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

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Property Address:	<b>3432 Connecticut Avenue, NW</b>	<b>X</b>	Agenda
Landmark/District:	<b>Cleveland Park Historic District</b>		Consent Calendar
Meeting Date:	<b>March 28/April 4, 2019</b>	<b>X</b>	Concept Review
H.P.A. Number:	<b>19-209</b>	<b>X</b>	Alteration
Staff Reviewer:	<b>Steve Callcott</b>		New Construction
			Demolition
			Subdivision

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Nicholas Development, with plans prepared by Core Architecture & Design, seeks conceptual design review for site and façade alterations and a two-story addition (one floor and a penthouse) to a three-story apartment building in the Cleveland Park Historic District.

**Property Description**

3432 Connecticut Avenue, NW, constructed in 1922, is a three-story Georgian Revival styled apartment building clad in red brick with limestone trim. The building sits atop a raised landscaped berm and features a classic T-shaped plan, with full frontage facing the street and shallow light well courts on each side of a central rear wing. This type of small-scale apartment building is discussed in the nomination for the Cleveland Park Historic District:

The demand for housing following World War I created a proliferation of houses and garden apartments within the residential core and apartment buildings along Connecticut Avenue. The latter were constructed of brick generally with Georgian decorative features. The increase in population in the neighborhood created a demand for retail services which led to the rapid growth of local stores in the 1920's. Apartment buildings of four and five stories with Colonial Georgian decorative motifs followed in rapid succession during the 1920's. These buildings were all brick (red and yellow) with stone trim accentuating the entrances and corners with some of the following details: arched entrances, pediments, angle quoins, key stones, pilasters, modillioned cornices and urns as well as decorative rectangular and round stone panels with rosettes and swags.

The building was developed by Harry Bralove and designed by architect Robert O. Scholz. Scholz was a prolific architect of apartment buildings in the 1920s when the building type became increasingly popular and widespread across the city. After working with architect George Ray, known for his neo-classical commercial buildings, Scholz established his own practice in 1922, the year the subject building was designed. He most frequently collaborated with builder David Baer; their work includes several other apartment buildings in Cleveland Park on Connecticut and Wisconsin avenues. In 1928-29, they designed and constructed the largest apartment-hotel in the city – Alban Towers – designed in the Gothic Revival style to complement the nearby Washington Cathedral. Other notable apartment buildings designed by Scholz include 2755 Macomb Street (1926), 3707 Woodley Road (1926), and the Bishop's House (1927). In the late 1930s and early 1940s, Scholz designed Art Deco styled apartment buildings in Foggy Bottom and, in 1940, designed one of Washington's first air-conditioned apartment buildings, the General Scott, on Scott

Circle. His other notable buildings of this period include the Eddystone at 1301 Vermont Avenue (1937), the Bay State at 1701 Massachusetts Avenue (1939) and the Pall Mall at 1112 16<sup>th</sup> Street (1940). He retired from architectural practice in the 1950s.

### **Proposal**

The project calls for removing the raised berm on which the building is sited, and lowering the first floor to the sidewalk grade. The façade below the sills of the second-floor windows would be reclad in new stone and the openings reconfigured for retail storefront windows and a residential lobby entrance. The non-original vinyl windows on the upper floors would be replaced with six-over-six sash to replicate the original condition. A fourth floor would be constructed on the roof, set back approximately 6 feet from the façade and rising flush with the south side walls. The fifth floor penthouse level, housing both mechanical and residential space, would be set back approximately 8 feet from the fourth floor at the front, and at a 1:1 ratio (approximately 10 feet) from the south side walls. The additional floors would be clad in terra cotta panels to relate to the color of the building's limestone trim.

### **Evaluation**

The proposal raises three preservation and design issues for the Board's consideration: the consistency of the project with the Board's regulations regarding demolition, the compatibility of changing the building's relationship to grade by removing the raised front yard berm and dropping the elevation of the first floor, and the compatibility of the proposed roof addition.

#### *Demolition*

The proposal has been developed with attention to the preservation regulations limiting the extent of removal of the building's structure. As illustrated on the section drawings (HPO.14 and .15) and plans (HPO.22, .23 and .24), the intent is to retain the majority of the exterior walls, the upper floor assemblies and the roof, and to remove only the first-floor slab, the non-bearing interior walls, and the north court walls. If this conceptual approach to removal is maintained through design development, the extent of removal does not result in substantial demolition as defined in the Board's regulations (DCMR 10-C, Chapter 3, Section 305) and is consistent with the preservation act.

