

---

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

---

Property Address:	<b>917 M Street NW</b>	(X) Agenda
Landmark/District:	<b>Blagden Alley-Naylor Court Historic District Shaw Historic District</b>	( ) Consent Calendar
ANC:	<b>2F</b>	
Meeting Date:	<b>December 20, 2012</b>	(X) Concept Review
H.P.A. Number:	<b>#12-503</b>	( ) Alteration
Staff Reviewer:	<b>Brendan Meyer</b>	(X) New Construction
		( ) Demolition
		( ) Subdivision

---

The applicant, PGN Architects, PLLC for owners Altus Realty Partners, seeks conceptual design review for construction of a five-story apartment building on a vacant site in the Blagden Alley-Naylor Court Historic District (and the overlapping Shaw Historic District). The new building is being proposed in conjunction with another new building at 1212 9<sup>th</sup> Street NW (HPA #12-504) by the same development team. The Board heard this case once before, in October 2012, and found the general height and massing compatible with the historic district but directed the applicant to continue to develop the M Street façade.

### **Property Description and Context**

The site is adjacent to an unusually elaborate and exuberant terrace of Second Empire row houses (901-915 M Street) dating from 1871-74, which includes the Blanche K. Bruce House, a National Historic Landmark (See Fig. 1). One house in the row (1913 M Street), originally built as a Second Empire house, was significantly altered by an 1895 remodeling. When constructed, these houses were sited set back approximately 10 feet from the front property line, giving them deep front yard gardens.

### **Proposal Revisions**

The three sections of the front elevation are for the most part proportionally unchanged and include: a section of honed block 17 feet wide adjacent to the existing row, a glass and aluminum central section of 14 feet, and a 27 foot wide free-standing brick wall with punched openings screening balconies and a glass and aluminum curtain wall. The entrance in the central aluminum section has been emphasized by increasing its height into the second floor and capping it with a cable supported metal and glass canopy. The landscape at the entrance has also been regraded so that it ramps down gradually from the sidewalk. The flanking masonry sections have been articulated at the base with heavier rustication and at the top with projecting stringcourses at different intervals. The honed stone section is now framed by piers and its windows have lost their thick window surrounds in favor of punched openings with masonry headers.

### **Evaluation**

The first version for the M Street elevation was overshadowed by a strong and well received alley façade. The ambiguity resulting from the side elevation being more distinguished than the front elevation created problems of orientation and hierarchy; the detailing, proportions and lack

of a strong entrance on the street-fronting elevation also resulted in a lack of compatibility with the streetscape.

The revised façade elevation has a stronger emphasis on the entrance. By shifting the canopy up into the second floor level and changing the fenestration pattern above it, the entrance now achieves a level of prominence similar to the entrances in the historic row where doors are typically a full floor above grade. Additional emphasis on the entrance has been accomplished by a more gradual regrading of the front terrace so that the entrance is more visually prominent.

The revised detailing of the masonry sections of the façade are more refined and commensurate with the scale and level of detailing found on surrounding historic buildings. The use of string courses and less rustic masonry coursing on the upper floors, while retaining heavier rustication at the base achieves greater compatibility with other buildings on this row.

The one aspect that remains insufficiently resolved is that the use of two entirely different expressions for the façade's masonry elements. The use of different detailing, different materials, different coloration, and different proportions belies the fact that this is a single building and fails to make the building more compatible. The lighter toned brick element simply appears disjointed from the language and materials of rest of the building. While the intent may be to relate to the variety of materials within the row of adjoining houses, this could be done in a manner that breaks this larger building down into smaller sections while also being clear and honest that it is a single building.

### **Recommendation**

*The HPO recommends that the Board approve the refinements made to date, but direct the applicants to continue working on developing a more unified language for the façade's masonry elements.*



**Figure 1** 901-915 M Street NW, c. 1990, at the time of designation of the Blagden Alley-Naylor Court Historic District designation.