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

Landmark/District:	Capitol Hill Historic District	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agenda
Address:	411 New Jersey Ave SE	<input type="checkbox"/> Consent
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Concept
Meeting Date:	March 31, 2016	<input type="checkbox"/> Alteration
Case Number:	16-248	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> New Construction
Staff Reviewer:	Sarah VanLandingham	<input type="checkbox"/> Demolition
		<input type="checkbox"/> Subdivision

The National Democratic Club with plans prepared by Nelson Architects requests conceptual review for a new three-story building in the Capitol Hill historic district.

Property Description

This unusually-shaped vacant lot is flanked by several rowhouses to the south and a railroad right-of-way to the north. This right-of-way and an increase in the grade provides long open views to the building from New Jersey Avenue heading toward the Capitol. This property also falls under the jurisdiction of the Commission of Fine Arts under the Shipstead-Luce Act.

Proposal

The plans call for constructing a new three-story brick building with an at-grade entrance. It features a large Romanesque arch over the front entry and a rounded two-story projecting bay. The arch is constructed of multiple layers of brick. It is not clear if these are corbelled or at the same plane. Two brick medallions are located above the arch off to each side. The bay is topped by a short railing that appears to be metal creating a balcony. Since there are limited dimensions on the plans, it is not clear if the balcony is sunk into the bay or sits atop it.

The main face of the building is a standard running bond but between the second and third floors under the windows the brick is shown in a herringbone pattern. There are seven two-over-two windows evenly spaced across the third floor and four above the arch on the second floor. The third floor windows are all topped by jack arches while the rest have a soldier course lintel. The windows in the bay are also two-over two.

The façade contains a substantial cornice of unspecified material that concludes at the corner by a one-brick reveal. A short base of unspecified materials wraps the building under the first story windows. Date and name stones terminate the arch at this base to flank the entry.

The side elevation consists of more two-over-two windows and some blind window openings for rhythm. An inset deck above the second floor in the middle of the side elevation provides views to the Capitol. The deck is accessed through several full-light doors and features a railing that appears to be similar to the one on the front bay. The cornice on this side of the building is simpler in form than that on the façade.

The grade of the lot falls away toward the rear revealing more of the base on the side. At the rear a full four stories are revealed with the base material at the lowest level and brick above. Due to the lot shape, the rear elevation is narrower than the front and features two two-over-two windows on each level and exit doors at grade.

Evaluation

The overall massing, height, and materials of the building are compatible with the historic district. The building reads appropriately as a small institutional building rather than as a rowhouse. The use of Romanesque features is unusual for Capitol Hill but not incompatible.

Two-story bays are features found in Capitol Hill but since the proposed bay is rounded, the bay windows should follow the curve instead of being flat as shown in the plans. Two-over-two punched windows are compatible with the historic district but the seven continuous windows across the third floor becomes repetitive, and the applicant is encouraged to consider a different type of fenestration above the projecting bay such as French doors. The plans show these three windows as faux double-hungs that actually swing open as casements.

For the front entrance, the door is shown in plan as being right at the property line but the elevation suggests a shadow that would indicate the door is recessed, making it difficult to determine how heavy the entry arch will feel. As the project is further developed, the applicant should provide a section through the arch to show how much depth is intended.

The plans call for a small indentation at the corner in order to finish the cornice and turn the corner. The other oversized elements on this proposal suggest that the indent should be more substantial and intentional. Alternatively, another feature could be employed to ground this corner.

Designing a side elevation for this building is challenging because it will always remain visible but cannot feature projections since this is not technically a corner lot. The decorative brick work and inset deck feature help to break up the massing of the elevation and add visual interest. As the project progresses, it will be helpful to get more information on the detailing of these features.

Due to the long sightlines and grade variation, any roof appurtenances including mechanical equipment and the elevator overrun will be clearly visible. The plans show a small elevator overrun but do not indicate the location of any mechanical equipment. If this is to be housed on the roof, it will need to be designed.

As the plans progress, more information will be needed on the materials and detailing for the arch, windows, railings, base, and cornice. Additionally, landscaping information will be an important aspect of the design.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends the Board find the general concept to be compatible with the Capitol Hill historic district and direct the applicant to return for further review as the design progresses.