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

Property Address:	7th and Pennsylvania Avenue, SE (Hine Junior High School site)	X Agenda Consent Calendar
Landmark/District:	Capitol Hill Historic District	X Concept Review
Meeting Date:	April 28, 2011	Alteration
H.P.A. Number:	11-195	X New Construction
Staff Reviewer:	Amanda Molson and Steve Callcott	Demolition
		X Subdivision

Stanton-Eastbanc LLC, represented by architect Amy Weinstein, seeks conceptual design review for redevelopment of Square 901 and a small southern portion of Square 900 in the Capitol Hill Historic District for a mixed used residential, office, and retail project. The site is bounded by Pennsylvania Avenue on the south, an east-west service alley running through Square 901 on the north, and 7th and 8th Streets, SE on the west and east. The property was historically occupied by several schools, most notably architect Adolf Cluss's Wallach School (1864), as well as the Tower School (1887) and the first Eastern High School (1892), all demolished in the mid-20th century and replaced by Hine Junior High. In addition to Hine and its playground, the site is occupied by the temporary tent that was erected for vendors following the Eastern Market fire.

Project Background

The redevelopment of this city-owned property was awarded to Stanton-Eastbanc through a competitive bidding process managed by the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Economic Development (DMPED). Prior to selection of this team, opportunities were provided for review and comment on the proposals by the community and the Office of Planning.

The project was first submitted in March 2010, as developed in response to the RFP, but was put on hold at the request of the applicants and DMPED while the terms of the deal were still being finalized. Design work and consultation with the community and Office of Planning began in earnest in January 2011, and the applicants have since presented the evolving plans at numerous meetings hosted by Advisory Neighborhood Commission 6B, the Capitol Hill Restoration Society, and other groups. The project will be submitted as a Planned Unit Development (PUD) for review by the Zoning Commission upon obtaining conceptual design approval from the HPRB.

Project Description

The site will be cleared in its totality, including demolition of Hine and removal of the market tent, both of which are non-contributing to the historic district. C Street, which was closed during the 1960s and its right-of-way absorbed into the Hine site, will be reopened and reconstructed for pedestrian and vehicular traffic. The street will run

through a new urban plaza opening to 7th Street; it is envisioned that the street would be temporarily closed on weekends to accommodate outdoor vendors and for special events.

For the purposes of discussion, the development site can be divided into five parts distinguishable by use and general architectural direction. Their locations, number of floors, and heights from curb to parapet are summarized below; the heights do not include penthouses, which are discussed later in this report.

North residential building

This building extends east-west on the north side of the site, bordered by an existing alley and the reopened C Street. The building would contain 33 affordable housing units above ground-floor retail. The visually dominant four-story center section is proposed to include a continuous 4' bay projection into public space and rise to 48' tall; the building would step down to three stories on 7th and 8th Streets. The 7th Street wing will have retail entrances on the ground floor; the 8th Street wing will have entrances to residential units.

The building's dominant central core and horizontal proportions are somewhat reminiscent of Eastern Market's taller center hall, which is similarly punctuated by the more modest north and south halls at either end of the landmark building. The design calls for a combination of brick, terra cotta, and slate shingles.

8th Street residential building

This building extends north-south along 8th Street, wrapping the corner onto C Street. It would be four stories at the street, with a fifth floor set back 30' from the facades in all locations except over the lobby entrance. Overall heights range from 35' to 48', with the predominant height at approximately 45'. The C Street elevation would include the access to the project's underground parking garage; the rear of the building opens to a mid-block courtyard.

While a single apartment building within, the design has been developed so that it would appear as a variety of individual rowhouses and small scale apartment buildings. The facades would include variations in height, mass and ornamentation, with traditional bay projections; decorative brickwork and varying cornice treatments; raised entrances with basement-level units below; and a variety of masonry colors. Further relief is provided by two breaks in the street wall along 8th Street, mimicking the alley entrances that punctuate Capitol Hill's residential blocks.

8th & D corner building

This building is located at the corner of 8th and the spur of D Street that feeds into Pennsylvania Avenue; while orthogonal in shape, its primary frontage would be perceived as facing Pennsylvania Avenue. The building includes five floors of residential units over a ground floor that may be used as for retail, office or residential. The overall height is approximately 63 feet, with a slight increase at the mid-block tower element.

