board when appropriate.*