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

Landmark/District:	Capitol Park Towers	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agenda
Address:	301 G Street, SW	<input type="checkbox"/> Consent Calendar
Meeting Date:	July 23/30, 2015	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Alteration
H.P.A. Number:	15-368	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> New Construction
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Subdivision
Staff Reviewer:	Steve Callcott	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Conceptual Design

Capitol Park Towers LLC/Urban Investment Partners and Perseus Realty seek conceptual review of a development project at Capitol Park Towers in Square 540, bounded by 4th Street to the west, a linear park in the former location of 3rd Street on the east, G Street on the south, and Interstate 395 on the north. The building, together with its site, was designated a landmark in July 2014.

The proposal, with conceptual architectural plans prepared WDG Architects and landscape plans by Lee and Associates, calls for constructing a seven-story (75' high) residential tower parallel to the existing building at the north edge of the property adjacent to the highway. The project would result in removal of the parking structure and reuse of its molded concrete shells, reconstruction of the at-grade swimming pool, other site alterations and landscaping, and ground-level alterations to the existing building. While designed to appear as its own structure, the new residential building would technically be an addition, connected by an enclosed walkway.

The project submission also includes an evaluation and landscape preservation plan prepared by EHT Tracerics.

Property Description and History

Capitol Park Towers is a nine-story, Modernist apartment building with a freestanding parking garage, a pool and pool house changing room, and original site features. It was constructed in 1962, the second of five towers that would be constructed at Capitol Park (Potomac Place was the first, completed in 1959), which also includes 399 townhouses; the entire complex was completed by 1964.

Like the other Capitol Park buildings, Capitol Park Towers was designed principally by Chloethiel Woodard Smith, one of the planners of the larger Southwest urban renewal area, together with her partner Nicholas Satterlee. The rationalist building stands on pilotis and integrates masonry screens and brise soleil for both texture and sunlight control; its long elevations are punctuated by cantilevered balconies. The building is set within a Modernist landscape design by Daniel Urban Kiley, characterized by geometrically arranged plantings, a hallmark of Kiley's work. The complex is further enhanced by a barrel vaulted roof garage structure and works of art incorporated into the common spaces.

Capitol Park Towers was found to be of comparable significance to the landmark Capitol Park Apartments (also known as Potomac Place) which is part of the same complex and was the first

building to be constructed in the complex. Capitol Park Towers was found to be a complete composition on its own, a “tower in the park” sufficiently distinct from the rest of the complex and a fine example of Modernist architecture and landscape. Capitol Park was also recognized in the designation as the first complex in Southwest, and perhaps the first in the city, to be formally open to all races, several years prior to the enactment of the Fair Housing Act of 1968. The Board determined that the building, structures and hardscaping retained a high degree of integrity, but acknowledged the loss of landscape plantings and insertion of a perimeter fence as compromises to the site’s original landscape plan. The Traceries report provides thorough documentation and evaluation of the landscape’s condition and integrity.

Since the designation of the property, the owner has worked with the HPO on selecting and installing appropriate replacement windows and sliding glass doors. Other interior alterations to the lobby and spaces have also been undertaken, which were not subject to historic preservation review.

Proposal

The project calls for construction of a seven-story residential tower at the north edge of the site. The construction would necessitate demolition of the two-level parking garage; the concrete vault shells would be reused as an enclosed walkway between the new construction and the existing building while others would be used at the southern perimeter of the site. An underground parking garage would be located under the new construction accessed by a ramp on G Street at the east edge of the property. A loading area would be provided off 4th Street accessed by the curb cut serving the existing garage.

The courtyard between the buildings would duplicate the 80’ width currently between the tower and the garage structure. The landscape plan would retain the original spatial organization and recreate the geometric stands of London Plane trees. New paving would be inspired by the patterned concrete paving found elsewhere on the property.

The pool would be reconstructed in its existing location, reoriented and slightly reduced in size. The decorative hexagonal terra cotta block perimeter walls, mural, and unusual sculptural features associated with the pool would be salvaged and reused. The pool house, located outside the perimeter brick wall at the north end of the site, would be removed.

Parking at the front of the property would be removed and converted to green space, incorporating geometric stands of trees and a children’s play area flanking the retained circular drive to the front door. The reused concrete vault shells would line the southern perimeter of the site and a new decorative perimeter fence would replace the existing non-original fence.