The design is a contemporary interpretation of a Victorian commercial building with vertically-oriented two-over-two windows and decorative brick panels organized asymmetrically into repeating blocks. The sixth floor features a roof terrace viewed through voids in the panels, with a tower element at the west corner.

Pennsylvania Avenue office building

Located at the corner of 7th and Pennsylvania, this office and retail building is architecturally composed of three different pieces: a three-story entrance element slightly recessed from the street wall adjacent to the 8th and D building, the primary seven-story block at the corner, and the 7th Street frontage, which steps down with a variety of heights as it extends toward C Street.

The entrance element would be predominantly glass to provide views through to the courtyard with some type of architectural skin folded over it to provide sculptural form. This element is a relatively recent addition to the plans, and the design direction has not been fully developed. The corner element would rise to seven floors (88 feet). The corner element would have patterned glazing panels set behind a brick armature. The armature is intended as a contemporary interpretation of Capitol Hill's traditional corbelled masonry architecture with twisted brick columns to define vertical bays, horizontal floor divisions, and which suggest towers at the roofline.

With the discussion to date focused elsewhere on the project, the 7th elevation has received the least attention. However, the conceptual direction is for this elevation to step down in height with setbacks for upper floors, employ projections to break down its mass, have ground level retail to reinforce the commercial uses on the opposite side of the street, and to recess the loading dock considerably back from the building face to minimize its visibility.

Plaza building

This building would form the southern edge of the plaza at the corner of 7th and C Streets with its most notable feature being the canted angle of its C Street elevation that opens the plaza up to 7th Street. The plaza will be used as public gathering space and to accommodate vendor tents for the weekend flea market.

The building is anticipated to be either residential or hotel, with four stories over ground-floor retail, reaching approximately 58' in height. Along with the 7th Street frontage, the plaza building's design is still being discussed. Whether the use is residential or hotel, the idea is to employ a residential vocabulary with balconies, large expanses of glass, and projections.

Evaluation

It is rare that the Board has the opportunity to review such a substantial project in terms of overall size and potential impact on an historic district, particularly on Capitol Hill. As this project bridges commercial buildings on Pennsylvania Avenue and 7th Street with the

more modest residential buildings on 8th, C and D Streets, it presents special challenges in achieving compatibility within a varied context primarily composed of historic buildings.

Before the applicants continue to elaborate on the design, they seek comments on and approval for three critical elements: the site plan, the general architectural direction, and the overall height and massing. It is anticipated that the project will return for additional review in the next few months when the plans are further developed and to respond to any changes and refinements suggested by the Board prior to submitting for zoning review.

Site Plan

The conceptual site plan is urban, contextual and consistent with established patterns in the Capitol Hill Historic District. The reopening of C Street reestablishes a missing piece of the L'Enfant Plan, improves pedestrian and vehicular connectivity, and breaks the site back down into their original blocks consistent in size with the historic district. Buildings are clearly oriented to the streets on which they front and are predominately built to reinforce established building lines. Where the plan deviates from the standard build-to lines – most notably in the creation of the plaza – it is done with intension for the public benefit of creating a new civic space. This space, and the activity it will support, will enhance and build on the substantial public investment in Eastern Market and reinforce this area as a neighborhood center for Capitol Hill.

The site plan incorporates several smaller but welcome reprieves in massing that also improve its compatibility with the historic district, including the two indented garden areas on 8th Street, the recessed entry foyer on Pennsylvania Avenue, the recessed loading dock on 7th Street, and the prolific use of projecting bays. As it is atypical that entire blocks on Capitol Hill would have been developed in a single building campaign, these breaks help to counteract the expansiveness of the facades and suggest a more organic development pattern.

The treatment of public space will be crucial in helping the project appear organic and achieve compatibility with the historic district, and should continue to be developed to reflect the use and scale of the buildings it abuts.

1.1 On 8th Street, it will be important for the landscape plan to denote individual, fenced gardens appropriated to each of the building facades rather than as a continuous single landscape that extends the length of the block. Each “rowhouse” on 8th Street should have its own walk from the sidewalk to the front door, and gardens should be planted in a variety of plant materials. Turning the planting and maintenance of front yards over to individuals interested in gardening should be considered to ensure both variety and ownership by the future residents.

