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

Property Address:	575 3rd Street, NW	X	Agenda
Landmark/District:	Adas Israel Synagogue		Consent Calendar
Meeting Date:	September 28, 2017	X	Concept Review
H.P.A. Number:	17-510	X	Alteration
Staff Reviewer:	Steve Callcott		New Construction
			Demolition
			Subdivision

The Jewish Historical Society of Greater Washington, represented by Smith Group Architects, seeks conceptual design review for an addition to the landmark Adas Israel Synagogue at the corner of F and 3rd Streets NW.

Property History and Description

Adas Israel was constructed in 1876 and is the oldest synagogue structure in Washington. The simple, temple-front brick structure was originally located at the southeast corner of 6th and G Streets NW. When the congregation relocated to a larger synagogue at 6th and Eye at the beginning of the 20th century, the building was converted to commercial use. Advocacy by the Jewish Historical Society saved the structure from demolition in the 1960s, instead resulting in an early preservation success story with its relocation to 3rd and G Streets in 1969. The building was subsequently restored and has since operated as the Lillian and Albert Small Jewish Museum. The building is designated as a DC landmark and was listed on the National Register in 1969.

The synagogue is soon to be relocated to the southeast corner of 3rd and F Streets as a part of the Capitol Crossing/Center Leg Freeway project. Currently under construction, the project is resulting in the decking over of I-395 for the construction of office and retail buildings. The relocation of the synagogue and the reopening of F and G Streets through the site are among the preservation benefits that were negotiated and codified in a Memorandum of Agreement signed in 2012 between the Federal Highway Administration, the National Capitol Planning Commission, Center Place Holdings LLC, DDOT, and the Historic Preservation Office. The new location will restore the synagogue's original orientation facing east.

Proposal

The proposal calls for the construction of a new museum building that would incorporate the historic structure, and related site improvements. The concept has been developed as a composition of three parts – the historic synagogue building serving as the focal point at the corner, a primary four-story mass to the south separated from the synagogue by an entrance courtyard, and a secondary two-story mass to the east separated from the synagogue by a smaller courtyard. The building would sit slightly elevated on a raised plinth due to the parking garage constructed below as part of the Capitol Crossing project. The new masses would have projecting metal-clad enframing walls with a skin of glass, terra cotta, and metal sun screens.

The perimeter of the site would be improved with a low masonry retaining wall and a simply planted hillside to evoke the original site condition of the synagogue sitting in a green space. The landscape plan has been developed to conceal and soften the raised plinth on which the building will sit.

Evaluation

The design is successful in breaking down the new building into component parts that complement and engage the historic building, while also providing intermediate-sized massing elements that bridge between it and the larger surrounding modern construction. The organization of courtyards will simultaneously provide breathing room around the historic building and opportunities for public gathering spaces in which the synagogue will be a primary focus. For a public museum, the sculptural form and dynamic composition are appropriately bold while remaining respectful to the historic synagogue.

Much of the discussion with the design team has focused on the treatment of the public space. The inherited condition of the raised plinth initially seemed destined to make the synagogue appear as a somewhat isolated object removed from the street. However, after considering various alternatives the solution was ultimately influenced by the historic condition with the plinth obscured and the building appearing raised on a naturalistic planted berm. The result is a compatible, appropriate and hopefully permanent setting for the peripatetic landmark.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Review Board approve the concept as consistent with the purposes of the preservation act and delegate final approval to staff.