#### *Change of grade*

Substantially changing the setting and grade in the front of an historic building is typically not an appropriate treatment. As is discussed in the Board's landscape guideline, a building's front yard – and particularly its topography and grade – is an important feature that establishes the immediate context for a building and its relationship to surrounding properties. In this instance, the property is adjacent to two different historic contexts – the landscaped, raised berm, residential condition to the north and the paved, sidewalk-grade, commercial condition to the south. Removing the grade would clearly not be compatible if the building was not in a commercial context, such as within the 3600 block of Connecticut, which is consistently made up of apartment buildings set atop raised berms. However, given 3432's particular location within the commercial district, lowering the grade would not be incompatible with this context; it would merely move the location where the residential and commercial conditions abut.

There is some precedent for this type of alteration when looking at historical development patterns within the city's historic neighborhoods, where the grade and first floors of residential buildings

were often altered to respond to the demand for retail uses. Many former 19<sup>th</sup> century residential buildings along Connecticut Avenue in Dupont Circle, 18<sup>th</sup> Street in Washington Heights, and along U and 14<sup>th</sup> Street were altered in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in response to emerging commercial districts. Within the Cleveland Park Historic District, the row of 13 Georgian Revival buildings at 3500-3518 Connecticut Avenue also illustrates this development pattern. Constructed originally as rowhouses in 1921 by developer Harry Wardman, these buildings had been altered to commercial use by the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century with the removal of their front yard berms and conversion of the basement levels to retail storefronts.

Given this building's particular context and with consideration of historical development patterns, it is recommended that the conceptual idea for lowering the grade and altering the base of the building be found compatible. However, it is also recommended that there be further refinement for how precisely this is done. As proposed, the design unnecessarily removes important character-defining features of the first floor – the distinctive stone quoining at the corners, the jack-arched keystone over the door, and the juxtaposition of red field brick with lighter stone accents. The resulting design is monumental rather than domestic in its proportions, and not in character with the building's Georgian Revival character. An alternative design that provides the desired retail storefronts could be achieved that retains these features and reduces the monumentality of the building's base.

#### *Roof additions*

The Board's guidelines also typically discourage adding vertically to a historic building if the addition is visible from a public street, as it has the potential to adversely alter the historic building's height, mass, design composition, cornice line, roof, and its relationship to surrounding buildings and streetscape – all of which are important character-defining features on historic property. However, this general principle is applied somewhat differently to different building types and contexts. Adding a visible roof addition to a small-scale rowhouse in a context of similarly-scaled residential buildings is typically more problematic and impactful on the character of the resource than adding to a large-scale commercial or industrial building in a more varied commercial context. For a mid-rise apartment building with a flat roof, such as 3432, adding an additional floor with a setback from the front elevation as proposed would not fundamentally change the character of the building, would not result in the removal of character-defining features, and would be subordinate and distinguishable from the underlying building. As seen from the south, a roof addition would be seen against the backdrop of the taller five-story building to the north rather than rising taller than the established heights on the block. While some further refinement of the design, materials and coloration could improve its relationship with the underlying building, the general concept for a set back fourth floor is reasonably compatible for this building and context.

The proposed penthouse level is more difficult to find compatible. It's greater proportional height relative to the underlying floors and the stacked wedding cake massing results in a complicated series of blocks that is top heavy and compositionally incongruent with the simple massing of this and the other residential and commercial buildings along Connecticut Avenue. While it may not be necessary to entirely eliminate this level, substantially increasing the setback from the front so that it would not be seen atop the new fourth floor (to the location of the proposed elevator) would result in an improved, simplified massing and composition. The

deck railing at this level should also be set back so this it isn't the crowning architectural feature of the fourth floor.

**Recommendation**

*The HPO recommends that the Review Board find the concept for alterations to the building's structure, front grade, first floor elevation and fourth floor roof addition to be generally compatible with this building and its context within the Cleveland Park Historic District, with the following conditions:*

- 1) Further refinement to the design of the first floor should be undertaken to retain more of the building's distinctive character and architectural features;*
- 2) The design of the fourth floor should be further developed to better relate to the character of the building;*
- 3) The penthouse level should be pulled substantially back from the front so that it is not seen above the fourth floor's front elevation.*