

HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION

Property Address:	901 G Street NW	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agenda
Landmark/District:	Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Library	Consent Calendar
Meeting Date:	July 23, 2015	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Concept Review
H.P.A. Number:	15-137	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Alteration
Staff Reviewer:	Anne Brockett	New Construction

In January 2015, the District of Columbia Public Library (DCPL) presented an informational session to the Board on the proposed alterations to the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Library. Working with their design team of Mecanoo architecten and Martinez + Johnson Architects, DCPL has refined the design and returns to seek conceptual approval.

The Mies van der Rohe designed building, its site, and the interior public spaces on the first floor (the vestibule, lobby, and two reading rooms) are designated as part of the landmark.

Project Description

In its initial review, the HPRB expressed *general support* for the work being proposed, including the following:

- a one-story roof addition with terrace;
- selective removal of parts of the brick perimeter site walls to enliven the exterior and better engage the sidewalk;
- installation of translucent panels in the loggia paving to provide light to the basement;
- infilling the rear loading dock as a new performance space, accessed from the interior by a series of new openings in the rear lobby wall.

The Board gave *direction to reconsider* the designs as follows:

- limit the amount of clear or treated glass on the exterior by retaining the brick front bay walls;
- retain the brick walls of the building's circulation cores;
- consider the organic form of the roof addition in relation to the architectural character of the building;
- ensure that the commemoration of Dr. King is properly captured in the District's memorial to him;
- formulate a preservation plan for specific noteworthy elements such as the clocks, built-in shelves, lobby staff counters, water fountains, and other features.

As a result of the Board's comments, the project has been modified to retain the brick façade, installing glass in only the two metal panels on either side of the entry. The form of the roof addition has been refined to better relate to the underlying geometry of the building, and the walls of the circulation cores will be largely retained on the upper floors. However, in the vestibule, the brick walls are proposed for replacement entirely with glass.

Evaluation and Recommendation

The revised proposal substantively responds to many of the elements in which the Board recommended further study, and the HPO will continue to work with the design team on the following elements:

- retention of the integrity of the perimeter wall, while allowing flexibility for selectively lowering its height and removing small portions to allow for an enhanced use of the site;
- retention of as much of the existing glazing and exterior material as possible and/or to design historically appropriate replacements, if necessary;
- final design of the loading dock infill;
- treatment of special components such as clocks, water fountains, public phones, and other features.

In addition, the project is subject to review under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act and the HPO will continue to work with the consulting parties to determine and, if necessary, resolve any adverse effects. However, there are two areas of the design which remain unresolved: the extent of brick removal in the vestibule and the pivoting doors leading from the lobby into the new performance space.

From the previous design, the vestibule walls, which had been proposed for partial removal, are now being proposed for full demolition and replacement with glass. The HPO's previous report addressed the issue of the vestibule thusly:

As shown, the partial removal of the brick walls in the vestibule is problematic in several ways. By making the cores fully transparent, the careful architectural balance between solid and void is disrupted right at the entrance to the building. The removal of the vestibule walls negates a perceptual device that has been used in public architecture for centuries: by creating a sense of physical compression in a vestibule, the size and grandeur of the succeeding central room is greatly enhanced by contrast. In addition, any alteration to walls or openings should maintain the rigid symmetry of Mies's design.

Limiting the wall openings inside the vestibule to the area of the central recess (though probably higher than the ceiling of the current service alcoves) would be more appropriate, while also providing transparency and instant announcement of the stairwell locations to arriving patrons.

The HPO does not find that the design has moved in a successful direction toward this recommended approach or to the Board's January recommendations regarding retention of the core walls.

For the pivoting doors at the rear of the lobby, a material has not been determined and the HPO seeks the Board's input on the materiality and appropriate level transparency.

With the recommendation for the removal of brick only within the recessed doorways of the vestibule walls, as noted above, the HPO recommends that the Board approve the concept as consistent with the preservation law and delegate further review to staff.