

HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD
STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION

Landmark/District:	Anacostia Historic District	(X) Agenda
Address:	1905-09 Martin Luther King Avenue SE	() Consent
		(X) Concept
Meeting Date:	September 24, 2020	
Case Number:	HPA 20-402	(X) New Construction

On behalf of the Menkiti Group, Studios Architecture is returning to the Board with a revised concept design for a four-story office and retail project called MLK Gateway II. This proposal is to replace the previously approved plan for a portion of this site approved by the Board several years ago (HPA 17-592).

Property Description

The project site is bounded by Good Hope Road SE, Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue SE, and U Street SE. It is comprised of 7 lots, five of which are vacant. Of the other two lots, 1901 MLK Jr. Avenue is occupied by a one-story contributing commercial building (to be retained) and 1110 U Street is occupied by a one-story non-contributing industrial structure (to be demolished). The site is split zoned MU-7 along eastern portion along MLK and PDR-1 on the western portion.

Revised Proposal

As before, the project calls for a 4-story commercial office building with an occupied penthouse floor and two levels of below-grade parking. The ground level facing MLK Jr. Avenue would have two retail bays and one bay containing the office building lobby entrance; the garage and loading entrances would be accessed off U Street.

At the July 30 meeting, the Board approved a proposed lot combination subdivision and issuance of a foundation-to-grade permit, and made a variety of suggestions for making the proposed building less boxy, recommending a greater variety of setbacks and façade plane changes, that the penthouse be more recessive on MLK, and that the language of the highway/river facing façade be developed to be more in character with the historic district, and for the project to return for further review when ready.

The revised proposal has a continuous two-story building expression along MLK with smaller windows on the second story in rhythms of three and articulating the two-story cornice line with a raised parapet to reinforce the three-bays along this street frontage. The upper two stories along MLK would be set back 15 feet from the lower floors. These upper floors would have larger window openings and continue the brick material in a simpler design. The penthouse has been pulled further back from the underlying floors to reduce its visibility and prominence.

The river-facing elevation has been revised to include a two-part metal panel system, with warm, copper-colored smaller panels framing tripartite windows with more neutral-colored spandrel panels. The river-facing façade is set back 70 feet or more from all street frontages, and is designed to read from these more distant vantage points, such as from the Anacostia Freeway or the 11th street bridge overpass.

The building would also have access through a lot on Good Hope Road, which could potentially be programmed as an outdoor seating or dining area. An enclosing fence with brick piers is now included to provide some enclosure to the space and continue the street wall.

Evaluation

The revised proposal has reduced the height and scale of the retail storefronts and created a handsomely detailed series of two-story buildings that integrates well with the existing historic commercial buildings and surrounding streetscapes. The raised parapets of these two-story building elements also help improve the proportions of the overall larger building by giving greater prominence to the base and screening more of the setback upper floors. The increased setback of the penthouse level is successful in diminishing its presence along MLK. As the design continues to be refined, providing some additional visual interest to the upper floors of the brick portion of the building should be considered, such as through brick detailing and/or additional development of the windows.

The revised proposal is also more successful in uniting the front and rear portions of the building with a greater commonality of window proportions and color. The use of copper-toned metal panels will clearly relate to the brick mass facing MLK while simultaneously providing variety to the design and appearing distinct.

It is also recommended that additional design work be given to the open space along Good Hope Road. Creating a terrace or additional landscaping will provide a border and street appeal of an otherwise blank space.

Recommendation

HPO recommends that the Review Board find the revised concept to be compatible with the character of the historic district, with additional refinement of the upper stories of the brick portion of the building and the Good Hope Road entrance garden to be coordinated further with staff. It is recommended that final approval be delegated to staff.