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

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Property Address:	<b>201 East Capitol Street, SE</b>	<b>X</b>	Agenda
Landmark/District:	<b>Folger Shakespeare Library Capitol Hill Historic District</b>		Consent Calendar
Meeting Date:	<b>June 27, 2019</b>	<b>X</b>	Concept Review
H.P.A. Number:	<b>19-332</b>	<b>X</b>	Alteration
			New Construction
			Demolition

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The Folger Shakespeare Library, represented by Kieran Timberlake architects, Olin landscape architects and EHT Tracerics preservation consultants, seeks conceptual design review for exterior and interior alterations. The project is the first phase of a longer-term master plan intended to provide a more welcoming entrance, improve public accessibility, and to provide expanded exhibition space.

**Property History and Description**

The Folger Shakespeare Library was conceived by Henry Clay and Emily Jordan Folger, who tapped their fortune from Standard Oil and spent their married life collecting books and other materials by William Shakespeare. The building, located just east of the Library of Congress and U.S. Capitol grounds, was designed by Paul Cret with Alexander Trowbridge serving as consulting architect. Completed in 1932, it is exceptional in design for its Stripped Classical exterior and its extraordinary, highly-crafted Tudor and Jacobean Revival interiors. This juxtaposition of styles was intended by the designers to fulfill the Folgers' vision of the building as a monument to Shakespeare and the Elizabethan era while relating to the federal buildings of Capitol Hill.

The long, three-story building sits atop a raised plinth and is characterized by its smooth, white marble walls divided into bays by long, narrow windows with Art Deco-inspired aluminum grilles separated by fluted pilasters. The panels, by sculptor John Gregory, depict scenes from Shakespeare. On East Capitol Street, entry doors at either end of the façade are set within reveals with carved bas reliefs. A wide marble architrave caps the building that contains quotes and inscriptions. The building was originally U-shaped in plan with an open courtyard at the rear, but in 1958, a one-story addition filled this court and. in 1983, another addition was constructed over it. For the past decade, accessibility has been provided by a circuitous temporary metal ramp at the front (to the theater) and an at-grade entrance in the rear off the service alley (to the library).

The classical white-stone exterior belies the rich interiors reflecting the architectural interior styles of the Tudor and Jacobean periods that give the visitor the sense of visiting the world of Shakespeare. The Folgers wanted the building to be primarily devoted to the library while also containing spaces for exhibitions and performances. The interior was thus divided into

three zones corresponding with these uses. The Exhibition Gallery and Reading Room span the main block of the building, while the theater occupies most of the eastern wing. The west wing accommodates the Founder's Room, a suite for use by the governing board, the Registrar's Room, Main Stair, service rooms and storage areas. The first-floor public spaces have several changes in floor level that prevent universal access.

The Folger Shakespeare Library was designated a District of Columbia landmark by the Joint Committee of Landmarks in 1964 and listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1969 with a period of significance of 1929 through 1932. The property is also a contributing resource within the Capitol Hill Historic District. In 2018, the Board approved an amendment to the designation, submitted by the Folger, to designate the building's original interior spaces.

### **Proposal**

The project's interior modifications include inserting a new open stair and an elevator off the east theater lobby and inserting a bridge within the west library lobby that provides access between the Great Hall and west wing, both of which are at the same level and elevated three steps above the lobby.

On the exterior, sunken courtyard gardens would be created on each side of the plinth to provide accessible entrances to a new lobby and exhibition hall contained under the plinth. While the specifics are still being refined, the courtyard gardens are being developed to serve as public spaces with benches and a palette of plants that relate to the Shakespearean era. The sides of the plinth would be converted to recessed glass walls to provide visibility into the building. While the original front doors atop the plinth would be retained, they would likely only be used for emergency egress. The plans also include a symmetrical ramp to allow accessibility up to the top of the plinth to allow for closer viewing of the bas relief panels.

The circular drive on the east side of the building would be removed and replaced with an additional new public garden that would open to the new east entrance garden. The project would also include new signage at the corners of the site and along new glass railings at the sides of the plinth.

### **Evaluation**

The interior modifications have been designed to retain the important character-defining features, finishes and spatial qualities of the east and west lobbies.

The exterior portion of the project has been developed and substantially revised over the past two years with substantial input from the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts, DC Department of Transportation (DDOT), and the Historic Preservation Office. A variety of options were studied, and the current proposal substantively refined to respond to the comments of the review agencies. The proposal is based on several underlying premises, that may be helpful to outline:

- 1) All visitors should enter the building through the same entrance;
- 2) Providing accessibility through the existing entrance doors would require substantial physical alterations and visual changes to the building's façade;
- 3) The existing east and west lobbies are inadequately sized for current and projected visitorship and require duplicative building security;
- 4) Providing expanded lobby and exhibition space at the basement level under the plinth would result in no alteration to the designated interior spaces on the first floor;
- 5) The building grounds have been altered several times, and redesigning portions of the grounds could enhance the landmark if done in a manner that retained the site's balanced symmetrical composition and was welcoming to the public;

Much of the most recent discussion has been studying how to achieve the proper balance between retaining some of the existing topography – particularly immediately adjacent to the public sidewalk on East Capitol Street – and ensuring that the sunken entrance gardens were sufficiently sized to be welcoming public amenity spaces. The current concept, which includes additional at-grade landscaping within the public space, has recently received conceptual approval from the Commission of Fine Arts and DDOT's Public Space Committee, and the HPO concurs that this plan achieves an appropriate and compatible balance. The proposed alterations retain the property's important character-defining features and are compatible with the landmark while allowing for adaptation for current use.

**Recommendation**

*The HPO recommends that the Review Board approve the concept as consistent with the purposes of the act, and that final approval be delegated to staff.*

*HPO Contact: Steve Callcott*