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

Landmark/District:	Capitol Hill Historic District	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agenda
Address:	801 Virginia Ave, SE	<input type="checkbox"/> Consent
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Concept
Meeting Date:	October 22, 2015	<input type="checkbox"/> Alteration
Case Number:	15-629	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> New Construction
Staff Reviewer:	Sarah VanLandingham	<input type="checkbox"/> Demolition
		<input type="checkbox"/> Subdivision

Applicant Northfield Construction and Development with plans prepared by architect Peter Fillat seeks concept review for a new four-story mixed-use building in the Capitol Hill Historic District.

Property Description

Located just south of the Southeast Freeway between Virginia Avenue and L Street on 8th Street, the site is currently vacant and used as a parking lot. Much of the historic fabric of this area has been eroded over time with only two historic buildings remaining in the square. Across L Street are a few small scale residential buildings and south of the site on 8th Street are some small commercial buildings. Diagonal from the site sits the Navy Yard Car Barn (Blue Castle). A block further south 8th Street terminates at the Navy Yard.

Proposal

The plans call for constructing a four-story plus penthouse residential building with retail on the ground floor. The plans call for a brick building with punched windows in a contemporary vocabulary. The elevations are broken down by a series of glazed vertical bays with storefronts at ground level.

The circular driveway currently located on Virginia Avenue will be removed and a new curb cut created on L Street. A smaller retail floorplate allows for parking under and outside of the building at grade which would be entered through a garage door on the L Street elevation.

On top of the building would be a penthouse clad in “eco siding” with private terraces attached to two-story apartments as well as mechanical equipment and the elevator overrun. A green roof surrounds the penthouse. It is not clear from the drawings where railings would be located.

Evaluation

The use of projecting bays creates a vertical rhythm that helps the building relate to the rowhouses found throughout the district. This is lessened somewhat on L Street where the bays remain as oriels and do not engage the ground level. This problem could be remedied by rethinking the location of the parking entrance. By bringing those bays down to the ground, the

resident entrance on L Street could be made more prominent. Additionally, it is unusual to have a garage door in a street-facing elevation of a building in Capitol Hill—especially given the space between the rear of the building and the lot line. The L Street elevation would be improved by moving the curb cut to the property line and employing a free-standing gate. This would necessitate re-working the parking area to accommodate the necessary number of spaces.

The design would benefit from having a more fully developed base in order to ground the building. This could be achieved through a combination of materials, color, and design including adding bases to the storefront bays, a condition found consistently throughout Capitol Hill.

Although much of the historic context of this section of Capitol Hill is gone, the building as shown in the plans doesn't relate particularly well to that which remains. Some of this may be due to the lightweight appearance of the renderings and conceptual nature of the proposal so far. Some of these issues might be resolved by rendering the design to show the color and materials proposed for the building but others may require adding detailing to the design. This building will serve as an anchor for the redevelopment of this part of Capitol Hill and it should be designed to set the bar for future construction.

Given the large amount of public space, especially on the Virginia Avenue side, landscaping and the overall plan for public space will be an important component of the project. The applicants should consider the differing character between 8th Street (a commercial corridor), L Street (a residential street), and Virginia Avenue (an avenue with a wide right-of-way and large setbacks), and develop a plan that is coordinated but relates to the specific character of each of these streets.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends the Board find the concept to be generally compatible with the Capitol Hill Historic District with the condition that the applicant continues to refine the design so that it has more of the character of Capitol Hill including a weightier base, an attention to details and materials, and an improved L Street elevation that relocates the parking entrance to the rear yard rather than through the base of the building. A landscaping plan is needed as well as more information about materials, colors, and finishes.