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

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Landmark/District: **Anacostia Historic District** (x) Agenda  
Address: **2226-2252 Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue SE**

Meeting Date: **October 29, 2015** (x) New construction  
Case Number: **13-578**

Staff Reviewer: **Tim Dennée** (x) Concept

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The applicant, Chapman Development (with Grimm and Parker Architects), requests the Board’s review of design development of a five-story residential and retail building. The project includes consolidating all five lots on the avenue frontage of the square, relocating two contributing buildings to another site within the historic district, demolishing the noncontributing 1950 shack at the used-car lot at 2226 Martin Luther King, and demolishing the former “Big K” liquor store, which stands outside the boundary of the historic district.

**Background**

The Board last reviewed the project in February 2014, recommending against the new building’s design and against the relocation of the two contributing buildings. The Board requested that, in the event of a Mayor’s Agent decision favorable to the project, the Mayor’s Agent require the return of the projects to the Board for review of design development. In an October 28 decision, the Mayor’s Agent approved the proposed program as a project of special merit that necessitates the relocation of the two historic houses. In accordance with the Board’s earlier request, the Mayor’s Agent noted that:

There are continuing objections to the massing and design of the new building. These are outside of the scope of the Mayor’s Agent’s review at this time. Because the building site remains within the designated boundaries of the Anacostia Historic District, the HPRB will have to review further modifications to the design to determine if the “new construction” is incompatible with the character of the historic district. *See id.*, §6-1107(f). Accordingly, the permit to move the houses, treated as an alteration, is hereby GRANTED. The permit to subdivide will be GRANTED, upon approval by the HPRB of the plan for the new construction....

The Mayor’s Agent therefore settled the issue of the consolidation of the Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue lots as well as construction of a new building subject to the Board’s approval of a design. By repeatedly citing the 114 units of housing and the retail proposed as the meritorious features of the project, the Mayor’s Agent accepted the project’s rough dimensions and its division into distinct uses, but he appropriately left the massing, proportions, details and materials to the Board’s expertise.

The idea of the relocation of the contributing buildings to the new site is settled, except that permits are dependent upon a subdivision of that parcel which has not yet occurred. Unfortunately, while the entire project depends upon these relocations, the specifics of the subdivision are not yet ready for the Board's review (although the Board saw a conceptual subdivision and site plan in 2014).

As a reminder, with regard to the new construction on MLK, the Board's February 2014 action stated that:

The Board denied the concept... finding the project improved but still inconsistent with the character of the historic district because it is too tall relative to the district's historic buildings and too extensive, [meant] to occupy half the square and crowd the narrow sidewalk. It would also destroy the unusual topography of the site. The Board recommended that any revisions to the building include attention to the articulation of the long sides of the building—to better relate to the residential streets—and simplify and refine materials, minimize the use of fiber-cement panels, and improve the proportions of the windows.

### **Evaluation**

The building has been redesigned by a new architectural team with input from the HPO on the basic site organization and massing. The design has moved away from overt historical references and looks contemporary. It has largely retained the massing of the concept that the Board and the Mayor's Agent last saw, including the recesses that carved the façade into three implied wings, connected by the retail first floor. In fact, those recesses have been deepened, and there are additional ones along the sides on the building, one for the main residential entrance on the building's north side and one over a garage door on the south.

As the design continues to be developed, the following is recommended for revision and further development:

- Additional perspective drawings should be developed that show the project from a greater variety of vantage points rather than solely from the north.
- This design better handles the differentiation of the whole into parts by setting the fifth floor well back from the northwest corner of the building. However, in doing so, it pushes that entire mass rearward, and the relationship to the Maple View Place homes suffers for the extra height there. Pulling the fifth floor mass further away from the Maple View houses is recommended.
- The projection of the canopy or brise-soleil from the north end of the fifth floor cuts against the attempt to de-emphasize that floor through setback (see Sheet A-2.4), and should be minimized.
- The roof deck railing (also visible in Sheet A-2.4) should be set back farther from the edge of the building, a distance greater than the rail's height.
- Sheet A-2.13 generally specifies the materials proposed for the front and at least one side of the building, but not for the south side and rear. It is presumed that the same materials are used in those areas as suggested by similarities in the rendering of them, but that should be confirmed in future drawings.

- There has been some decrease in the proposed use of fiber-cement siding, but it appears to be used as an accent material throughout and as the primary material in the recesses, on the rear, and on the penthouse. Fiber-cement siding should be used sparingly, because it tends to look flat and is not commensurate with the character of masonry that typifies commercial buildings on this corridor. Its most noticeable features tend to be its thin joints. It might be used successfully as an accent material, but it is unlikely that the perspective drawings accurately depict the visual character it will have when applied; the renderings make it look rather like cedar in varied shades of brown in some places, and perhaps like terra cotta of gray shades in others.
- It is not clear what the “high density masonry units” of the base would be. Most kinds of concrete blocks would be incompatible with the character of the historic district, but there are some types of polished block that might be successful.
- Vinyl windows, whether premium or otherwise, are not compatible with the character of the historic district and are contrary to the applicable regulations, except perhaps for the rear of the building. Their finish, typical profiles, the way that they would typically have to be mulled together, and even their durability make them a poor fit for this type of building. They would likely look different from the windows depicted in the renderings.
- Corner windows are not characteristic of Anacostia. Depending on the type of window units and mullions ultimately employed, they may or may not be successful. They should probably be reduced in number and not employed throughout the project.
- A two-story-tall sign is unnecessarily large to signal the main residential entrance. While it may look in scale with a small drawing of a large building, it is not in scale with the modest buildings nearby on Maple View.
- The storefronts should continue to be developed to provide the building with a stronger base and a sense of human scale. For Class-A retail space, it is understood that the ground-floor ceiling heights will have to be high, and the height of the storefronts will reflect this. However, breaking the storefronts down into component parts of stronger masonry bases, projecting storefronts, a strongly defined transom layer, and artfully accommodating vents to handle air intake and exhaust for the retail spaces will be critical. The horizontal formed by the use of canopies helps lower the apparent height of the storefronts, however, the total number and projection of the canopies seems a bit strong and should continue to be refined.
- The base of the building should probably be composed less with the idea of bringing down to the ground the (green) columns from the upper stories and more with the idea of providing logical retail bay widths with the masonry coming to the ground. Retail bases do not necessarily have to reflect the openings above, although there are good structural and design reasons for grounding the masonry walls. Indeed, the masonry should be brought to the ground where the retail wraps around the north side, as the upper floors appear to float.

### **Recommendation**

*The HPO recommends that the Board support the progress of the project but request revisions in line with the comments above.*