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

Property Address:	2112-2146 Georgia Avenue, NW	X	Agenda
Landmark/District:	Bond Bread Building		Consent Calendar
	WRECO/Central Bus Garage	X	Concept Review
Meeting Date:	September 22, 2022	X	Alteration
H.P.A. Number:	22-444	X	New Construction
			Demolition
		X	Subdivision

Bond Bread Partnership, LLC, on behalf of property owner Howard University, seeks concept review for plans to rehabilitate the Bond Bread Factory (2146 Georgia Avenue NW) and the Washington Railway and Electric Company (WRECO)/Central Bus Garage (2112 Georgia Avenue NW), and construction of nine-story additions to the buildings for a mixed-use project that will include ground level retail, a public park, multi-family residential, and a hotel. The project will also include a lot combination subdivision to combine the two properties into a single lot.

The development team is comprised of Menkiti Group, Fivesquares Development and Edens; architectural plans have been prepared by Studios Architecture; landscape and urban design plans by David Rubin/Land Collective; and the preservation plan by EHT Traceries.

Property History and Description

The property consists of two industrial buildings listed individually on the DC Inventory of Historic Sites and National of Register of Historic Places.

Bond Bread Factory

The Bond Bread Factory was constructed in 1929 by the General Baking Company, a New York City baking conglomerate, and designed by Corry B. Comstock, an architect who specialized in bakery design. The building is Art Deco in style characterized by its ziggurat façade composition of white glazed brick punctuated with channeled pilasters, recessed decorative brick panels, and terra cotta trim. The interior features a repeating series of concrete structural columns, some of which on the first and second floors have distinctive mushroom-shaped capitals.

The building illustrates the rise of large-scale corporate baking facilities in the early 20th century which, in DC, were clustered in this neighborhood, and the trend to build “sanitary” bakeries that responded to the principles of sanitation, nutrition, food safety and public health as it was understood at the time. It is an important and architecturally distinctive survivor of one of the city’s largest and most notable industries.

Washington Railway and Electric Company (WRECO) Garage

The Washington Railway and Electric Car Company (WRECO) garage was constructed in 1930 to house and maintain the company’s bus fleet. It continued in this use through the company’s

consolidation as the Capital Transit Company in 1933 (as its Central Bus Garage) and through the company's reorganization into the DC Transit Company in 1949. In 1958, the garage became a service facility and gasoline depot for a United States Post Office truck fleet.

The building was designed by local architect Arthur B. Heaton organized as a series of street-facing brick facades enclosing a large central glass-roofed atrium where the buses were serviced and stored. The Art Deco-styled design exhibits walls punctuated with muscular piers and a roofline with shallow stepped parapets. Perhaps most notable is the use of multi-hued decorative brick laid in common bond and basket weave patterns that provide texture and relief to the long expanses of wall. Heaton would return to the use of this tapestry brick in his design for the Western Bus Garage for the Capital Transit Company.

While both buildings retain their basic integrity of design, they each exhibit not insignificant structural failures and environmental contamination. The WRECO garage's atrium roof has almost entirely collapsed leaving little but the supporting metal trusses, and contamination from gasoline storage tanks and other chemicals has spread under approximately 75-80% of the building's footprint. The Bond Bread Factory has structural failure along its north wall, substantial water-infiltration that has compromised portions of the concrete roof and floor assemblies, and environmental contamination under the northeast portion of the building. Remediation of these issues will require some removal and replacement of failed building elements and excavation and disposal of contaminated building materials and soils.

Planning Considerations

The project site has long been envisioned in community planning studies and the Comprehensive Plan for substantial redevelopment. The Uptown Destination District Plan (dubbed "DUKE" after Duke Ellington) was developed by the Office of Planning in 2004 as a framework to guide redevelopment of the U and 7th Streets corridors as an 18-hour arts, entertainment and cultural district. Promoting the historic character and African-American heritage of the area is a cornerstone of the plan, but which also emphasizes the need for additional density and transit-oriented development to achieve the critical mass and desired vibrancy for the area. While developed prior to the designation of the two subject buildings as landmarks, the plan encouraged retention of at least parts of the buildings as part of a Howard Town Center redevelopment. The DUKE small area plan was adopted by the DC Council in 2005.

