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

Property Address:	1733 16th Street, NW	X	Agenda
Landmark/District:	Scottish Rite Temple		Consent Calendar
Meeting Date:	May 23, 2019	X	Concept Review
H.P.A. Number:	18-668		Alteration
		X	New Construction
			Demolition
		X	Subdivision

Perseus-TDC, in partnership with the Supreme Council 33rd degree Scottish Rite, seeks on-going conceptual design review for construction of a four-story plus penthouse apartment building at the rear of the temple along 15th and S Streets NW. The new building would incorporate a two-story stable building located along the alley that runs on the south side of the property. Plans have been prepared by Hickok Cole Architects.

When it reviewed the project in November, the Board concurred that this site could be developed with a new building and found the concept for new construction and subdivision to be generally compatible with the landmark and 16th Street and 14th Street historic districts. However, the Board determined that the following was needed to improve the proposal's compatibility:

- (1) The floor-to-floor heights should be reduced on all levels, including the penthouse;
- (2) The proportion of glazing should be reduced and the windows made more residential in scale and character;
- (3) The corner elements should be redesigned, with study of reducing the extent of glazing, improving the proportions of the projections, and pulling back the S Street corner element (the west end of the building) and its penthouse to open up views to and provide a more deferential relationship to the temple;
- (4) There should be more variety in the building's mass and height; pulling the building forward to the building line and increasing the depth of the projections should be considered;
- (5) The intent of relating the materials to the neighborhood is appropriate but the specific materials appear too dark;
- (6) The stair to the basement areaway should be relocated to the courtyard so that it is not visible from public street view;
- (7) Portions of the building should come directly to the ground and for those portions with area-ways the landscape plan should be developed to screen the areaway and guardrails to provide the impression from the sidewalk that the building sits on a base surrounded by foundation plantings;
- (8) The new square window openings in the alley building should be eliminated; and
- (9) A north-south through-block connection or park area and improved views of the back of the temple should be considered.

The Board asked that the project be revised and return for further review by the ANC and HPRB when appropriate. The revised plans were submitted in February, but scheduling was deferred to allow the Board to hear the proposed amendment to the landmark application (Case 19-06) prior to considering the revised concept.

Revised Proposal

The basic concept presented in November remains the same, calling for construction of a “C”-shaped apartment building designed to relate to the general forms, materials, coloration and detailing of the rowhouses and small-scale apartment buildings in the 14th Street Historic District to achieve compatibility with its surroundings. The primary entrance to the building would be located at the southeast corner on 15th Street, with the first-floor street-facing units also having their own entrances accessed by individual lead walks and stairs. The building would rise four stories with a penthouse set above a partially-raised English basement, a below-grade cellar below the English basement, and two levels of underground parking below the cellar. Except at the building entrance, there would be a continuous 15’ deep below-grade areaway projecting 5’ from the face of the building to provide light and egress for the lower levels.

The revised design addresses the Board’s comments in the following ways:

- (1) The floor-to-floor heights have been reduced from 11 to 10 feet (and from 12 to 11 feet for the penthouse); as a result, the building height has been reduced from 50 to 46 feet;
- (2) The extent of glazing has been reduced from 48% of wall surface to 36% on the 15th Street townhouse elements and from 48% to 39% on the S Street townhouses. Glazing on the 15th Street entrance element has been reduced from 52% to 40%;
- (3) Glazing on the corner tower element at 15th and S has been reduced from 63% to 33% on 15th Street and from 64% to 35% on S Street. The western corner element closest to the back of the temple was revised just prior to the previous HPRB meeting to be set back in line with the S Street elevation (rather than projecting forward as was initially shown). The projecting bay on the west side elevation facing the rear of the temple has since been eliminated;
- (4) Variation to the roofline has been provided by pulling the corner elements up to be slightly taller than the townhouse elements and vertical breaks have been inserted on the street-facing elevations of the penthouse to align with the breaks between the townhouse elements below. The building has not been pulled forward and the depth of the projections remains the same;
- (5) While the computer-generated renderings vary somewhat in their depiction of the building’s colors, material samples have been provided that make the intent of the coloration clear;
- (6) The stair to the areaway has been relocated to the courtyard so that it will not be seen from public street view;
- (7) The areaway around the perimeter of the building remains continuous around the building, except at the entrance element on 15th Street. The design of the building has been revised to provide a stronger visual base and the landscape plan developed to include understory trees, evergreen hedges and layered plantings to provide screening for the areaways and guard rails;
- (8) The square window openings on the alley building have been eliminated;
- (9) A north-south linear park has been developed to provide public access to view the back of the temple and a pedestrian connection through the block.

