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

Property Address:	6100 Georgia Avenue, NW	X	Agenda
Landmark/District:	Emory United Methodist Church		Consent Calendar
Meeting Date:	May 28, 2015	X	Concept Review
H.P.A. Number:	15-319	X	Alteration
Staff Reviewer:	Steve Callcott		New Construction
			Demolition
			Subdivision

Emory United Methodist Church (with Beacon Center Housing LLC and Torti Gallas Urban architects) seeks review of a revised concept for building and site alterations and new construction. The project would provide an expanded sanctuary and office space for the church, affordable and workforce housing, community recreational facilities, and below-grade parking.

Property History and Description

In April, the HPRB listed Emory United Methodist Church on the DC Inventory of Historic Sites because it is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of history and the development of the District of Columbia. The church has a history dating back to 1832 and is closely associated with the settlement and growth of the Brightwood community over more than 180 years. The site played a pivotal role in the Civil War as part of Fort Stevens, the focal point of the only Civil War battle to take place in the District of Columbia, and where President Lincoln famously came under fire as he viewed the progress of the battle.

The site was also found to be a preeminent example of early twentieth-century religious architecture. A temple on a hill reached by a monumental stone staircase, the Classical Revival church's most striking features include its pedimented portico, massive Doric columns, granite walls, and terracotta trim. The architecture of the building in its setting evokes a grand and commanding presence. These features reflect the mature work of a highly successful local firm, Milburn, Heister & Company, which designed many important institutional buildings in the city in the early decades of the twentieth century.

Finally, the site was found likely to yield archaeological information important to our understanding of the Civil War, to the historic development of the church, and to the transformation of Brightwood from a rural landscape to an urban environment. Pre-Civil War resources may be present, related to the original church or when the property was owned by Elizabeth Butler, a free woman of color.

Project Background

In April, the Board took three actions related to three separate applications. It found the property to meet the designation criteria for listing on the DC Inventory and National Register, it recommended to the Mayor's Agent that demolition of the church would not be consistent with the preservation act, and it reviewed the proposed concept plans for new construction on the site.

In reviewing the concept, the Board encouraged the applicants to explore whether the proposed project could be revised to be consistent with the preservation act by retaining and adding to the church building rather than demolishing it, to revise the design of the new construction to make it more compatible with the building and site, and to develop a professional plan for the investigation, documentation and remediation of archaeological resources on the property.

Revised Proposal

The proposal has been revised in four significant ways. Most important, the 1922 church building would no longer be demolished. Portions of the north and south side walls would be removed for construction of side additions, but the building's structure, roof, side projections, and rear wall would be retained together with the front portico. The 1907 wing, which was truncated by the construction of the 1922 building and further altered in the 1950s, would be removed.

The church would be expanded with additions to each side that have been made substantially lower in height relative to the retained building, both reducing their overall mass and allowing greater retention of the side walls. While the design and exterior finish of the additions is still being explored, they would likely be clad in masonry to relate to, but not precisely replicate, the original fieldstone walls of the church.

The perimeter stone wall and natural grade of the hillside site in front of the church would be more substantially retained. The storefronts proposed within the hill have been removed entirely from the south side of the church entrance stairs and pulled further away from the stairs on the north side. The terraces atop the hillside have been lowered and pulled back from Georgia Avenue to allow the hill to remain as the natural setting for the church. The accessible entrance to the church and its programs would be provided in a smaller entrance on Georgia Avenue, relocated from the corner.

Finally, the design of the new construction has been provided greater unity among its elevations. The strong contrasts in color (red, dark gray) have been eliminated in favor of a more neutral, complementary palette that takes its cues from the church building. The storefront base and residential upper floors of the north wing have been unified into a single design, and the hyphen between the church and the south wing has been pulled back to allow the church to read as a free-standing building. The fronts of the wings would be clad in brick.