Open parking under the building would be converted to additional residential units, with glazing enclosing each of the bays between the piloti.

Planning Considerations: Southwest Small Area Plan

Following a two year community-based planning process, the Council of the District of Columbia approved the Southwest Neighborhood Small Area Plan on July 14, 2015. The DC Office of Planning (OP) developed the plan based on input from Southwest DC residents and other stakeholders with the goal of maintaining the unique characteristics of the neighborhood and shaping anticipated future growth. A central vision for the plan is that Southwest will

promote the preservation of its unique architectural legacy and support new development that reflects the form and rhythm of the mid-20th century, reinforcing the neighborhood design as a “Modernist Gem.”

Among the many goals of the plan are to: 1) celebrate the distinctive character of Southwest and promote preservation of its outstanding Modernist architecture, landscape architecture, and urban design, 2) ensure that future development is compatible with the existing design of the community, and 3) ensure that new construction and adaptive reuse will contribute positively to the neighborhood’s identity.

Evaluation

The project would result in some obvious preservation compromises. The garage proposed for demolition is an original element of the site plan. While the structure itself is unremarkable and was not built as originally designed – due to cost and site conditions it was constructed with the first floor only partially rather than entirely below grade – its repeating concrete vault roofs are a hallmark of Mid-Century Modern design and provide a distinctive sculptural backdrop to the rear garden. The pool house is also an original feature; despite not being visible from the pool or elsewhere in the property due to its siting immediately behind the hexagonal block pool wall, its flat roof supported by exposed steel posts and I-beams and its simple planar wall surfaces are characteristic of Modern design. And clearly the insertion of a new seven story building will change the relationship of the existing single tower-in-a-park building to its surrounding site.

However, these alterations must be weighed against the enhancements that the project will provide, both in terms of preservation benefits and in fulfilling broader planning goals. These enhancements include rehabilitating and restoring lost aspects of the Kiley landscape plan, expanding the landscaped areas by the removal of surface parking, and reconstructing the deteriorated and somewhat altered swimming pool. The demolition of the garage will be mitigated by the salvage and reuse of the distinctive concrete vaults in a manner that makes them more visible and central to the Capitol Park complex; a somewhat less distinctive formed concrete structure is used in a similar manner on Eye Street in front of Capitol Park Plaza. The project will also result in expanded parking capacity in a new underground garage, and a site plan that will limit the impact of the new construction on the plan and visual integrity of the broader Capitol Park neighborhood.

The new construction has been designed with specific attention to its site and context. In placing the addition in the same footprint as the existing parking garage, parallel to the tower, the rear courtyard will retain the same dimensions as it has currently, allowing an accurate recreation of Kiley’s geometric groves. The architectural language has been developed in a contemporary vocabulary to be distinct from but related to the geometries of the existing building. The addition’s placement at the rear of the property abutting the freeway will not compromise important public open spaces or how the existing tower is perceived from within the Capitol Park community. While resulting in some alteration and loss of secondary character-defining elements, taken in its entirety, the project is a reasonable and not incompatible approach to introducing new construction on the site.

Enclosing the first floor of the existing building would not be an incompatible alteration so long as it retains the expression of the piloti and the open quality of the building’s base, and this same alteration was approved by the Board for the base of Capitol Park in 2003 (HPA 04-010). As the

detailing for this is developed, the glazing should be pulled as far back within the openings as is possible, or alternatively, pulled entirely back behind the pilotis.

Within the context of a project that seeks to restore and enhance the property's landscape, retaining a perimeter fence is regrettable and not consistent with the original open character of the front of the site. As the project continues to be developed, the fence should be eliminated entirely or pulled back to enclose only the rear portions of the property and retain the front areas as open. If it is determined appropriate to reinstall any fence on the property, it should be developed to be consistent in design with the modern character of the site rather than the decorative, figurative examples shown.

Finally, while it is assumed that the decorative concrete totem and horse sculptures are to be reused, the locations of these elements are not indicated on the plans and should be identified.

Recommendations

The HPO recommends that the Board find the general concept for the addition, landscape rehabilitation and restoration, and other site and building alterations to be consistent with the purposes of the preservation act.