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

Landmark/District: **Decatur Street Car Barn/Northern Bus Garage** (X) Agenda
Address: **4701 14th Street, NW** () Consent Calendar
Meeting Date: **October 28, 2021** (X) New Construction
H.P.A. Numbers: **21-553** (X) Alteration
(X) Demolition

The Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA), Beyer Blinder Belle Architects and Wendel Architects seeks final concept review for an extensive renovation of the historic Decatur Street Car Barn. HPRB first reviewed the concept on May 28, 2020, a related demolition permit on September 24, 2020, and a revised concept on December 17, 2020. The latter was unanimously approved by the Board conditioned upon a few minor revisions and an additional review after the Mayor’s Agent hearing of the demolition permit was complete. That hearing occurred on March 26, 2021 and the order to clear the permit was issued on September 17, 2021. The project team is now seeking approval for its final design.

Decatur Street Car Barn

The Decatur Street Car Barn was designed in the Italian Renaissance style by the local architectural firm of Wood, Donn and Deming, and constructed for the Capital Traction Company in 1906-1907. The car barn was adapted for use as a bus garage over time and significantly altered when WMATA enlarged the building in 1989-1992. This expansion left most, but not all of the remaining historic fabric along the 14th Street, NW elevation. The entire site was designated a DC landmark in 2012 and listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 2013.

Proposal

Substantial renovation is necessary to accommodate WMATA’s expanding and modernizing bus fleet. To meet these goals, WMATA proposes to gut most of the existing building, reconfigure the interior, and construct new levels above and below. To offset the loss of historic fabric, the remaining portions of the original car barn along 14th Street, NW will be preserved and restored along with the smokestack and portions of the northern and southern elevations.

Evaluation

The most recent concept continues to reflect community input gathered via virtual meetings and an on-line survey of various design alternatives. It has also been modified to address the two specific “edits” recommended by HPRB during its last review.

Firstly, the light-colored, high performance masonry panels on the southwest corner and the Buchanan Street elevation, which the Board determined inappropriately read as a “posts & beams,” have been eliminated. These have been replaced with red masonry and grey metal panels to better integrate these elements into the overall composition. The light-colored panels

above the garage entrance on the northwest corner have also been eliminated. Subtle detailing consisting of dark-colored brick have been introduced in this area to better relate this entrance to the highly ornamented historic garage entrance immediately to the south.

Secondly, the Board's direction to better relate the east elevations to the row houses across the street has been addressed by introducing perforated screens above the previously proposed recessed panels, incorporating a dark brick belt course above the screens, setting the wall above the new belt course back 1' 4", and revising the cladding of the recessed wall from variegated red to a single shade of red. These revisions establish a more direct architectural dialogue with the residences across the street by accentuating a rowhouse rhythm, suggesting first and second story fenestration, establishing a cornice-like element at a proportionally-related height, and by playing down the greater height of the new building above the "cornice line."

Recommendation

HPO recommends that the Board approve the revised design and delegate all remaining review to HPO.

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