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

Landmark/District: **Financial Historic District** (x) Consent Calendar

Address: **734 15th Street NW**

Meeting Date: **April 22, 2021** (x) Alteration
(x) Subdivision

Case Number: **21-263** (x) Concept

The applicant, Milken Center for the American Dream, requests the Board's review of a conceptual application to renovate the Walker Building, a 12-story office building constructed in 1937 in the Financial Historic District. The renovation would expand the Milken Center concept to incorporate a fourth building, in addition to the three for which the Board has already reviewed rehabilitation plans. The upper four floors of the building would be reconfigured as expanded space for the Milken Center, and the remainder would be used as leased space.

Background

The Board's previous reviews of the Milken Center from 2015 to 2019 involved the former Riggs National Bank (1899-1902) at 1503-05 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, with its 1926 addition; the former American Security & Trust Company (1904-05) at 1501 Pennsylvania Avenue NW; and the connected American Security Building (1930) at 730 15th Street, NW. The Board has approved those project components in concept, with delegation of final reviews to the staff. The U.S. Commission of Fine Arts has conducted concurrent reviews and given its approval as well. Numerous permits have been issued for the project, and it is currently under construction.

Recent acquisition of the Walker Building has enabled the Milken Center to expand the club facility planned for the upper floors of the American Security Building. In order to accomplish this expansion, a subdivision will be required to encompass the Walker Building within the same lot as the three other structures. The applicant also proposes to reconfigure the internal structure of the four upper floors of the Walker Building to create three floors that will align directly with the upper floors of the American Security Building. The elevator core will also be relocated for functional reasons.

Architectural Character

The Walker Building is similar to the adjacent American Security Building in overall form, character, and materials, but is distinguished by a very fine late Art Deco facade in the manner of New York skyscrapers of the era. The architect was Porter and Lockie, and the craftsman of the polychrome concrete decorative panels above the three front portals was John Joseph Earley; both are distinguished Washington practitioners of the time whose work is well represented among local landmarks. Documentation of the building is presented in the architectural historian's report at the end of the project plans.

Scope of Work

The Walker building is largely unaltered from its original condition, although the windows were replaced in 1980s renovation, which also changed the main entrance doors and converted the secondary entrances in the other two portals to windows. While the proposed renovation involves some significant changes to the interior structure of the building, this is more than offset by the exterior restoration. Most importantly, the limestone street façade will be restored to its historic appearance. This work includes:

- restoration of the original entrance portals, complete with replacement of the non-original doors and windows with new doors in each opening as originally designed, including replicated metalwork copying the original;
- readjustment of the altered sidewalk grade to reflect the original condition;
- cleaning and repointing of the stone as needed; and
- replacement of the non-original windows with new metal units to match the 6/6 sash configuration shown in period photographs.

The upper portions of the street façade, including the setbacks, will remain in place as the interior floors are reconfigured. As requested by the HPO staff, the adjustment of the 9th floor level will be recessed two full bays back from the windows to avoid any visibility of the realigned floor from the exterior. The structural shift in the newly double-height 10th floor will similarly not be visible from the exterior (see project plans, page 9).

Recessed from the street façade, a new penthouse will be constructed to replace the present utilitarian structure, which is not needed with the elevator relocation. It will be lower in height and further back from the façade so that only a tiny portion will be visible from the street. Its façade will evoke that of the ground floor. Also not visible from the street, the remaining portion of a former light court will be filled in to expand the office floors. The corresponding section of this shared court has already been filled in at the American Security Building.

Interior Protections

As with the previously reviewed components of the project, the Milken Center has agreed to put in place permanent historic protections for the original lobby of the Walker Building, which is intact and well-maintained (see plans, page 26). Once the renovations are complete, there will be updated nominations for the Riggs and American Security landmarks, extending designation to include the banking halls and lobbies, and a historic landmark nomination for the Walker Building and its lobby.

Recommendation

The Historic Preservation Office recommends that the Board endorse the project concept and subdivision, and delegate final review and signoff on project plans to the HPO.