1.2 The treatment of the public space in front of the north residential building should continue to be studied. Rather than extending the plaza pavement to the front façade, continuing the brick sidewalk that extends along the east and west sides of the building down C Street would more convincingly tie this building back into the

surrounding neighborhood. The use of bollards, which have negative associations with security measures and can be an impediment to pedestrians, should be carefully considered in consultation with OP and the DC Department of Transportation.

- 1.3 As discussed with the applicants, the placement of below-grade utility vaults and their impact on the public space (if located in public space) should continue to be explored.

Architectural Direction

The overall architectural direction of the project is consistent with the Board's design principles for new construction, which state that new buildings should be compatible with the character of the surrounding historic district. The principle of compatibility is addressed in the design guidelines as follows:

Compatibility is based on a thorough understanding of the design principles of existing buildings, as well as those used to design landscape features and secondary buildings. Compatibility should also involve analysis of how major design principles are used in the neighborhood and study of how they can be interpreted using today's materials and construction techniques. Compatibility does not mean exactly duplicating the existing buildings or environment. A new building should be seen as a product of its own time. By relating to the existing buildings and the environment, but being of its own time, a new building shows a district's evolution just as the existing buildings show its past.

While incorporating some traditional architectural elements of Victorian-era design, particularly in the 8th Street residential building, the project reinterprets the character of the historic district in creative and often whimsical ways. The 8th and D corner building, which at first appears wholly contemporary, includes clearly recognizable abstractions of conventional elements such as double hung windows, decorative brickwork, and corner towers. Similarly, the creative use of brick in the Pennsylvania Avenue office building, the rich material palette of the north residential building, and the detailing suggested for the 8th Street row is both recognizable as being influenced by the surrounding historic architecture but also unusual and different. While the specific building designs are still being developed, the general architectural approach establishes a compatible relationship with Capitol Hill's Victorian-era residential and commercial buildings in its use of materials, proportions, building types and variety, while promising to be contemporary, interpretative and clearly a product of its own time. As the architecture continues to be developed, the HPO encourages study of the following:

- 2.1 The architectural direction of the north residential building should be reconsidered. It is questionable whether designing the central core of this building as a single pavilion to serve as a companion to the massing of Eastern Market across the street is an appropriate design model. Eastern Market is so distinctive and unusual in its form and as a building type that it raises the question as to whether it needs or benefits from having a companion. The north residential building is at a crucial transition point between the modest residential and commercial buildings to the north and the taller

new construction buildings planned to the south that it bears the responsibility to seamlessly bridge these two contexts. The building might also benefit from further study to mitigate its long, low appearance. Restudy might include removing or altering the lengthy horizontal band of masonry in favor of vertical piers that visually divide the center section into smaller bays and slightly recessing ground floor retail entrances to provide additional shadow.

2.2 Implying depth and providing shadow to the skin of the 8th and D corner building will be particularly important for this design to achieve compatibility and mitigate its potential flatness.

2.3 In terms of architectural direction, the 7th Street elevation and plaza building remain too preliminary to comment on and should continue to be developed for presentation at a later time.

Height and Massing

The project's incorporation of buildings that are taller than much of the surrounding historic district is perhaps the most important conceptual issue that needs to be finalized before the project can continue to be developed. As the discussion of architectural direction and height and mass are not easily separated, several recommendations that affect both height and mass and architectural development are offered.

The Board's design guidelines for new construction do not explicitly lay out an acceptable ratio of the height of new construction to surrounding buildings. Instead, the guidelines state: "Perhaps the best way to think about a compatible new building is that it should be a good neighbor, enhancing the character of the district and respecting the context." As has been shown in historic districts throughout the city, this can be done with taller new construction if careful attention is paid to the design, proportions, materials and other characteristics that collectively work to achieve compatibility.

