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

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Landmark/District:	<b>Capitol Hill Historic District</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Agenda
Address:	<b>732 7<sup>th</sup> Street, SE</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Consent
		<input type="checkbox"/> Concept
Meeting Date:	<b>May 28, 2015</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Alteration
Case Number:	<b>15-365</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> New Construction
Staff Reviewer:	<b>Sarah VanLandingham, Kim Williams</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Demolition
		<input type="checkbox"/> Subdivision

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The Potomac Electric Power Company (PEPCO) seeks approval to raze a substation in the Capitol Hill Historic District.

**Property Description**

The subject property, 732 7<sup>th</sup> Street SE, was built about 1941 as a PEPCO substation. It is a plain red brick structure with spare detailing consisting of a stone base, a flat stone door surround, and a stepped stone coping band. The building has no windows or other architectural features.

**Proposal**

The proposal is to raze the building in its entirety. While there is currently no replacement proposed for the site, the plan is for it to be sold for redevelopment.

**Evaluation**

The Potomac Electric Power Company substation was built in 1941 within the period of significance for Capitol Hill (the ending date of which is 1945) to accommodate the increased need for electricity for the growing war-time population on the Hill. Despite its historical relevance, the building does not possess the quality of design or the architectural characteristics of contributing buildings in the historic district, nor does it reflect the design sensitivity later adopted by PEPCO to more sympathetically introduce its substations into the city's neighborhoods.

The Capitol Hill Historic District was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1976. At that point, the nomination focused primarily on nineteenth century residential development. There was no specific period of significance included and no list of contributing buildings. In 2003, the district was expanded to include a small area to the south of the original district at the same time that an amendment nomination was prepared that defined a period of significance of 1790-1945 for the entire district. The 2003 amendment nomination included discussion of 20<sup>th</sup> century resources, but still did not include a list of contributing buildings for the full historic district.

Capitol Hill is fundamentally a residential district with small scale commercial areas and institutional buildings, both of which were largely neighborhood serving. It is characterized by its high-style Victorian residential buildings, its cohesive collections of both 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>-century rowhouses, and its architecturally notable and distinctive commercial and public buildings punctuating the residential corners and gracing the district's parks and squares. It is bordered by the Navy Yard on the south and the Capitol on the west, both of which provided important sources of employment and reasons for the neighborhood's development. The 1976 nomination explains that the "modest yet imaginative housing typifies the Historic District and gives it character and identity" (Item 8 p. 9). The 2003 nomination calls out the "red brick rowhouses with Victorian antecedents" as "the style most typically associated with the Capitol Hill Historic District" (Section 8 p. 4).

The Pepco Substation is not indicative of the high quality architectural character of Capitol Hill. Its design is essentially functional—a box housing electrical equipment—and not an important part of the architectural story of Capitol Hill. It was built at a time of great need to provide electricity to the growing residential, commercial and governmental city; in particular, this part of Capitol Hill which was experiencing a significant increase in population due largely to the around-the-clock employment at the Navy Yard, as the government increased its ordnance production for war-time needs. After the war, there was significant and vocal opposition to the "unsightly character" of the substations being built in residential areas. As a result, PEPCO responded by designing its sub-stations to be more in character with the neighborhoods in which they were being built.

### **Recommendation**

*The HPO recommends the Board determine the building at 732 7<sup>th</sup> Street, SE to be non-contributing to the historic district, and clear the raze application as consistent with the purposes of the preservation act.*