At the time of this report's preparation, it is the HPO's understanding that the applicants are working with the Ottery Group, a professional environmental sciences firm that specializes in archaeology (and which performed a Phase I evaluation of the site for the church in 2009), to develop an archaeological plan for the property that meets the required standards. More information on that plan will be presented at the HPRB meeting.

Evaluation

The revised proposal substantially improves the proposal's consistency with the preservation law. As was discussed in the previous report to the Board, demolition of the building as a whole or in significant part is contrary to the purposes of the law, as the landmark would neither be retained nor enhanced. The decision to retain the building with limited alterations would keep the integrity

of the site's most important above-grade feature. While removal of portions of the side walls is not an ideal preservation treatment, the extent of removal has been minimized and does not constitute demolition as defined by the Board's regulations.¹

The additions to the church have been designed to be subordinate to and distinguishable from the historic building, and are a reasonable accommodation to provide for the congregation's continued use of the building as it expands and adapts the structure to its current needs. The removal of the much-altered 1907 rear wing of the building would not result in a substantial loss of character for which the site has been recognized. While the precise exterior finish of the additions is still being explored, the renderings of the wings clad in masonry that provides a commensurate sense of scale, texture and subtle range of color to the church's fieldstone walls is a compatible approach to the challenge of adding to the landmark.

The substantial reduction of storefronts proposed in the hill, together with reductions in the extent of excavation for the accessible entrance, pulling back the above-grade terraces, and the retention of the natural grade and stone perimeter wall all greatly improve the compatibility of the proposal by retaining more of its historic setting. The perception of the church sitting atop the hill, rather than atop commercial storefronts, will be much more effectively retained. As the proposal continues to be developed, efforts should be made to see if the height of the parapet of the commercial space closest to the church stairs can be reduced further, and the line of demarcation between the hillside site and this roof can be further softened. The relocation of the accessible entrance to Georgia Avenue reduces the excavation of the hillside, retains the corner of the site at Quackenbos Street, keeps more of the site's perimeter retaining wall, and more closely relates the entrance to the church rather than to the new construction.

The revisions of the new construction have improved its compatibility with the church and resulted in some reduction of impact on the site. By lessening the contrast of colors and more closely relating the new construction to the church, the composition is quieter and more unified, and the church has a stronger presence than previously presented. While it is still a substantial amount of new construction for the site, the aggregate complex is no longer discordant for the changes in the design, and presents a campus-like imagery. Further changes to the design still being undertaken by the architects and not yet reflected in the drawings include using more brick on the south elevation of north wing to break down the scale of this long wall, and further developing the rear elevation facing Fort Stevens.

Because the construction project will destroy any remnants of the Civil War fort on the property, the applicants have been advised that intensive archaeological investigations are needed. The 2009 testing consisted of manually excavated shovel tests in grassy areas; it is recommended that future testing be done mechanically, whereby a backhoe or Gradall with a flat-bladed bucket is used to remove the parking lot and fill soils across the property under the supervision of an archaeologist. Using a combination of backhoe trenches and test units, the applicant's archaeologists can quickly examine the features found previously to determine their nature and extent, and also determine if any other resources are located under paved areas. The deposits

¹ As defined in 10C DCMR § 305.

would be evaluated in consultation with the HPO, and if significant, the archaeologists would excavate them and record the information. The consultants should prepare a work plan for submission and approval by the HPO, which would culminate in a written report on the investigations.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Board make the following findings:

- 1. The proposed alterations and additions to the church are an acceptable accommodation to the congregation's continued use and needed expansion and do not constitute demolition as defined in the preservation regulations;*
- 2. The proposed new construction and site alterations are acceptably compatible for the landmark;*
- 3. An archaeological work plan should be developed for review and approval by HPO, and should be implemented in full as a condition of permit clearance for the project;*
- 4. The applicants should continue to refine the design in consultation with HPO, including but not necessarily limited to the material finish for the church additions, the accessible entrance portal on Georgia Avenue, and the elevations, fenestration and materials of the new construction, including the rear elevation facing Fort Stevens;*
- 5. Final approval should be delegated to staff.*