The Comprehensive Plan provides the following in the Mid-City East Area Element:

Action MC-2.1.C: Howard Town Center - Develop a new mixed-use neighborhood center on land to the west of the Howard University campus. This should include not only the planned Howard Town Center site (with housing, retail, and structured parking) but also a medium- to high-density, mixed-income housing development that provides a mix of affordable housing as a result of a rezoning effort, civic space, cultural facilities, and public open space on surrounding sites. Historic structures within the area should be preserved. Appropriate transitions in scale should be established between this center and the lower density row house neighborhoods to the west. 2011.12

The site is zoned MU-10, permitting medium to high density mixed-use development.

Project Background

The current proposal is not the first attempt to redevelop these properties. In 2010, Howard University signed a ground lease to allow a different team to develop the site with housing, a grocery store and a substantial underground parking garage. Initially, the project called for demolition of all but the Georgia Avenue façades; it was this proposal that spurred submission of landmark applications that led to their designation.

Upon review of the previous proposal in 2013, the HPRB (not surprisingly) found the extent of demolition to be inconsistent with the purposes of the preservation act. In its discussion and adoption of the HPO report, the Board acknowledged that substantial development, height and density could be achieved on the site, and these large-scale industrial buildings are the type that can often most readily lend themselves to being creatively adapted, altered, substantially added to as long as the buildings' essential character is retained. The Board recommended that substantially more than the front façades be retained, and that the massing of the additional floors be organized and designed to more specifically relate to the different characteristics of the underlying buildings.

While the previous design team started work to revise the plans to respond to the Board's direction, Howard University cancelled the ground lease. In 2018, a new RFP was issued and, at the University's request, HPO provided guidance to the selection committee in the review of the respondents' proposals. HPO's guidance was based on the two principles cited by the Board in its 2013 review: 1) that while there could be some alteration and removal to accommodate an adaptive reuse project, demolition should be limited and the important character-defining features of each retained, and 2) that substantial new construction could take place atop these large industrial buildings if it was designed to relate to the character of the underlying buildings.

Proposal

This new proposal calls for all elevations of both historic buildings to be preserved with the exception of the utilitarian north wall of Bond Bread which will have to be reconstructed due to structural failure. Some additional demolition and replacement will be necessary due to other structural failures and the need to remediate environmental contamination. Exterior modification will include lowering many of the first-floor window openings to serve as doors and storefronts to open the buildings up for improved circulation and retail uses. This includes the three large openings on the south-facing V Street elevation of WRECO which will serve as the primary entrance to the public courtyard garden. The reconstructed north elevation of Bond Bread, which is now mostly blank, will include a greater extent of fenestration and a vehicular drop off to serve as the primary entrance to the hotel along the reopened W Street. The extremely thorough preservation plan developed by EHT Traceries provides much greater detail, but significant interior spaces and features – most importantly, the atrium and some of the trusses of WRECO and the majority of mushroom columns in Bond Bread – will be retained. The project also includes a commitment to historical interpretation, community story-telling and public art which is still being developed.

On WRECO, the new construction would be organized in a H-shape, above and slightly set back from the long Georgia Avenue and 8th Street elevations and framing the former atrium in the center. The atrium would be converted to an open public courtyard and events space lined by retail, with the original metal roof trusses retained at the north and south ends; the towers would

connect at the mid-point over the courtyard. On Bond Bread, the new construction would be massed as a T-shaped tower, with the base of the T set behind and aligned with the building's central tower and the top of the T forming a vertical extension of the building's 8th Street elevation. The design and materials of each of the towers has been developed to be differentiated from each other and to provide a complementary contrast to the underlying historic buildings. Materials include different colors and sizes of brick, metal panels, and metal framed windows in a variety of expressions.

Evaluation

The project represents a thoughtful, creative and successful balance of preservation, new design and urbanism, and has been developed to follow the principles cited by the Board in its review of the previous project. Most importantly, the project will result in the rehabilitation of two long vacant and deteriorated landmarks, with a plan to address the environmental and structural conditions in a manner that minimizes the extent of demolition. Through in-depth documentation and analysis of the environmental and structural conditions, reduction in the size of the below-grade parking garage (eliminating it from under Bond Bread) and strategic organization of the new construction, the important exterior and interior character-defining features of the buildings will be retained.

