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

Property Address:	3400 Connecticut Avenue and 2911 Newark Street, NW	X Agenda Consent Calendar
Landmark/District:	Cleveland Park Historic District	X Concept Review
Meeting Date:	December 19, 2019	X Alteration
H.P.A. Number:	20-043	X New Construction
Staff Reviewer:	Steve Callcott	Demolition Subdivision

Velocity Property Management, with plans prepared by Kasa Architects, seeks conceptual design review for construction of two new buildings at the Macklin apartment and retail complex in the Cleveland Park Historic District.

Property Description

The Macklin was designed by Washington architect Mihran Mesrobian in 1939 for developer Frank Macklin as an L-shaped residential and retail complex wrapping around a small corner parking lot. The three-story tan brick Art Deco-styled apartment building is oriented south to Newark Street, while its limestone-clad retail base faces east to the parking lot. A separate one-story commercial building extends out to the Connecticut Avenue building line and contains storefronts that face both the parking lot and the avenue; it is adjacent to a row of similar one-story commercial buildings built together with the Uptown Theater in 1936.

In addition to its Art Deco styling, the Macklin's significance is cited in the Cleveland Park Historic District nomination within the context of the neighborhood's retail development. When retail was first introduced in Cleveland Park in the 1920s along the east side of Connecticut Avenue, it followed the traditional form of one-story shopfronts erected in a linear strip. However, with the increasing use of the automobile for shopping in the 1920s, architects and developers began to explore new configurations for neighborhood shopping areas. While the strip shopping center is ubiquitous today, the L-shape configuration of the Park and Shop in the 3500 block of Connecticut Avenue -- set back from the street with a parking lot provided in front -- represented a new type of commercial shopping center when it was constructed in 1930. The Macklin illustrates the influence exerted by the Park and Shop, and is cited in the district nomination as "an ingenious mixed-use complex with an unusually sensitive configuration designed in response to its urban context."

The site is also noteworthy as the location of a former stone quarry that has a dramatic change in topography rising to the west along Newark Street. The Connecticut Avenue sidewalk elevation is 216' while the elevation of the Macklin apartment entrance is 236'. The elevation at the top of the hill on which the adjacent single-family house is situated (2939 Newark) is 260'.



Aerial photo of subject site with 2' topographical contours.

Proposal

The project calls for construction of two new buildings on the site – a series of three-story townhouses atop a one-story commercial building at the corner of Newark and Connecticut in a portion of the parking lot, and a four-story apartment building west of the Macklin. The building adjacent to the Macklin would technically be an addition with shared service spaces and an above-grade covered connection but has been designed to appear as its own building.

The corner building would have a retail base clad in textured concrete that would open to the avenue. The upper floor townhouses would be faced in tan brick with multi-light windows and face on to Newark Street. The curb cut to the parking lot would be eliminated and the area converted to a landscaped courtyard with café tables and chairs. A new stair would be provided connecting Newark Street to the courtyard between the townhouses and the Macklin.

The four-story building/Macklin addition would have its entrance on the side and be clad in white and gray brick with two asymmetrical bays on the street elevation; the fourth-floor would be largely glass. A glass-clad penthouse level would house a clubroom opening to a roof deck. A residential loading area would be provided off the rear alley.

Evaluation

Site plan

The site plan has been developed in an effort to respect the original organization of the site and retain the Macklin's residential and retail presence on the avenue. Since initially submitted, the proposal has been revised to increase the distance between the new corner building and the Macklin, and the stair introduced to improve pedestrian circulation. The courtyard would repurpose the parking lot for a more pedestrian-oriented use while retaining the general plan and orientation of the 1939 complex.

The plan has some similarities to one reviewed and approved by the Board at the Spring Valley Shopping Center, another 1930s automobile-oriented neighborhood shopping center in the 4800 block of Massachusetts Avenue (HPA 15-232). In that project, the Board found the insertion of a new retail and office building in a portion of the parking lot to be compatible because it was respectful of the center's overall site organization, reinforced the primacy of the avenue on which the shopping center faced, and improved the pedestrian qualities of the complex.

Height and mass

The corner retail/townhouse building steps down in height from the Macklin, allowing the existing building to remain prominent in the new composition. The new building's mass is broken down to provide a differentiated retail base that relates to the Connecticut Avenue context, and the setback of the top floor reduces the mass and apparent height, allowing the building to be seen as stepping down the hillside. Rather than rising straight up from the lower floors, a setback of the top floor on the west side (facing the Macklin) is recommended, as is provided on the other three sides.

Compatibly inserting a new apartment building/addition on the west side of the Macklin requires some further revision to the proposed height and mass. While reduced since initially submitted, the penthouse remains large and overly prominent. The siting of the building at the highest portion of the property ensures that the penthouse will be seen over the top of the Macklin and from up and down Connecticut Avenue as the tallest feature in the surrounding blocks. The back of the new apartment building will also loom large adjacent to and behind the Uptown Theater, the centerpiece of the Connecticut Avenue commercial district. Eliminating the penthouse, moving the clubhouse function to the fourth floor, and stepping back the massing of the fourth floor on the rear elevation for a roof deck would improve the compatibility of the height and mass. Providing a setback on the fourth floor facing Newark Street to lower the cornice height to three stories rather than four should also be considered.

Architectural character

The architectural intent of the project is for the new buildings to appear related but distinct from the existing structures. The use of similar materials, colors, detailing, and scale and patterns of fenestration are successful in relating the corner building to the Macklin and the Connecticut Avenue commercial district.

The architectural character of the apartment building is less successful. The sharply contrasting colors, large expanses of glass in the projecting bays and on the fourth floor, and the industrial

Bauhausian aesthetic are quite different from the palette, colors and scale of the Macklin and the surrounding historic district; the result is the building feeling foreign and out of place in the complex and in the historic district. One solution could be to use the same warmer earth-toned colors and materials as the townhouses but to use them in a different composition appropriate for a multi-unit building. While differentiating the design of the fourth floor from the underlying floors to lower the cornice height is a good idea worth retaining, the extent of glazing in the new building should be made consistent with the building's location in a residential neighborhood.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Review Board make the following findings:

- 1) The conceptual site plan is respectful of the site organization of the Macklin and compatible with the character of the historic district;*
- 2) The height and mass of the new buildings are generally compatible with the historic district, subject to setback revisions for the top floors of both buildings and a rear setback for the top floor of the west building, as outlined above;*
- 3) The architectural character of the townhouse/retail building is compatible with the historic district but the apartment building needs to be rethought and return for further review by the Board.*