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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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agenda
Address:	<b>801 North Carolina Ave, SE</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Consent
		<input type="checkbox"/> Concept
Meeting Date:	<b>June 25, 2015</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Alteration
Case Number:	<b>15-246</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> New Construction
Staff Reviewer:	<b>Sarah VanLandingham</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Demolition
		<input type="checkbox"/> Subdivision

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Christ our Shepherd Church, with plans prepared by Teass\Warren Architects, seeks concept review for replacement of a historic church tower belfry in the Capitol Hill Historic District.

**Property Description**

Built in 1901 by a Methodist Protestant congregation, the building is a large stone Romanesque-style structure facing North Carolina Avenue. Its stone tower is topped by a decorative sheet metal belfry and pyramidal slate roof that reaches high above the building and is visible from a large area around the church. The building was noted in its day, with a Washington Post article from 1902 describing it as “one of the handsomest church edifices in East Washington” and that it “contributes much to the attractiveness of that locality.”

**Proposal**

The original sheet metal has deteriorated resulting in substantial rust and corrosion, rot of its supporting wood structural elements, and water infiltration within the masonry tower.

The plans call for removing the deteriorated belfry and replacing it with a new one to be constructed of fiberglass. The size and shape of the element would be replicated but the detailing would be simplified to reduce fabrication costs. The slate roof would be replaced with a synthetic slate.

**Evaluation**

Although the church is not individually listed on the DC Inventory, it is a building that, in its mass, composition, materiality and detailing, was designed to be impressive and distinctive; it is a landmark in the common meaning of the word. As such, proposed alterations to character-defining elements warrant careful examination.

The Board has not adopted guidelines dealing specifically church towers or steeples but the “Roofs of Historic Buildings” guideline identifies fiberglass as a material that may be an appropriate substitute for metal eaves, cornices, and parapets. The applicants have included images of fiberglass replicas of towers that are convincing in imitating the visual appearance of historic materials, and the substantial height of the belfry element above street view provides

some greater visual forgiveness than would be provided by an element closer to eye level. The applicants should supply samples of flat and shaped fiberglass elements to confirm that the replacement material will achieve the aesthetic qualities of the original.

The best preservation solution would be to replicate all of the detail of the original belfry so that it maintains its historic appearance. This proposal represents a compromise as the applicants have indicated that by reducing the amount of ornamentation on the tower, the fabrication costs would be substantially reduced. Specific information on the relative differences in cost between the various options has not been provided.

Again, since the belfry is so high in the air, there may be opportunities to reduce some of the detailing and still achieve a product that looks essentially like the historic tower. However, several details of the existing belfry – specifically the fluted detailing on the four corner towers and the dentils that encircle its top –are too fundamental to the building’s Romanesque character to eliminate and find consistent with the preservation act. Adding these details back into the design would make for a more compatible alteration that would retain the character-defining features of the church tower. There are multiple artificial slate products on the market and the new roof covering should accurately imitate the historic slate in its size, shape, color, and finish.

If some reduction in detail is deemed to be appropriate, the original design should still be thoroughly documented and archived so that it could be replicated in the future. The applicants are also encouraged to consider whether there are opportunities within the preservation community that could provide financial assistance in achieving a closer replication of the original condition for this important building.

### **Recommendation**

*The HPO recommends the Board find the concept of replicating the existing belfry in fiberglass to be a compatible alteration with the condition that the dentils and detailing at the corner towers are included to achieve a replacement that is consistent with the Preservation Act.*