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

Property Address:	5210-20 Wisconsin Avenue, NW	Agenda
Landmark/District:	PEPCO Harrison Street substation	X Consent Calendar
		X Concept Review
Meeting Date:	November 16, 2017	X Alteration
H.P.A. Number:	18-014	New Construction
		Demolition

The Potomac Electric Power Company (PEPCO), with plans prepared by HGA Architects, seeks conceptual design review for façade repairs and restoration of the Harrison Street substation at the corner of Harrison and Wisconsin Avenue. A landmark application is pending on the building.

Property History and Description

The Potomac Electric Power Company Harrison Street Substation is a 1/3-acre energy distribution site that contains a one-story building constructed in 1940 facing Wisconsin Avenue. The building's facade is designed in the Art Moderne style, clad in limestone panels and trimmed in black glazed terra cotta tiles along its base and surrounding the entrance door. The façade originally had aluminum-framed storefront windows (since bricked in) and a neon-lit clock over the front door (which is no longer lit or operational). The secondary elevations are of red brick with industrial sash windows; some alterations and new openings within the secondary elevations have been made as part of an on-going renovation project.

The substation was constructed to meet growing electrical demand in the Friendship Heights neighborhood and to help meet regional power needs in the event of war. The substation is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places at the local level of significance under Criterion A as it is closely associated with the growing need to provide reliable electric service to the residents in the District of Columbia and Criterion C as an outstanding example of a Pepco substation designed by in-house Pepco architects during the period 1939-1960. The substation is significant as an example of an architectural approach developed by Pepco architects in the era that incorporated camouflage or trompe l'oeil elements as part of a program to improve security for their electrical distribution system in preparation in the event of war. Buildings constructed during this period mimicked building types typically employed for residential or commercial uses, rather than industrial uses. In this context, the Harrison Street substation is a unique example constructed to resemble a business storefront in the Art Moderne style. The proposed period of significance is 1940, the building's original date of construction.

The substation is currently under a substantial renovation and upgrade. The genesis of the landmark application was to ensure that the proposed façade work is subject to HPO and HPRB review for consistency with preservation standards.

Proposal

The project has been developed with input from the Art Deco Society and the HPO, and calls for a careful restoration of the façade's character-defining features. The limestone will be cleaned and repointed, and the chipped terra cotta repaired, according to National Park Service standards. The bricked-in storefront windows will be reopened, and existing aluminum window frames will be retained, repaired and reinstalled with new clear glazing. The distinctive clock above the door will be repaired and re-lit with neon, and a new front door installed with its design based on 1940s photographs.

Evaluation

The scope of work will retain original features and result in a high-quality restoration of the building's façade. The work on the secondary elevations will not affect important character-defining features.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Board find the concept to be consistent with the preservation act and delegate final approval to staff.

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