In addition to the revisions made in response to the Board's comments, the 15th Street entrance element has been substantially redesigned with elimination of the two-story glass bay and inclusion of two masonry bays flanking a more prominent centered entrance.

The property consists of a single lot that represents the consolidation of multiple lots since the temple's initial 1910-1915 construction through the 1980s. The western portion of the lot is within the 16th Street Historic District; the eastern portion is in the 14th Street Historic District. The proposal seeks to subdivide the property to create separate lots for the temple and new building, as required by zoning regulations.

Evaluation

Building design

The compatibility of the design has been improved as a result of the revisions. The reduction of the floor heights, proportional reduction of glazing, the building's stronger base, and the redesign of the 15th Street entrance element substantively address the biggest compatibility concerns identified by the Board in the previous design. The detailing of the brick, stone and metal elements exhibits a level of detailing, texture and variety commensurate to that found in the surrounding historic districts. Variation in the building's height and the further development of the penthouse fenestration and detailing improve the compatibility of the roofline. While still using two different bay types to provide variety, the integrity of the design has been improved by concentrating a single bay type on each elevation rather than trying to mix them together. The building's stronger base and the more developed landscape plan are successful in grounding the building and screening its continuous areaway. Retaining the building slightly set back from the building line has the benefit of providing deeper front yards and a more generous setting for the new building.

As the design continues to be refined, HPO has the following recommendations:

- (1) The projecting bays on the S Street elevation appear flat, especially by comparison to the improved design of the bays and the projecting masonry window surrounds that provide shadow and depth to 15th Street elevation. Providing greater articulation and depth to the projecting bays and window hoods and sills on the S Street elevation should be studied.
- (2) The individual doors and door surrounds for the townhouse elements on both elevations appear flat and institutional and would benefit from some further elaboration.
- (3) The open risers to the stairs to the townhouse elements are prohibited by the building code. A perforated riser would satisfy the code requirement and could be developed to provide visual interest to the stairs, as is characteristic of historic entrance stairs in the surrounding districts.
- (4) The roof deck railings should be made more inconspicuous, ideally so that they are not visible from street view as the Board typically requires. The roof deck railing for building's amenity area should also be pulled off the S Street elevation to eliminate it from being seen against the back of the temple (Perspective – S Street Elevation, A-35), and the penthouse windows for the amenity room facing S Street should be reduced in size to the same proportions as the other penthouse windows.

- (5) As the penthouse includes enclosed areas for mechanical equipment, and the penthouse roof is illustrated as a planted green roof in the renderings, it is presumed that there will be no mechanical equipment or railings on top of the building. If mechanical equipment and/or railings are proposed atop the penthouse, this should be submitted for HPRB review.

Subdivision

The proposed subdivision is consistent with the purposes of the preservation act. It would reestablish the boundaries of the temple's original lot at the time of the building's construction in 1915. The HPO report for the pending designation application further discusses the appropriateness of this configuration from the historic preservation perspective.

The lot for the new building would remain split between the 14th Street and 16th Street historic districts, as it is currently. Thus, the subdivision would have no effect on the legal standard for review of the project under the historic preservation law. Whether the new construction is on the site of a historic landmark, or within a historic district, the standard for subdivision and design review set forth in Section 2(b) of the law is the same:

- (a) To retain and enhance historic landmarks and those properties which contribute to the character of historic districts, and to encourage their adaptation for current use; and
- (b) To ensure that new construction and subdivision of lots in historic districts are compatible with the character of the historic districts.

The Board advises the Mayor's Agent on whether the project meets the above tests with respect to both historic districts and the temple, a historic landmark and contributing building in the 16th Street district. The determination is the same, regardless of the subdivision.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Board find the revised concept for new construction and subdivision compatible with the landmark, the 16th Street and the 14th Street historic districts, and that final permit and subdivision approval be delegated to staff.