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

Property Address:	1600 North Capitol Street, NW	X	Agenda
Landmark/District:	Bloomington Historic District		Consent Calendar
Meeting Date:	March 7, 2019	X	Concept Review
H.P.A. Number:	19-154		Alteration
Staff Reviewer:	Steve Callcott	X	New Construction
			Demolition
			Subdivision

Florida & Q Street LLC, with plans prepared by Bonstra/Haresign Architects, seeks conceptual design review for construction of a six-story building on a vacant site in the Bloomington Historic District. The large (approximately 19,000 square foot) site is located at the intersection of Florida Avenue, Q Street and North Capitol facing the former location of Truxton Circle.

Proposal

The plans call for a six-story, V-shaped building massed with equal-sized wings facing North Capitol and Florida Avenue meeting at a rounded entrance tower facing the intersection. The sixth floor on each side of the entrance tower would step back from the main mass. The building would be clad primarily in red brick with polychrome brick accent bands. Bay projections, the central tower element, and the set-back portions of the sixth floor would be clad in precast stone or metal or cementitious panels in a limestone color. The entrance in the center tower would be slightly elevated above grade, accessed by stairs and a ramp running through a terraced planter. As the block has no alley, the building would be serviced by a garage entrance on Florida Avenue.

Procedural Background

This project has a long procedural history, with initial approval by the Zoning Commission as a Planned Unit Development (PUD) in 2007. While not subject to historic preservation review, the design was developed with input from ANC 5C, community organizations and DC agencies, including the Office of Planning and the Historic Preservation Office, to ensure that the project integrated with and related to its neighborhood context. Following the 2007 approval, the project was modified several times through revisions to the PUD, including a reduction in the building's height and the number of units, and the use of the penthouse. The revisions have all been approved by the Zoning Commission.

A building permit was filed for construction in 2015 but full processing and issuance was delayed due to efforts related to the required environmental remediation of the site, which was formerly occupied by a gas station. The property ownership was required to seek, and received, two extensions to the PUD from the Zoning Commission in 2016 and 2018. With the environmental remediation still not complete, the permit has not been issued. The project

became subject to review under the preservation act when the Bloomingdale Historic District went into effect in September 2018.

Evaluation

The Bloomingdale Historic District has only eight non-contributing buildings and very few vacant sites – none of which are nearly this large – so there is very limited potential for new construction. Although still in draft form, the proposed design guidelines for historic district provide the following general direction for new construction:

New construction should be compatible with its site, taking into account the immediate context and the broader character of the historic district. Compatibility does not mean or require duplicating existing buildings, and the review of new construction is not intended to discourage good contemporary design or creative architectural expression. New construction should be consistent with the principles outlined in the guideline “New Construction in Historic Districts.”

In applying the principles outlined in the Board’s new construction guideline, the concept is compatible in terms of its setback (built to the building line, except for the recessed entrance to allow for a raised entrance, which is a characteristic that is typical of the district), orientation (with equal emphasis on the two primary elevations and a centered entrance), and materials (brick and precast stone). The use of projecting bays to provide a vertical emphasis and rhythm to the mass helps prevent the building from appearing too horizontal while also providing smaller-scaled elements to break down the long expanses of the street-fronting elevations.

While the height is obviously greater than that of the district’s rowhouses, this characteristic should be evaluated in the context of the project’s height-to-width proportions rather than simply in absolute terms. For a very large lot, the height is generally proportional to its large footprint and the width of its street frontages. As recommended in the design guidelines, the building’s height and mass also should be considered in relation to its context, which in this instance is an outside corner of the historic district facing several sites that are currently under construction or for which larger development projects are anticipated. From a broader planning context, the Mid City East Small Area Plan recommends a future land use designation change for the intersections of North Capitol with New York and Florida avenues from low density commercial/moderate density residential to moderate density commercial/moderate density residential.

Recommendations

While the general concept for the building is compatible with its context within the historic district, the design has a visually busy quality that could benefit from some simplification. This quality is exacerbated by the sharp color contrast between the red brick and what reads in the renderings as almost-white precast stone panels and trim, as well as the sheer quantity of light-colored elements. While the precast samples indicate that the light-colored elements will be more similar to limestone than is suggested in the renderings, lessening this contrast could help visually calm the design. Using a darker color for the precast and metal panels elements throughout the building and cladding the set-back sixth floor in red brick (rather than precast or metal panels) should be evaluated.

Changing the color of the balcony edges to a darker color – even if the projecting bays to which they are attached remain light in color – should also be considered. This would reduce their tracery effect while also strengthen the verticality of the projections.

Several public comments have been received questioning the appropriateness of the crowning element atop the center rounded tower. Since the project was initially designed in the mid-2000s, this type of crowning element has become somewhat commonplace. The design would probably work equally as well without it, but the HPO defers to the Board as to whether this element should be modified or removed.

The design of the garage door facing Florida Avenue should be developed to a quality appropriate for a street-facing elevation.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Review Board find the concept generally compatible with the character of the Bloomingdale Historic District, but that the design be refined as suggested above.