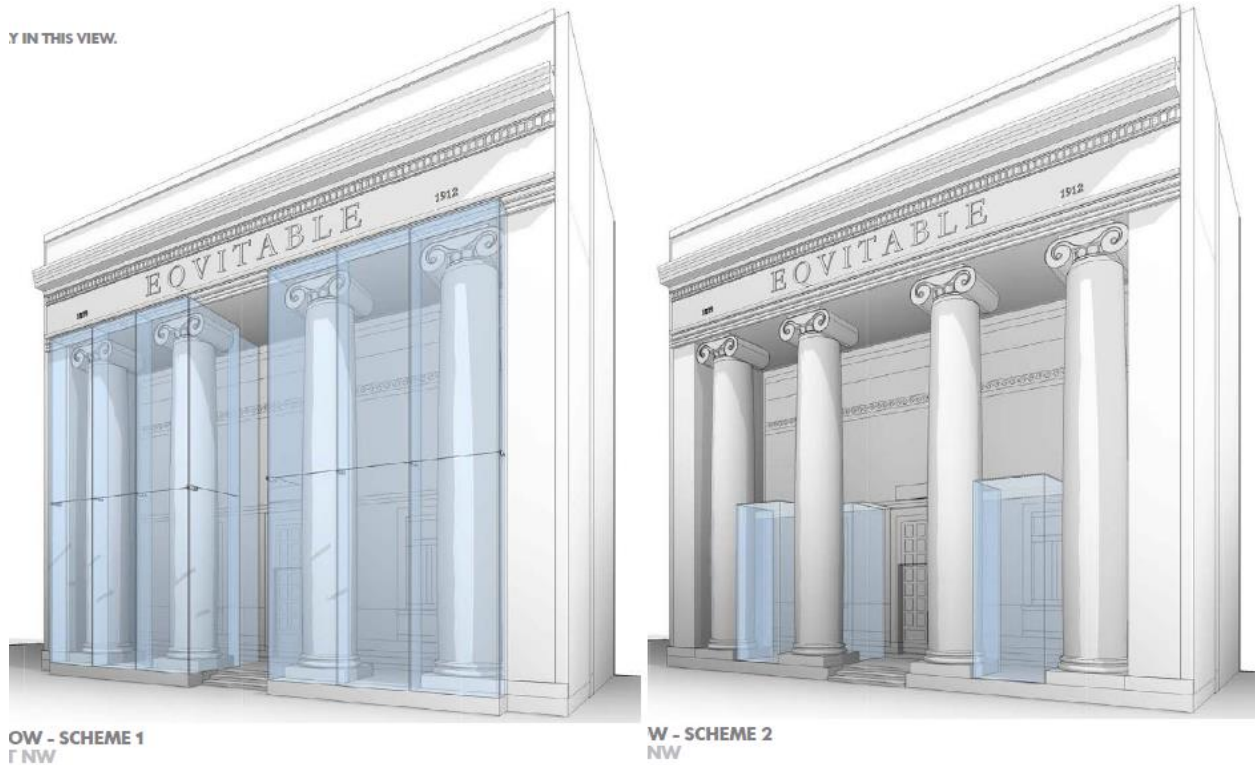

**HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD
STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION**

Property Address:	915 F Street NW	(<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>) Agenda
Landmark/District:	Equitable Co-Operative Building Association (Interior Landmark)	() Consent Calendar
		() Denial Calendar
Meeting Date:	March 26, 2015	(<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>) Concept Review
H.P.A. Number:	14-712	(<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>) Alteration
Staff Reviewer:	Brendan Meyer	() New Construction
		() Demolition
		() Subdivision

Owner Jemal's Equitable, LLC, seeks continuing concept review for altering the front façade of the Equitable Co-Operative Building Association, a landmark that is also located in the Downtown Historic District. The landmark designation includes the interior banking hall. Plans were prepared by Studios Architecture. In 2012 the Board approved the addition of five new stories at the rear of the building that is yet to be constructed.



Previous Board Review

In October 2014 the Board reviewed three schemes to enclose or partially enclose the temple porch behind glass panels to create enclosed spaces for merchandise display. In a motion adopted by a vote of 6-0 the Board recommended that two of the schemes be further developed before granting concept approval: Scheme 1 for full height glass in front of the columns and Scheme 2 for half-height glass display cases between and behind the columns.

Proposal

In Scheme 1, the amount of enclosed volume has been reduced by deleting the horizontal and vertical glass panels that would have created a glass passageway from the front steps to the main entrance. This central space would now remain open from stylobate to entablature. The full-height glazed fins (needed to structurally reinforce the glass panels) have been repositioned to either side of each column. The front plane of glass remains unchanged at 2 feet proud of the limestone façade.

In Scheme 2, the amount of enclosed volume has been increased by bring the fronts forward and between the columns so that each enclosure has a T-shaped footprint. The aedicula of the main entrance would not be encased or intersect with the enclosures and the enclosures would be tall enough to encase, but not intersect with the aediculae of the flanking windows.

Both schemes call for reversible joint conditions where the new glass panels would butt against the historic limestone façade and be gasketed. Signage would be kept to a minimum, located above the entrance aedicula and augmented by an unobtrusive amount of signage on the new glass.

Evaluation

The Equitable building is rare among designated downtown commercial buildings because so much of its front façade is set back from the front. Few other designated buildings even afford the opportunity of installing these types of glass structures, so similar future alterations are probably unlikely. Putting the bank building into service for retail use is consistent with the commercial character of this part of the Downtown Historic District, and would provide the opportunity for public access to its distinctive interior. This consideration is especially important because the banking hall is a designated interior which is an extra challenge in leasing out the building to a merchant. A fundamental condition of the concept is that the alterations will be buildable and reversible without needing to remove or damage any existing historic fabric. Beyond that, both schemes have strengths and weaknesses that in full consideration may be compatible alterations to the landmark.

Scheme 1 matches the scale of the giant order of columns and the structural fins emphasize the inter-columnation and proportion of the temple-front. The amount of glazing is enough that the alteration can best be considered a façade element, especially with its slight projection beyond the existing façade. Sitting in front of the columns, the glass façade can be served by a new plenum that could include a chase for electrical service and lighting without having to excessively disturb the stylobate. However, the weakness of the full height scheme is that the flat top will obstruct the decorative carvings of the lower part of the entablature, more so if the flat glass surfaces darken with grime over time. And of course, this approach will result in a fundamental change in the appearance of the building.

Scheme 2 is reduced in scale enough to appear as objects between the columns rather than an integral part of the façade. The reduced height does not obscure ornament like the limestone Vitruvian wave across the brick wall that backdrops the columns and the installation would more clearly read as separate objects placed within the porch. However, their shorter height creates a horizontal element across the mid-height of the columns that could be seen as competing with the temple's precise proportions and has the potential of cluttering up its bold, monumental porch. Finally, with no projection beyond the stylobate, running electrical service to the enclosure might result in the need to punch through the stylobate more than would be needed in Scheme 1.

Recommendation

The HPO seeks the Board's guidance as to which or either of the glass enclosure schemes for the front façade at 915 F Street NW, are compatible with the landmark.