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

Property Address:	1700 H Street, NW	X Agenda
Landmark/District:	Metropolitan Club	Consent Calendar
Meeting Date:	September 28/October 5, 2017	X Concept Review
H.P.A. Number:	17-487	X Alteration
Staff Reviewer:	Steve Callcott	New Construction
		Demolition
		Subdivision

The Metropolitan Club of the City of Washington seeks conceptual design review for a one-story addition to the top of its landmark building to accommodate a function space and reconfigured mechanical equipment. A roof terrace would wrap the addition on the north, east and south.

Property History and Description

The Renaissance Revival styled building was constructed in 1908, designed by the New York firm of Heins and LaFarge, and has since served as an important social and literary club to which many prominent local and national figures have belonged. The building is an elegant and beautifully detailed visual landmark downtown, in an area that has otherwise been redeveloped with modern office buildings. It was designated a landmark by the Joint Committee on Landmarks in 1964 and listed in the National Register in 1995.

Proposal

The addition would be clad in a simple skin of glass with metal structural supports. The portion of the penthouse concealing mechanical equipment (on the west portion of the roof) would be clad in an opaque glass; the function space on the east portion of the roof would be finished with vision glass. The building’s masonry parapet would serve as the railing for the roof terrace.

The concept plans have been revised since initially submitted in response to visibility and compatibility concerns raised in the HPO report issued in July; the case was not heard by the Board but was deferred at the applicant’s request. The addition has been reduced in height and footprint as below:

	<i>Previous proposal</i>	<i>Current proposal</i>
Setback from east (17 th Street)	14’9”	18’
Setback from north (H Street)	15’8”	18’
Setback from south	16’11”	18’
Height at edge of roof	18’	16’
Height at top of roof	18’	18’
Square footage	4,375	3,843

Evaluation

The historic preservation law expressly balances the preservation and adaptability interests of historic properties. It establishes a stricter standard for historic landmarks than for properties that contribute to the character of a historic district. Landmarks are encouraged to be adapted for current use, while being retained and enhanced, but they are simultaneously encouraged to be restored. This sets up a tension that suggests that adaptation should occur mainly in those portions of a property that are not considered character-defining.

The previous HPO report raised three concerns with initial proposal for the addition: its visibility from the street, its visual relationship to the building's balustrade, and its proportions and materiality.

Visibility

The Board has sometimes found visible additions on industrial and commercial buildings to be compatible, but has generally discouraged them on residential and institutional buildings. The Board's guidance on roof additions includes the following direction:

Adding vertically to a historic building is generally discouraged as such additions typically alter significant features, such as its roof line, height, relationship with surrounding buildings, and overall form and mass. Additions on top of a building can sometimes be achieved when they are not visible from street views, do not result in the removal or alteration of important character-defining features of the building or streetscape, and are compatible with their context. If conditions allow, this approach typically requires a substantial setback, the extent of which depends on the height of the addition, the height of the building, the height of adjacent buildings, the topography of the area, the width of the street, the relationship of the subject building to its surroundings, and views from public vantage points surrounding the building.

Under most circumstances, roof additions that are visible from a public street are not appropriate, as they would alter an historic building's height, mass, design composition, cornice line, roof, and its relationship to surrounding buildings and streetscape – all of which are important character-defining features that are protected for historic property. In rare cases, a visible roof addition may be found acceptable if it does not fundamentally alter the character of the building and is sufficiently designed to be compatible with the building.

Balustrade

The specific character of this building includes a rooftop balustrade that was designed and serves as a strong architectural termination, and an addition rising behind and above the balustrade has the potential to diminish this feature and pull the eye upward to the new object behind. Renaissance precedents for low attics hidden behind rooftop balustrades suggest that an addition along such lines is conceivable with careful attention to the height, setback and material use to ensure that it is visually subordinate and recessive.

Proportions and Materials

As previously rendered, the proposed addition had a height greater than that of each of the lower floors, making it disproportionate to the whole and rendering it too conspicuous. Its

prominence made its materials and expression more problematic, as the scale, detail, and solid-to-void proportions made the all-glazed elevation incongruous in relation to the underlying building.

Revised proposal

The revised plans seek to address the concerns raised in the previous report. The visibility of the addition has not been eliminated from street view, but has been better documented and reduced through the increased setbacks and reduction in height. The addition is still seen through and above the balustrade, but is proportionally smaller. The reduction in height improves the proportions of the addition so that it no longer reads as distinctly taller than the underlying floors. Lowering the height of the glass around the perimeter of the addition also results in the addition's solid top becoming slightly visible, establishing a horizontal cap to the composition that repeats the historic building's horizontal belt courses. If the Board is inclined to accept the revised the proposal, a further reduction of the perimeter height would heighten this effect and further reduce the amount of exposed glazing atop the building.

Recommendation

HPO seeks the Board's direction on whether the proposed roof addition is sufficiently reduced in setback and height for it to be found compatible with the character of the historic landmark.