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

Property Address:	509-517 H Street, NW	X	Agenda
Landmark/District:	Downtown Historic District		Consent
Meeting Date:	April 27, 2023	X	Concept Review
H.P.A. Number:	23-176	X	Alteration
Staff Reviewer:	Steve Callcott		New Construction
			Demolition

Rift Valley Partners, with plans prepared by Cunningham Quill Architects, seeks on-going conceptual design review for alterations and construction of a 9-story addition behind five three-story row houses in the Chinatown section of the Downtown Historic District. The project would be for lodging and accessory uses.

At the February meeting, the Board expressed their support for the proposed removal of the rear wings of the historic buildings and retention of their main blocks, the setback of the new construction, and the overall deftness of the design. The Board asked for additional street views of the project showing the surrounding context in order to assess the compatibility of the height of the new construction, and also encouraged further study to simplify the design.

Revised Proposal

As before, the plans call for retaining the main front blocks of the historic buildings, with their rear ell wings removed. A nine-story tower would be constructed behind and partially above the historic buildings; the tower would rise to eight stories (86 feet), with the ninth floor (97 feet) set back on the south and west sides.

Design revisions since the last presentation include extending the tan brick of the H Street elevation around to the sides, revising the mass and materials of the 9th floor to use a light gray metal panel consistently on all sides, and changing the rear elevation from a dark gray metal panel to red brick. The submission also includes additional context views of the project from pedestrian perspectives on all sides and from Massachusetts Avenue as requested.

Evaluation

Each of the revisions is an improvement to the building's design and compatibility. The previous design's use of tan brick only on the front elevation made the façade appear thin and tacked on, which is successfully addressed by extending the tan brick around to the sides. The use of a single light-colored metal panel on the 9th floor helps this top floor recede and lowers the visual top of the building to the 8th floor. As illustrated by the rendering from Massachusetts Avenue, the back of the building will be quite visible above the block from the north. HPO and the applicants agreed that the previously proposed dark metal panels would appear forbidding, and that the use of red brick was a better choice at relating the tower to its context.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Board find the revised concept to be compatible with the Downtown Historic District and delegate final approval to staff.