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

Landmark/District:	Anacostia Historic District	(x) Agenda
Address:	2100 Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue SE	
Meeting Date:	November 3, 2016	(x) New construction
Case Number:	16-687	
Staff Reviewer:	Tim Dennée	(x) Revised concept

The applicant, Donahue Peebles III, agent for property owners 2100 Martin Luther King Associates LP, requests the concept review of a proposal to construct a four-story 61-unit, affordable, senior apartment building at the rear of the four-story 1990s office building at 2100 Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue.

Background

This project is tied to another, at 5th and I Streets NW, a parcel disposed of by the District of Columbia for the purpose of redevelopment, with a condition that affordable housing be provided.

The Board first reviewed this project in January. At that time, it was proposed at five stories tall. The building was narrower, too, limited by a boundary between the avenue's commercial/multi-use zoning and the residential neighborhood's low-density zoning. The new building was to be linked to the old by means of an above-grade connector across the alley space behind the existing office building. A three-story rear wing of the building was to extend onto the vacant lot behind at 1222 W Street. And an existing vehicle ramp for access to the office building was to be reconfigured within the eastern half of the lot, the portion zoned for single-family homes.

In January, the Board unanimously recommended that the building be given a front yard; that its five-story height be reduced at least one story; that its massing and the application of materials be revised; that its fenestration and other elements provide a more vertical emphasis; and that the visual effect of the ramp be de-emphasized by better screening it.

Proposal and evaluation

The present proposal is a story lower than the previous one and its uppermost floor is expressed as something of an attic story with a slight setback and color change. As discussed in the January hearing, this building should mediate between the height of 2100 MLK and that of 1229 V Street. While both buildings are four stories, this one manages to be lower than 2100 because of lower floor-to-ceiling dimensions throughout, but especially at the ground floor. Said to be 41 feet tall, it is fairly squat, but the vertical elements help balance that. The neighboring house at 1229 V Street is approximately 26 feet tall, but it stands on a higher grade than the project site.

The former rear wing has been discarded in favor of a side wing that crosses the zone boundary.¹

The above-ground connection has been eliminated, which is another improvement. This raises the question of whether the buildings would have to be connected below ground, however, because two separate buildings could not occupy the same lot without a subdivision.²

Perhaps the greatest improvement is the fact that, with the loss of the above-ground link, the vehicular circulation down to the office building garage will be placed *under* the new building, healing a prominent scar on the landscape, something that the previous concept had not effectively grappled with. That rearrangement has also eliminated from the side yard an unsuccessful sunken outdoor space, providing for the opportunity for a better passive recreation space.

The side wing makes composition more challenging as it creates a longer façade. It has been articulated by setting back the wing and adding shallow bays that might in some sense recall the scale of the narrow Italianate houses of the neighborhood, but in smaller dimensions.

The setback of the wing gives the space in front of it potential as a front yard equivalent in depth to that of next-door 1229 V Street³, a contributing two-story frame house. However, the site plan suggests that much of this area might have pavers on it, which seems unnecessary for circulation and contrary to the Board's expressed preference for a yard. The yard in front of the main block is a little more than half that depth, about six feet, which is a couple of feet less than the setback of the front bay of 1229 V.

Material choices will be crucial to the success of the building. A brick better than most wire-cut bricks and of compatible and complementary colors will be necessary for the prominent elevations. Such stark differentiation in colors between fourth floor and lower floors and between field brick and bay and cornice elements seems unnecessary and should probably be toned down. The cornice material is not specified and the metal product for the bays would have to be further specified as well.

The building could have a more prominent treatment of the base. The rooftop mechanical and its screening should be minimized as much as possible. The roof deck railing should be set back *at least* one to one from any point at the perimeter of the roof, given that this building will have essentially no parapet. There appears to be enough space to afford flexibility to move it farther back.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Board approve the concept in terms of general height and site layout, but seeks input on issues of materials, massing and landscaping.

¹ The applicant has presumably figured out a solution to this issue or will seek zoning relief, but no need for zoning relief is stated on the concept application.

² Since June of last year, the record lot has been split into two assessment and taxation lots, but these tax lots cannot be used for new construction. It is possible that the project would have to return to the Board for the review of a subdivision, but there is nothing to that effect in the present application.

³ There is actually a lot between 2100 MLK and 1229 V, as a large lot on W Street has a pipe stem to V Street.



The site.

