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

Landmark/District:	Cleveland Park Historic District	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agenda
Address:	3427 Wisconsin Avenue, NW	<input type="checkbox"/> Consent
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Concept
		<input type="checkbox"/> Alteration
Meeting Date:	November 2, 2023	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> New Construction
Case Number:	23-511	<input type="checkbox"/> Demolition
		<input type="checkbox"/> Subdivision

Applicant Rich Markus, agent for property owner Sunil Chhabra, seeks conceptual design review for construction of a 4 story plus penthouse apartment building in the Cleveland Park Historic District.

Property Description

The proposed building will be built upon a trapezoidal lot fronting Wisconsin Avenue between Norton Place and Ordway Street/Idaho Avenue NW. Two contributing residences of modest size currently stand on the lot along with their accompanying garage structures. Both houses and their garages will be relocated to the edge of the lot and face the secondary, primarily residential streets of Ordway Street and Norton Place, leaving the entirety of the lot's Wisconsin Avenue frontage for the proposed apartment building. The two relocations were previously approved by the Board (3427 Wisconsin Avenue NW, HPA 22-078, was approved for relocation to face Norton Place in January 2022; 3433 Wisconsin Avenue NW, HPA 22-241, was approved for relocation to face Ordway Street in April 2022). At this time, neither relocation has occurred.

Project Description

This is the second time a proposal for this lot has appeared before the Board. At the January 2022 monthly meeting, under case #22-078, the Board approved the relocation of one of the existing houses and reviewed a proposal for a 3 story plus penthouse apartment building on the site. The Board neither approved nor denied that design concept but made comments regarding fenestration, detailing, coloration, and landscape issues, and encouraged the applicant to return for further review. The Board found the proposal's height and overall massing to be compatible. Since that meeting, the lot has changed ownership and the property has been rezoned from RA-1 (permitting up to 40 feet in height, 0.9 FAR and 40% lot occupancy) to RA-2 (permitting up to 50 feet in height, 1.8 FAR and 60% lot occupancy). The design concept before the Board today is considerably larger than the design reviewed in 2022 and has changed significantly.

The current proposal calls for construction of a 23-unit apartment building. It will be 4 stories tall with additional penthouse and basement levels. It will have roughly a trapezoidal footprint to fit the lot and will fill the majority of the Wisconsin Avenue frontage, minus setbacks to match those of existing neighboring buildings (since initially filed, the applicant have revised the plans to be in alignment with the houses along Ordway and Norton in addition to Wisconsin Avenue). The building will take up nearly the entirety of the lot and will be framed by a simple landscaping of grass, shrubs, and trees. No resident parking will be provided on the lot, and no underground parking structure will be built. The lot is mostly flat and currently stands a few feet above the grade of Wisconsin Avenue,

sloping steeply to the sidewalk at the very edge of the property. This grade difference will be retained, thus setting the proposed building atop a small grassy pedestal.

The building itself will feature a single large mass, slightly broken along the Wisconsin Avenue frontage by the inclusion of 4 projecting bays that run from ground level to the fourth story cornice. A single bay will also be visible on both the Ordway Street and Norton Place facades. Some of the units will spread across two stories and will contain rooms with two stories of open height. Because of those larger interior spaces, some of the windows also spread across two stories to maximize interior light and views. As a result, the building's fenestration appears larger than that of its similarly-sized neighbors along Wisconsin Avenue. The windows are planned with minimally noticeable interruptions, thus creating large, relatively smooth expanses of glass. Much of the building's exterior will be beige brick, with the bays being gray cement board. Most of the materials will be dark in color and the building has relatively little detailing. Atop the building's fourth story will be a penthouse level topped by a metal roof and surrounded by open terraces on the street facing elevations and mechanical systems on the rear.

Evaluation

The proposal is compatible in overall form, but comes up a little short in the details. Though large in size, the proposed massing is appropriate for buildings of its type along Cleveland Park's two major commercial thoroughfares, Wisconsin Avenue and Connecticut Avenue. For example, the Abby apartment building, built in 1926, is a contributing structure located one block south at Wisconsin Avenue and Newark Street. It is 4 stories tall with an additional basement level, and has a street frontage approximately a third shorter than the proposal for 3427 Wisconsin. In addition, a series of non-contributing apartment buildings along the eastern side of Wisconsin Avenue are built at a similar scale, as are larger mixed-use developments along the western side of the avenue, across the street from 3427 Wisconsin, including Cathedral Commons and the Vaughan Place tower. The proposed size of the building is thus in keeping with existing conditions along that segment of Wisconsin Avenue.

Where the proposal needs improvement is in the details, notably the preponderance of dark materials, the unusually large fenestration, and the lack of traditional identifiers for a residential building. As currently designed, the concept does not read as a residential building, which is not appropriate for a historic district mainly notable for its residential architecture. Its design seems more fitting for an office building or school. This situation can be addressed without major changes to the building's overall shape. Ideally, the windows should either be made smaller, or their scale reduced through the use of framing elements. The introduction of additional detailing, particularly on the bays and to more strongly demarcate the front entrance, would better signal its residential function. In addition, the insertion of items such as Juliet balconies, sills, or detailed cornices can further break up its mass and connect it to existing apartment buildings along the corridor, most of which use similar elements. The proposed materials could also better relate to materials already found in Cleveland Park, which could also help better identify it as being a residential building.

In addition, although the applicant proposes to break up the massing through the use of bays, further strategies of a more horizontal nature should also be introduced, such as belt courses. Most of the historic district's similarly-sized residential buildings were built in the 1920s and feature such techniques (see, for example, 3621 Newark Street, 3039 Macomb Street, 3220 Connecticut Avenue, and 3217-3221 Connecticut Avenue). The proposed building's location at the edge of the historic district means that, on the one hand, it will be less obstructive, but on the other hand will serve as a gateway to Cleveland Park. As proposed, it appears more like a dividing line rather than a transition

line into the historic district. Refining the detailing, materials, and fenestration can tie it in better with Cleveland Park's unique residential aesthetic.

Recommendation

HPO recommends that the applicant revise the proposal to emphasize its residential function and better relate to the historic district in regard to materials, details, decoration, and fenestration, and return to the Board for further review.

HPO Contact: Todd Jones