

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

Property Address:	2220 Martin Luther King Avenue SE	X	Agenda
Landmark/District:	Anacostia Historic District		Consent Calendar
Meeting Date:	January 27, 2022	X	Concept Review
H.P.A. Number:	HP 21-0016	X	Alteration Subdivision

Applicant Bethel Christian Fellowship, Inc, with plans prepared by PGN Architects, seeks conceptual design review for construction of a five-story plus penthouse addition on top and behind three one-story contributing commercial buildings in the Anacostia Historic District.

Property Description

The site includes three one-story retail buildings, constructed between 1929 and 1936, located on the corner of Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue and Pleasant Street. Each property is listed as contributing to the historic district.

2218 Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue is a one-story brick commercial retail building built in 1929 by Ernest Syme. It has a flat storefront window and is capped by a parapet that forms a sunburst pattern that is mentioned in the original historic district nomination.

2220 Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue is a one-story brick commercial building currently being used as a church. Built in 1936, the façade is clad with brown brick with a flat storefront window and recessed entry door.

2224 Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue is a one-story brick corner commercial building built in 1930. The façade is clad in brown brick with a corner entrance.

A large portion of the contributing commercial buildings in the Anacostia Historic District are one-story brick structures dating from the 1920s and 30s. The subject properties are representative of that era with Art Deco-inspired designs capped with prominent cornices or parapets with simple stone reliefs inset into the brick. These simple buildings are enlivened by their patterned brickwork and parapet gables.

The surrounding context includes adjacent historic contributing one- and two-story commercial buildings along MLK and contributing two-story framed homes at the rear of the block. A Planned Unit Development is proposed for the parking lot across the street and the mixed-used four-story Maple View Flats development that was approved by the Mayor’s Agent is located to the south.

Proposal

The site would be excavated for an underground garage, accessed off the rear alley. The façades of the historic buildings would be rehabilitated, with demolition of the rear and portions of the side

bearing walls; a detailed plan for the retention/demolition of the roof framing has not been provided. A five-story addition with a sixth-floor occupied penthouse capped by a mechanical penthouse would be constructed atop and behind the historic buildings. The addition would be constructed on top of 2218 and 2220; the first two floors would be set back 6' from the historic facades. This two-story addition would be clad in brick with double and triple ganged windows and capped by a metal cornice. Above the two-story addition, the fourth and fifth floor will be set-back 8' and 10', with an additional setback for the sixth floor penthouse, all to be clad in a metal panel system.

The vacant lot between 2220 and 2224 will be infilled with a traditionally-inspired, three-story brick façade set flush with the property line. The first-floor fenestration and entry would resemble the neighboring storefronts with double and triple ganged windows on the second and third floors. A similar three-story infill piece is proposed along the Pleasant Street side elevation clad in a light-colored masonry. The first floor here would have the lobby entrance and a mix of single and double ganged windows on all three floors. The three-story brick composition would be capped by a cornice, and the fourth and fifth metal panel vocabulary would rise flush with the brick façade. The metal clad addition at the corner building (2224) would be set back 16' from the property line, expressed with balconies on each floor facing the corner.

Planning Considerations

The Comprehensive Plan specifically encourages retail development in Historic Anacostia and encourages combining upper story housing/offices and ground floor retail. The Anacostia Transit-Area Strategic Investment and Development Plan (2004) states that new retail in Anacostia should emphasize smaller stores in a transit-oriented environment. It highlights that Martin Luther King Jr Avenue is the focus of attention for new development and its design should represent a vibrant and pedestrian-friendly "heart" of the Anacostia neighborhood. The Transit Area plan also recommends that infill buildings should be sensitive additions into the historic fabric and build to the existing street grid. Special design considerations should be considered to ensure appropriate corner treatments, ground floor uses, and the potential for a central piece of public art and/or gathering place at these commercial crossroads.

Evaluation

Early businesses in Anacostia clustered along Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue and the original nomination for the historic district calls out this row of commercial buildings as representation of an intact block of historic commercial buildings in a rapidly developing historic district. The commercial architecture of contributing buildings in the Anacostia Historic District includes early Italianate buildings, relatively modest purpose-built retail buildings, and Art Deco style buildings such as the ones identified in this proposal. Typically, the contributing commercial buildings in the Anacostia Historic District are one to two-story buildings with patterned brick or stone, fully glazed storefronts with recessed entries and flat roofs.

The commercial buildings along these two streets are either early houses converted for commercial use, commercial/residential buildings with stores on the first floor and apartments above, or twentieth-century commercial structures. The later buildings follow their own stylistic

patterns but, for the most part, continue the low-scale residential quality found in the rest of the historic district. The height along the Martin Luther King Ave ranges from low scale one-story properties to four-story commercial properties.

