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

Property Address:	610-24 Eye Street, NW	X	Agenda
Landmark/District:	Downtown Historic District		Consent Denial
Meeting Date:	February 26/March 5, 2015	X	Concept Review
H.P.A. Number:	14-242	X	Alteration
Staff Reviewer:	Steve Callcott		New Construction
		X	Demolition
		X	Subdivision

Monument Realty, with plans prepared by Hickok Cole Architects, seeks on-going conceptual review for a project in Square 453, bounded by 6th, 7th, H and Eye Streets, NW, in the Downtown Historic District. The project includes renovation and alteration of nine contributing buildings on Eye Street and within the alley and demolition of a five-story contributing alley warehouse for construction of an 11-story retail and residential building. The applicants will be seeking approval from the Mayor's Agent for a project of special merit.

Previous Review

When last reviewed in November, the Board determined that for the project to be compatible with the historic district it would need to have a much smaller bridge over the north/south alley – 2-3 floors at most, or no bridge at all -- and that there should be less or no construction over the alley buildings. It was also stated that the design of the new construction should be revised to be more in scale with the proportions and geometries of the Eye Street buildings, and the penthouse fully incorporated into the building's design. The concept for the streetscape, alley paving, and green roofs on the historic buildings were commended and found compatible.

Revised Proposal

The project has been revised to reduce the alley-spanning bridge to a single story at the second floor. The two stories immediately above the alley buildings have been pulled back 16' back from the face of the one-story building (increased from 4'10" in the previous submission) and 13'2" from the face of the two-story building (2' in the previous submission); the upper floors have been pulled back from 7' to 17'8". The design of the interstitial two floors has also been revised to have a lighter transitional vocabulary (there are also two options for those floors – one which has a consistent two-story height above the alley buildings; the other that steps the height with two stories above the one-story alley building and three stories above the two-story alley building).

The towers have been designed with complementary but slightly differentiated masonry elevations. The east building would have one-story openings; the west building would have openings paired two-story openings. The intent in each is for the masonry to be gradations of gray in order to be recessive and not compete with the red brick historic buildings. The penthouses have been further developed to be more fully integrated into the designs.

With the reduction of the alley bridge to a single story, an additional lobby entrance has been provided through two of the historic buildings. The existing door within 616 Eye would serve as the primary entrance, with the inside of the building converted to a lobby. An accessible entrance would be provided through 612 by modifying the façade to lower the entrance to grade. The lobby entrance previously proposed within the new construction at 622 has been shifted to be within 624; 622 is now proposed to have ground level retail.

Evaluation

The reduction of the alley bridge to a single story greatly improves the compatibility of the project. The visual link between the two towers is insubstantial enough now for each to read as separate structures rather than as one large project that spans the entire block. The single story glass connection, set far back from the street, is sufficiently minor so as to not erode the legibility of the block's alley system.

The increased setbacks above the alley buildings also improve the proposal's compatibility, and the design of the transitional floors immediately above them is lighter in weight and more comfortable atop the structures. The option that includes a step in the height of the interstitial floors (two stories atop the one-story building and three atop the two-story building) has a dynamism that distracts the eye from the disparity of heights between the alley buildings and new construction.

While the extent of structural removal at 614 and 616 would normally raise concerns about consistency with the Board's regulations regarding demolition, these buildings have already been comprehensively reframed in recent years, and the removal would not affect historic materials. While the interior solution for providing an accessible entrance from 612 through 614 to the new lobby in 616 is not particularly elegant, it will be entirely on the interior and will not affect historic construction. Efforts should be made to ensure that the bay on 614, which will be cut off from the rest of the building by the accessible lift, has appropriate illumination and perhaps an activated use (e.g. for a storefront window display) so that it doesn't appear dark and boarded up.

The proposal to lower 612's raised entrance to the sidewalk is somewhat harder to find compatible, as it will change the original relationship of the building's entrance to the street. However, this building's integrity has also been somewhat compromised by alterations to the proportions of the masonry window openings, and the stairs, door surround and front door that are proposed for removal are not original or character-defining features. The Chinatown portion of the Downtown Historic District contains many formerly residential buildings in which the first floors have been altered for commercial uses (including 624 Eye Street), so this type of alteration is not without precedence in the historic district. The scale, detailing and crisp contemporary vocabulary have been developed to relate compatibly with the surrounding residential buildings and streetscape. Given the many trade-offs that this project has entailed, in this particular instance altering the ground level of this building to achieve accessibility appears to be the best solution.

The vocabulary of the residential buildings has also been improved with a use of a neutral, recessive colored brick that allows the historic buildings to remain the primary focus of the composition. Varied heights of the massing elements, variations in the rhythm of the

fenestration, smaller-scaled openings, balconies, and a judicious use of colorful accents help break down the scale of the towers and provide variety and visual interest. As their designs continue to be developed, some further variation between the two towers and exploring further opportunities for distinctive elements that could further relate them to their Chinatown location should be encouraged.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Board find the revised concept sufficiently compatible with the character of the Downtown Historic District to warrant forwarding the case to the Mayor's Agent for review of the demolition permit. If it is found consistent with the purposes of the preservation act as a project of special merit by the Mayor's Agent, the project should return to the Board for final design review.