The applicants have worked closely with HPO, the DC Preservation League (the sponsor for the landmark nominations) and the ANC over the past months to refine and increase the scope of preservation and maximize the retention of character-defining features, including the industrial concrete floor and ceiling finishes and structural columns at Bond and the spatial qualities and steel roof trusses of WRECO's atrium. While some demolition will be necessary for remediation of the structural and environmental issues, as well as some to accommodate the new construction, the extent of removal and alteration does not rise to the level of constituting substantial demolition under the Board's regulations and can - and should - be found consistent with the purposes of the preservation act by the Board.

Modifications to the buildings' facades will preserve existing fenestration patterns while achieving the urban design goals of opening the buildings up to the public, improving circulation through this large block and activating the abutting streets. The Board approved similar interventions at the Uline Arena (1140 3rd Street NE), a comparable industrial building also adapted to provide ground level retail. The retention of the north wall of WRECO and the south wall of Bond will ensure that the buildings continue to read as separate entities from within.

While substantial, the new construction has been designed to relate to the characteristics of the underlying landmarks. On WRECO, the first two floors of the new construction are expressed as an inset element that provides a neutral backdrop for the garage's stepped parapet roofline and a visual break for the remainder of the tower to float above. On Bond, the addition is organized to retain the distinctive ziggurat roofline, reinforce the primacy of the central tower, and to push the mass back above the building's secondary 8th Street elevation. The differentiated design, materials and fenestration of the new towers from each other further reinforces that each addition relates to the underlying building and relieves the overall composition from appearing as a monolithic mass.

As the Board cited in its review of the previous project, these large scale, muscular industrial buildings are the type of structures that can accommodate substantial additions. Examples of similar preservation projects involving substantial additions to industrial buildings include the C & P Warehouse (1111 North Capitol Street, NE), where a 12 story tower was found compatible because it retained the building's important characteristics and the new construction was massed toward the rear of the site; the former Sears Department Store in Tenleytown (4500 Wisconsin Avenue, NW), where a six story addition atop the building was found compatible based on the creative manner in which the tower was shaped and sited atop the historic building; and the Uline Arena (1140 3rd Street NE), where a two-story addition atop the original one-story ice house portion of the building was found compatible due to its glassy design and the solid, industrial character of the underlying building.

Other aspects of the project that have inter-linked preservation, urban design and planning benefits include the creation of a public courtyard park that retains much of the volume and character of WRECO's central atrium; the reduction of parking to reduce the extent of building demolition and improve the project's reliance on mass transit; providing a variety of retail, entertainment, housing, and hotel uses while retaining historic buildings to contribute to the vibrant arts and cultural district envisioned in the DUKE small area plan; and a program of public art and interpretation to commemorate the sites' African-American and industrial history.

As the project continues to be developed, additional discussions should take place regarding the precise colors and materials for the new construction with samples modeled in the field adjacent to the historic buildings. HPO has encouraged the applicants to investigate whether the paint can be removed from Bond Bread to expose the underlying glazed brick (which is a cream color rather than pure white), and which may influence final decisions for the color and texture of adjacent new materials. HPO also concurs with the finding of the DC Preservation that the relationship of the new construction behind and engaging the historic central tower of Bond Bread isn't yet adequately resolved and should continue to be studied.

Recommendations

The HPO recommends that the Review Board make the following findings:

- 1. As the plans call for substantial retention of the interior walls that separate the two buildings and the buildings will continue to be understood as separate and discrete structures inside and out, the proposed lot combination subdivision is consistent with the purposes of the preservation act.*
- 2. As the extent of building removal has been minimized through careful study of existing conditions, strategic placement of new structure, and retention of important exterior and interior character-defining features, the project will not result in a loss of integrity or substantial demolition as defined in the Board's regulations.*
- 3. The proposed building modifications and new construction have been designed to retain and relate to the individual characteristics of these historic buildings. These large-scale industrial buildings can support substantial additions and the proposed new construction achieves compatibility through massing and design that relates to the specific characteristics of each.*

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