The overall height and massing of the 8th Street residential building is compatible with the surrounding residential blocks. While taller than some of Capitol Hill's more modest historic houses, the row is within the established range of heights established by the variety of rowhouses and small scale apartment buildings found throughout the district. Visually dissecting the mass into smaller units, employing a substantial setback for the top floor, inserting recesses that serve as garden areas mid-block, terminating some projecting bays one floor below the parapet, and varying the width of structures along the row all work to achieve a compatible height and mass for this building.

The Pennsylvania Avenue office building will be the project's "beacon" as viewed from the avenue, attracting the attention of riders emerging from Metro and drivers on the avenue. It will also likely be the tallest building on Pennsylvania Avenue. However, being the tallest building doesn't necessarily mean that it will be incompatible with the historic district. This location facing the commercial corridors of Pennsylvania Avenue and 7th Street is certainly the most logical place to locate taller construction. Historically,

the Wallach School, while not as tall as the proposed office building, provided a similar punctuation on the avenue with one of Capitol Hill's most important civic buildings. Given the breadth of the wide avenue, the relative hierarchical importance of this building in the totality of project, and the site's frontage on a L'Enfant square and adjacency to a Metro station, additional height in this location is not inappropriate provided that the building is otherwise designed to "enhance the character of the district and respect its context." To that end, the HPO suggests study of several refinements:

- 3.1** Setting the top floor back from the façade plane, canting the wall surface, or developing it with an alternative roofline could help lower the building's apparent height and add visual interest to the top of the building. The setback would not need to be substantial in order to achieve an impact, with the result suggesting a dominant mass of six floors rather than seven.
- 3.2** In coordination with the restudy of the roofline, the masonry projections above the sixth floor should also be considered. The vertical masonry projection on Pennsylvania Avenue, in particular, doesn't seem to make as much sense now that the building's main entrance has been moved off-center to the smaller entry structure. The extension draws attention to the building's central core, which is not delineated in any other way and which is no longer where pedestrians will be directed to enter the office space above.
- 3.3** The scale of the building at the pedestrian level could be improved through further study of the building's base. The retail spaces on the ground floor appear out of scale in height with surrounding historic buildings and emphasize the building's large size. Projecting or smaller scaled storefronts would lower the perceived height of the retail spaces and add weight at the ground floor where it is traditionally found.

One of the most important elements of the project – affecting not only the Pennsylvania Avenue office building but all of the new construction – will be the massing and design treatment of the penthouses. While penthouses are common in the Downtown and 15th Street historic districts, they are not part of the character of Capitol Hill except on a few non-contributing buildings where they result in a very foreign presence on the skyline. The penthouses will be extremely visible across the wide surrounding streets and avenues and could add significant height and bulk; large penthouses spanning across the roofs of the new construction could also dramatically undercut the design intent of trying to break the structures down to appear as separate, smaller structures. As the plan develops further, it will be necessary to more fully gauge the potential obtrusiveness of the penthouse levels by carefully studying perspective views from all angles.

- 3.4** To minimize their footprints, the penthouse levels should be utilized exclusively for mechanical equipment; alternative locations within the body of each building should be found for amenity spaces. Where possible and necessary to reduce their size, absorbing mechanical functions within the body of buildings should also be explored.

3.5 Limiting elevator overrides and stepping down the heights of penthouses where additional height is not needed (which requires zoning relief that could be provided as part of the PUD review) should be evaluated.

3.6 The penthouses should be designed and articulated as integral to the building designs.

Recommendations

The Historic Preservation Office recommends that the HPRB take the following actions:

Site Plan: Approve the general site plan in concept as compatible with the character of the Capitol Hill Historic District, with further study and development of the sidewalks and plaza adjacent to the north residential building and the overall treatment of public space.

Architectural Direction: Approve the general architectural direction in concept as compatible with the character of the Capitol Hill Historic District, with further study being given to the north residential building and Pennsylvania Avenue office building as discussed above. The 7th Street and plaza buildings should be further developed prior to the next review.

Height and Massing: Approve the height and massing as proposed in concept for the north residential building, the 8th Street residential building, the Plaza building, and the 8th and D corner building as compatible with the character of the Capitol Hill Historic District, and direct the applicants to continue studying the height and massing of the Pennsylvania Avenue office building in conjunction with its design as noted above. Conceptual approval of the height and massing is not recommended to include the penthouses, which warrant further study.