One of the important characteristics of the Anacostia Historic District is its topography and the views residents have across the river. The low scale density along the commercial corridor closest to the Anacostia River allows for scenic views from within the residential neighborhood from behind Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue. These views provide a visual link that connects Anacostia with the rest of the city.

The height and scale of a five-story building (six, including the penthouse) on a row of one-story contributing does not fall within the ranges of height seen in the historic district. Although larger scaled construction is found close by (in areas outside the historic district or projects that were permitted before being pulled into the recent expansion of the historic district), larger buildings in the historic district are best accommodated on vacant lots. Additions to historic buildings should be set back considerably from the historic façade. New construction should be contextual in nature, respecting the character of surrounding buildings in such aspects as massing, height, materials, storefront configuration and upper story fenestration.

While the two-story brick addition atop 2218-2220 and the three-story masonry infill pieces on the vacant lots relate to the context of the historic district, the three additional stories above these overwhelm the contributing historic buildings and dwarf the neighboring contributing buildings on the block and the residential buildings behind it. The material choice of metal panel cladding for the upper floors exacerbates the incompatibility of the building's size.

Demolition/Alteration

The extent of demolition to the existing buildings is shown on AD-10 and AD-11. It shows that demolition appears to be located primarily at the rear of 2220, however, the extent of removal of the roof framing is not evident and should be clarified. Similarly, while it assumed that roof framing on 2224 is being retained, as no new construction is proposed above, this should also be clarified. And pulling the addition back to align with the existing rear wall of 2224, rather than slicing it off, would both reduce the amount of demolition and improve the relationship of the addition behind to the angled geometry of the underlying building. The plans should also be developed to indicate how the new structure will work with the existing buildings.

New Construction

The use of setbacks for added floors behind historic buildings has been found to be a compatible approach in many of the city's historic districts. However, the extent of setback currently proposed is less than is typical, nor is it sufficient to provide a sense that the historic buildings have been preserved and for the new construction to read as an independent building behind them. If the setbacks are to remain as proposed, dividing the elevation of the new construction into differentiated sections – with greater variety of setbacks and architectural expression – would help alleviate the new construction's horizontality and break down its scale. At a minimum, the setback behind 2218 (the one-story building with the sunburst parapet) should be pulled back about five feet to align with the required setback at the adjacent 2216 building. This would better relate the

setbacks to the historic facades and help modulate the massing. A simpler façade treatment without a heavy cornice for this secondary piece would also allow for a more coherent architectural composition for the taller portion of the project.

The use of masonry for the new construction is appropriate and compatible, as it is the most common material used for the district's commercial buildings. Red brick and light blond/tan brick are most common. As the palette of materials continues to be developed, the compatibility of the new construction could be enhanced by using a more typical blond or beige brick, rather than white. A closer alignment of material colors to the district's historic buildings could help better relate the larger building to its context. The use of metal panels for the additional fourth, fifth, and penthouse floor, particularly for the size of the mass proposed, raises greater compatibility concerns and is not a visually compatible material. Consideration should be given to ensure that the panels do not appear metallic or reflective in finish; alternatively, stucco, terra cotta or an alternative finish may be worthwhile to consider.

Recommendations

As the project continues to be developed, HPO recommends the following:

1. The extent of demolition to the historic buildings on the roof framing and how the structure of the new construction will intersect with the historic buildings should be clarified to ensure that the project does not require a public hearing by the Mayor's Agent.
2. The height of the building should be reduced. The fifth and sixth (penthouse) levels introduce an unprecedented height to the block and the historic character of the MLK corridor that is incompatible with the one and two-story contributing commercial buildings on the block. Reconsideration should be given to the rear/roof addition's materials to ensure they are compatible in color and finish. At a minimum, mechanical equipment should be moved to the penthouse level to eliminate the 6-foot mechanical screen on top of the penthouse. An additional floor on the new three-story street-front infill pieces could be considered to offset reduction in the upper floor(s).
3. The long expanse and horizontal cornice that extends across multiple historic buildings should be broken up to provide a more coherent architectural expression to the main building block, and the massing should be clarified with a modified setback at 2218. More compatibly spaced and sized windows and material colors that more closely related to buildings in the historic district would help balance and contextualize the less-than-optimal setbacks.
4. A preservation plan should be developed that clarifies the rehabilitation work to the historic buildings' storefronts and entries.

HPO recommends that the applicant revise the proposal with the above recommendations and that the project return to the Board for further review.

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