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

Property Address:	4866 Massachusetts Avenue, NW	X	Agenda
Landmark/District:	Square 1500 (part of Spring Valley Shopping Center)		Consent Calendar
Meeting Dates:	April 23 and 30, 2015	X	Concept Review
H.P.A. Number:	15-283	X	Alteration
Staff Reviewer:	Steve Callcott		New Construction
			Demolition
			Subdivision

The applicant, prospective tenant Millie's Restaurant, seeks conceptual design review for additions and site alterations to a 1936 gas station that is part of Square 1500, a landmarked complex of retail buildings. Plans have been prepared by Katinas Bruckwick Architects.

Property Description

Square 1500 is a cluster of one- and two-story brick Colonial Revival commercial buildings commonly referred to in conjunction with a separate landmark across the street, the Massachusetts Avenue Parking Shops, as the Spring Valley Shopping Center. The subject building and the one-story commercial building to the south were the first structures erected on the square, built in 1936 by the W.C. and A.N. Miller Company to provide neighborhood retail services to their adjacent Spring Valley and Wesley Heights residential developments.

The gas station was designed by the Miller Company's in-house architect Gordon MacNeil in a Williamsburg-inspired Colonial Revival style to complement the company's surrounding residential neighborhoods. By the 1930s, the Colonial Revival style was embraced as a fashionable image for public buildings, residences, and commercial buildings, particularly those associated with the middle and upper middle classes. The restoration of Colonial Williamsburg, starting in 1926 and reaching a state of completion sufficient to attract large numbers of tourists by the 1930s, further solidified the popularity of the style.

Wesley Heights and Spring Valley are among the most fully-realized examples in the District of planned residential neighborhoods that were developed to be serviced exclusively by the automobile. As such, providing for automobile servicing was an important and original component of both of these Massachusetts Avenue shopping complexes.

The gas station's original mass consists of a simple gabled form clad in brick and topped with terra cotta shingles. The façade features three garage door entrances and a pedestrian entrance with a colonial door surround flanked by small sash windows. A large free-standing canopy sheltering the original gas pumps is centered on the building's front door. In the 1990s, additions were constructed on the front, side, and rear of the building for conversion to a restaurant. The metal and glass front addition sought to evoke the three garage door bays while maintaining the original doors inside, the side addition took the form of an angled wing to the main block of the building

and was clad in matching brick, and the rear addition was differentiated in materials and massing that allowed the original block of the building to remain legible.¹

Proposal

The project calls for building a larger addition on the front of the building that would extend in front of the front door and further out toward the street. The grade of the site would be made level to accommodate outdoor seating, with the circular drive removed and a raised perimeter planter provided adjacent to the sidewalk. A portion of the landscaped area at the rear would be removed to provide for a small outdoor seating area, and the fence surrounding the trash enclosure area relocated to allow for a walkway to 49th Street.

The new front enclosure would be taller than the existing, engaging the roof of the building and the free-standing canopy structure. It would be composed of structural posts supporting a flat roof, with large garage doors facing the avenue and into the outdoor seating area.

Evaluation and Recommendation

An expanded version of the existing front addition could allow some additional interior space while also retaining the primacy of the original mass of the building and visibility of its original facade. However, for such an approach to be compatible to the unusual character of this building, the same general design principles that characterize the existing addition should be applied again. As well, greater deference should be given to preserving the existing character of the site, which includes interstitial planted areas and the circular drive. As the project continues to be developed, the following is recommended:

- 1) The addition should not engage or intersect with the roof of the building or the canopy; it should tie in at the eave line of the gas station and not engage or enclose the free-standing canopy.
- 2) The addition should not enclose or obscure the building's front door, which should remain visible from the street.
- 3) The front terrace and planting areas should evoke the original circulation through the site by maintaining a wider opening at each end of the site, retaining the curved planted area adjacent to the mechanical yard, and using differentiated paving to denote the former circular drive.
- 4) The raised planter separating the terrace from the sidewalk should be developed as less of an architectural barrier to what was originally an open site. The existing sloped berm with plantings would provide a better model.
- 5) The seating area at the rear should be eliminated and this area retained as landscaped green space, as is the typical condition for buildings in this complex facing the parking area.

The HPO recommends that the concept be revised as recommended above in order for it to be found compatible with the character of the landmark.

¹ The front addition was found to be incompatible by the Board but was approved by the Mayor's Agent as necessary for the economic viability of the restaurant (HPA 99-71). The Mayor's Agent noted the removable nature of the proposed front enclosure, which would retain the original façade and allow visibility of it from the outside.