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

Property Address:	1625 Massachusetts Avenue, NW	X Consent Calendar
Landmark/District:	Massachusetts Avenue and Dupont Circle Historic Districts	
Meeting Date:	September 28, 2023	X Concept Review
H.P.A. Number:	23-454	X Alteration

The property owner, 1625 Massachusetts Avenue LLC, with plans prepared by Eric Colbert & Associates Architects, seeks conceptual design review for façade and public space alterations to a non-contributing office building in the Massachusetts Avenue and Dupont Circle historic districts for conversion of the building to residential use.

Property History and Description

1625 Massachusetts Avenue is an eight-story stone and glass office building constructed in 1971 as the Airline Pilots Association Building. It was designed by Vlastimil Koubek, a prolific modernist architect responsible for the design of over 100 office and apartment buildings in the District from the 1950s through the 1990s. Based on its date of construction well outside the periods of significance (1875-1931 for the Dupont Circle Historic District and 1880-1940 for the Massachusetts Avenue Historic District), the building does not contribute to the character of either district.

The Massachusetts Avenue Historic District represents one of the finest realizations of Pierre L'Enfant's Baroque vision of grand vistas and diagonal avenues. It was developed largely between 1880-1940 as an urban boulevard of grand mansions, rowhouses, embassies and apartment buildings clad in stone and brick and set in a linear, tree-lined landscape. It includes some of the city's most elegant turn-of-the-century residences by locally and nationally prominent architects in the Queen Anne, Richardsonian Romanesque, Beaux-Arts, Chateausque and Classical Revival styles. East of 20th Street, the avenue contains many purpose-built non-contributing office buildings and association headquarters, such as the subject property.

Proposal

The plans call for retaining the building's neo-formalist façade, composed of a two-story base with travertine-clad piloti supporting the upper six floors which are clad in thin travertine fins. The windows on the first two floors would be replaced with new units with deeply molded Alucobond frames set between rather than recessed from the piloti. A sculpted metal canopy would be added atop the corner entrance. The windows and flat metal spandrel panels on the upper floors would also be replaced; the new metal spandrels would be beveled. The existing mechanical penthouse would be removed and replaced with a lower occupied penthouse with a roof terrace, green roof, and solar panels atop a canopy structure.

The public space plan calls for installing raised concrete planters that would provide a vegetated screen for small outdoor patios around the building's perimeter; the planters would be sloped, rising from 1'6" at the edge of the sidewalk to 3'6".

Evaluation

The project is illustrative of the much-discussed office-to-residential conversions that the city is promoting to alleviate housing scarcity and a surplus of office space, and it would add needed street life and landscape to this stretch of Massachusetts Avenue. The alterations to the building are compatible with the character of the historic districts, adding an increased level of depth, detailing and material richness.

Removing the barren expanse of paving from the front of the building and introducing trees and other plantings will greatly enhance the character of the building and its compatibility with the historic districts. The proposed planters are similar to those that originally surrounded the building and are necessary to provide soil depth for the portion of public space that is above the underground garage. As the landscape plan continues to be developed, it will need to be coordinated with and comply with DDOT and the Office of the Urban Forester requirements. For instance, the proportion of paved space still exceeds what is normally permitted. The planting plan will need to meet requirements regarding visibility through public space, and the tree plan will need to comply with the city's public space and preservation policies that encourage the reestablishment of double allées of large shade street trees on avenues. But these are refinements that are best coordinated in conversations directly with DDOT and in which HPO will take part.

Recommendation

HPO recommends that the Board approve the concept as consistent with the purposes of the law, encourage the applicants to further develop the public space plan in coordination with DDOT and HPO, and delegate final approval further review to staff.

Staff contact: Steve Callcott