

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

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Landmark/District:	<b>GWU/Old West End HD</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agenda
Address:	<b>1900 F Street, NW</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Consent
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Concept
Meeting Date:	<b>September 26, 2019</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Alteration
Case Number:	<b>HPA 19-541</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> New Construction
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Demolition
		<input type="checkbox"/> Subdivision

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The George Washington University, with plans prepared by VMDO Architects, seeks conceptual design review for renovation of Thurston Hall at 1900 F Street in the George Washington University/Old West End Historic District and the Commission of Fine Arts jurisdiction.

**Property Description**

Designed by Harvey H. Warwick and built originally as the Park Central Apartment Building in 1928, this Art Deco and Art Moderne style building was part of the new wave of large apartment buildings constructed in the 1920s and 1930s in the West End catering to government workers. When it was built, the nine-story, 320-unit Park Central was one of the largest ‘elevator apartment-hotels’ in the city. Now known as Thurston Hall, the building serves as a residence hall for over 800 GWU students.

**Proposal**

The proposed project includes a comprehensive interior renovation, construction of a new occupied penthouse and vegetated roof, a canopy over the courtyard, alteration and cut away of the building at the upper floors on the south elevation, carving away and projections on the interior courtyard elevations, changing the masonry openings and replacement of windows in the courtyard, and streetscape improvements.

**Evaluation**

The renovation includes several significant alterations to the exterior of the building. On the south elevation, the central bay of the building would be carved away at the top three floors, creating a large opening to allow air and light into the interior courtyard space. The carving out of this portion of the building continues inside at floors 5 and 6 stepping down to the courtyard space and creating green terrace levels. Along with these green terraces a new glass canopy covers the space creating a dramatic and appealing bright courtyard. The exterior wall opening will be partially visible through the service alley from 19<sup>th</sup> Street, but the overall massing of the building would be maintained. The architect has designed hanging vegetation in the void at the exterior wall plane to refer to the original wall. Furthering this design idea could create a more powerful solution to serve as a palimpsest of the historic building.

At the roof level a new occupiable penthouse space, relocated mechanical equipment, and a new canopy covering the courtyard will be set back on all sides, and for the most part would not be visible. At some longer views there is minimal visibility of the canopy, but it does not distract from the building or the historic district.

At the street level, minor alterations enhance the public space—two small areaways are introduced on the east side but maintain the character-defining berm feature along 19<sup>th</sup> street—and a revised front entry terrace on F Street introduces new seating areas as well as additional green space.

The most significant alteration is in the interior courtyard. The interior space would be sculpted to create a dynamic green courtyard space, allowing light and air in from the carved-out south façade. This manipulation of the donut-shape building parti works well to adapt to this larger architectural move.

Where the architectural alterations are in question is with the courtyard walls. The proposed elevations and renderings suggest that every masonry opening in the existing courtyard will change—with an entirely new interior façade composition. There is a lack of notes on the drawings or write-up of the complete scope of work, so it is unclear what the design intent is. Based on several meetings with the architectural team and GWU, HPO had the understanding that the courtyard would be preserved with exposed (or painted brick) and that *some* windows would be replaced with larger scale, multi-floor projections in a few specific locations that signified common student spaces. The proposed interior facades raise the question of how the historic courtyard walls could be retained if this much brick is removed and patched? The result of this window replacement/relocation is that the original courtyard walls are not being retained and instead are being rebuilt completely. HPO recommends that the original masonry openings in the courtyard be maintained to restore this original expression of the courtyard and this building typology, and to limit the courtyard elevation alterations to a few, large-scale framed openings.

### **Recommendation**

*HPO recommends that the Board:*

- 1. Find the concept generally consistent with the preservation act;*
- 2. Advise the applicant to revise the interior courtyard elevations to maintain the original window composition (with the exception of the few special, large-scale windows);*
- 3. Continue to study a solution at the south elevation that recognizes the original massing of the building;*
- 4. Delegate final approval to staff.*

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