
HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD

Historic Landmark Case No. 20-04
Central Public Library (Amendment)
801 K Street NW
Square 403N Lot 800

Meeting Date: April 30, 2020
Applicant: Events DC and Apple, Inc.
Affected ANC: 2C

The Historic Preservation Office recommends that the Board adopt the additional documentation for the Central Public Library Historic Landmark and forward the nomination amendment to the National Register of Historic Places.

Preservation Background

The Central Public Library (Carnegie Library) building was named a Category II historic landmark by the Joint Committee of Landmarks in 1964 and was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1969. The Joint Committee identified the building as a Category II landmark because it “contributes significantly to the cultural heritage and visual beauty of D.C.” A National Register nomination was prepared and submitted to the National Register in April 1969 and listed in the National Register in December 1969 under Criteria A and C with Education and Architecture as its Areas of Significance. The Period of Significance was identified as being from 1899 to 1902, spanning the design and construction phases of the building.

This amended nomination, completed as part of a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) related to the 2017-2019 rehabilitation and renovation of the Central Public Library for Apple, Inc., provides additional documentation on the building’s physical and historical development and revises the Period of Significance from 1899-1902 to 1903-1905. As noted in the amended nomination, the Central Public Library has undergone three major periods of alterations, largely on the interior. In 1977-80, the building was modified to accommodate the University of the District of Columbia; in 2001-03, it was adapted for use as the City Museum; and in 2017-19, the building was rehabilitated for adaptive re-use by Apple, Inc.

This amendment provides a highly detailed and illustrated description of the building as it exists today, identifying alterations that were made to the building during the various renovations, including the 2017-19 rehabilitation. As part of this discussion, the nomination identifies alterations that occurred in 1977-80 and 2001-03 to the original building, that were then returned to their historic appearance during the 2017-19 renovation, as required by the MOA.

The amendment also provides a more complete narrative on the history of the building and the site. It also develops historic contexts on libraries in D.C., the creation of a Central Library for

Washington, and the role of Andrew Carnegie and the Carnegie libraries, offering a better understanding of the building within these contexts.

Period of Significance

The 1969 nomination identified 1899-1902 as the Period of Significance, a period that takes in the design and construction phases of the building. The amendment establishes 1903-1905 as the Period of Significance. The beginning date corresponds with the January 1903 dedication of the building to early design changes carried out between 1903 and 1905 that contributed to the building's appearance. This change in Period of Significance is in keeping with the National Register Guidelines that recommend establishing the Period of Significance as "the date of construction and/or the dates of any significant alterations and additions." Based upon the description of the early design changes, including expanding the book stacks from three to five levels, painting the interior, installing water fountains, undertaking minor plaster remodeling, introducing light fixtures, and other minor additions, HPO staff feels that such a Period of Significance is justifiable.

HPO recommends that the Board adopt the additional documentation on the Central Public Library Historic Landmark and that the amended National Register Nomination be forwarded to the National Register of Historic Places.