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

Landmark/District:	Central Public Library (Carnegie Library)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agenda
Address:	801 K Street, NW	<input type="checkbox"/> Consent Calendar
Meeting Date:	October 2, 2014	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Alteration
H.P.A. Number:	14-254	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Addition
Staff Reviewers:	Andrew Lewis, Steve Callcott	<input type="checkbox"/> Demolition
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Conceptual Design

Events DC, the International Spy Museum, MGA Partners Architects and Olin Landscape Architects seek ongoing conceptual design review for redevelopment of the Central Public Library (aka Carnegie Library) by the Board. The proposal includes alterations to the grounds of Mount Vernon Square, rehabilitation of the historic building to provide facilities for the museum, Convention Center, and Historical Society of Washington, and construction of additions to serve as a café, a DC Visitor Center, and exhibit and retail space for a relocated Spy Museum. The plans have been revised since last presented on May 22, 2014 to respond to the Board's recommendations and those of other consulting parties.

Central Public Library / Mount Vernon Square

The Central Public Library was gifted to the City by industrialist Andrew Carnegie in 1899 and designed in the Beaux Arts style by the architectural firm of Ackerman and Ross. The building retains a high degree of integrity and is the central feature of Mount Vernon Square. It was designated a DC landmark in 1964 and listed in National Register of Historic Places in 1969. The square is a contributing element of the Plan of the City of Washington (L'Enfant Plan), which was designated a DC landmark in 1964, and listed in the National Register in 1977.

Revised Proposal

The redevelopment program remains the same as before. Plans propose to more than double the existing 63,000 square feet by adding 65,000 square feet of new space. Approximately 47,000 square feet will be placed underground for controlled exhibit space while the remaining 18,000 square feet will be provided in above-grade additions that will house the remaining program features and support functions.

The primary change has been to the massing and architectural treatment of the above-grade additions. The pavilions have been redesigned as larger elements with a clearer separation from the library, and the connections redesigned as simple glass hyphens. To reduce the hyphens in size and transparency, vertical circulation and program that was previously within these areas have been relocated to the pavilions. While the essential landscape concept is the same, the north side of the square has been redesigned to provide more green space and to respond to the redesign of the additions.

Evaluation

The earliest redevelopment plans from the fall of 2013 included several elements that raised significant preservation concerns. Among the most disconcerting were the new additions' considerable size and roof forms which nearly eliminated views of the library's north elevations. The first designs presented to the Board on May 22, 2014 were encouraging in that revisions to some of the more problematic elements – especially the elimination of the central pavilion and lowering of the roof line – allowed more of the historic building to be seen. However, the Board's review established that more substantial revisions would be necessary if the design were to be determined compatible with the historic library.

Although the program has not changed, the designs have responded to the Board's direction in a number of important ways. The most significant revisions consist of shifting the bulk of the addition outward and away from the library so that the majority of the program will be housed in larger pavilions that are connected to the library by glass-enclosed, colonnaded hyphens. The mezzanines and support spaces have also been relocated into the pavilions to improve visibility and provide for more significant refinement of the plans.

These changes respond directly to the Board's recommendations by allowing the pavilions to read more as clearly defined objects in the park; substantially reducing the effect of the connecting elements on the north facade, and establishing an architectural *parti* that is much more harmonious with the historic Beaux Arts plan than previous concepts. The materials palette is still evolving, but the primary recommended materials consist of stone to match the historic library and transparent glass, so the overall effect of the materials palette should be one of improving compatibility with the historic building.

The revised design also offers other advantages over prior concepts. For example, small “pocket parks” incorporated along the north face of the library will provide additional green space, reinforce the sense that the building sits in a park and help to alleviate the hard urban north edge that was characteristic of earlier designs. The pocket parks also allow virtually all of the Carnegie's main block to remain fully exposed while the beautifully detailed arched windows of the library wings will be framed by transparent hyphens. Similarly, the hyphens are designed to create formal settings for new main stairs, provide interior views out to the park beyond, and afford passers-by with opportunities to view and understand the original form of the library.

While the aforementioned revisions do respond to each of the Board's comments, it may be possible to better address one of the more critical directives – ensuring that the pavilions read as freestanding objects in the park – by extending the length of the hyphens to create more separation between the pavilions and the library; by lowering the roofline in the areas between the hyphens and the pavilions; or by incorporating other such subtle modifications. In addition to causing the pavilions to read more as freestanding objects, refinements like these may provide even greater visibility between the old and new, allow one to better perceive the park space beyond and help compensate for the overall increased size of the pavilions. However, any such refinements should be carefully weighed to ensure that they do not push the pavilions too close to the outside edges of the park, work against the Board's directive to allow the park space to flow completely around the building or result in any other undesirable effects. HPO is looking to the Board for its advice regarding the appropriate balance between separating the pavilions from the library and maintaining open space around all sides of the building.

The landscape plan for Mt. Vernon Square has also been refined. The pocket parks on the north side of the building may be the most significant site-related improvement, but a careful review of the plan reveals that these parks will also be bolstered by a newly proposed thin green strip along Mt. Vernon Place. It is also important to note that the “laybys” on the east, south and west sides of the Square have been simplified and minimized in terms of number and design.

Further refinements to the landscape may help address other comments made by the Board and improve the overall project. For example, the proposed groupings of four trees on both the north and south sides of the library’s wings appear to block views to the decorative arched windows and should be reconsidered. The concerns expressed about the loss of park space also raise the question of whether it would be preferable to substitute open lawn for what appears to be low ground cover in relatively large areas of the park that surround and form a buffer around the library. Finally, it should be noted that none of the historic circulation pathways which have been in place for over a century are proposed for preservation as part of the current plans.

Review Authorities

This project is simultaneously being reviewed under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act and Section 9b of the DC Historic Landmark and Historic District Protection Act. Determinations of effect have yet to be formalized for these review processes, but comments made to date suggest that “adverse effects” are inevitable. A primary concern has been that the substantial program continues to overwhelm the historic building and park despite the improvements that have been made to the designs. A Memorandum of Agreement will most likely be required to complete Section 106 and 9b review processes and the Board’s recommendation for a preservation plan and conditions assessment for the Carnegie Library, which HPO understands have been initiated, will figure prominently in developing appropriate measures to mitigate the adverse effects.

Recommendation

If the proposed program is essential for the project and cannot be reduced, HPO recommends that the Board acknowledge the significant improvements that have been made to the original designs and find the revised concept consistent with the purposes of the Act.