
HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION

Property Address:	917 M Street NW and 1212 9th Street NW	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agenda
Landmark/District:	Blagden Alley-Naylor Court Historic District	<input type="checkbox"/> Consent Calendar
	Shaw Historic District	
ANC:	2F	<input type="checkbox"/> Denial Calendar
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Concept Review
Meeting Date:	March 26, 2014	<input type="checkbox"/> Alteration
H.P.A. Number:	#14-373 and #14-374	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> New Construction
Staff Reviewer:	Brendan Meyer	<input type="checkbox"/> Demolition
		<input type="checkbox"/> Subdivision

The applicant, owners SB Blagden, LLC, seek ongoing concept review for construction of two four-story buildings on two vacant sites in the Blagden Alley-Naylor Court Historic District and to connect the buildings with a pedestrian walkway over Blagden Alley. The project would incorporate a one-story brick commercial garage which contributes to the historic district and sits at the rear of the M Street lot.

Previous Board Review

The Board reviewed the joint concept for these two lots in July 2014. The Board adopted a motion endorsing the concept design for both buildings (with minor comments about building details) and the concept of a pedestrian walkway bridge over Blagden Alley that would connect both buildings at the third floor. The motion further determined that the bridge should be only one level and open rather than enclosed, and that the design should return to the Board after further development.



View to north, including soon to be completed projects on 9th Street.

Proposal

The design for the bridge has evolved into one that is open-air but covered by a glass roof and partially glazed walls. Although this is perhaps somewhat a somewhat different solution than was advised by the Board, it is intended to achieve the light, open, and airy quality that the Board requested.

The structure of the bridge includes a pair of diagonal members at each end from which the bridge deck is suspended. A glass panel roof would be supported by a sequence of post and beam supports with the posts also supporting horizontal railings. Early renderings shared with staff showed that the density of structural members, especially the beams supporting the roof, created a complicated visual distraction that competed with the simple utilitarian forms, shapes and materials of the historic alley buildings. Rather than streamlining the design by deleting posts, beams and roof, the applicant developed a membrane glazing that partially encloses the bridge and substantially hides its structural skeleton. The glazing panels mount to the outside of the structure. An asymmetric pattern of acute angled cut-outs in the vertical glazing panels produces the partially enclosed effect. Illumination studies of fixtures and output are included and show that the primary source of light will be integrated with the handrails.

Miscellaneous design changes to the buildings in accord with the Board's July motion include reconfiguring the rear fenestration of the M Street building to a more residential effect, substituting a metal fence for the masonry wall along the south side of the 9th Street building. Independently, the masonry of the 9th Street front façade has been slightly rearranged to give a taller stone base and penthouse massings have been added to both buildings.

Evaluation and Recommendation

In July the conceptual question of whether or not any such bridge would be compatible with the scale of the historic district was discussed thoroughly and thoughtfully by all parties. The caution the Board exhibited when it advised a one level, open, but not glazed bridge accurately predicted the inherent challenge of keeping the bridge as inconspicuous an intrusion into the historic district as possible.

The visual weight of the bridge is derived from its structure and its number of components. At minimum it needs the major structural members necessary to span the alley and the minor members necessary for safety railings. Beyond those requirements, to add extra components like a roof means to multiply members. However, mounting glazing to create a membrane over the extra members greatly helps to streamline the visual effect of the bridge.

While perhaps pushing beyond the parameters of the Board's direction, the current design for the bridge is polished and thoughtful in attempting to achieve the lightness and openness that the Board wanted to see.

Recommendation

The HPO seeks the guidance of the Board on the compatibility of a concept design for a partially enclosed, glazed pedestrian walkway over Blagden Alley with the Blagden Alley-Naylor Court Historic District. If found compatible, delegation of final approval to Staff is recommended.