

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

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Property Address:	<b>1201-1219 Massachusetts Ave NW</b>	<b>X</b>	Agenda
Landmark/District:	<b>Church of the Ascension and St. Agnes</b>		Consent Calendar
		<b>X</b>	Concept Review
Meeting Date:	<b>July 27, 2023</b>	<b>X</b>	Alteration
H.P.A. Number:	<b>23-367</b>	<b>X</b>	New Construction Subdivision

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The Church of the Ascension and St. Agnes and DAKS Development seek conceptual design review for construction of a seven-story residential building and alterations to a side chapel/social hall for construction of a new parish hall.

**Property Description and History**

The Church of the Ascension and St. Agnes, constructed in 1874-1875, is one of the District's finest examples of the High Victorian Gothic style. It was designed by noted Baltimore architects Thomas Dixon and Charles Carson on land donated by W.W. Corcoran, then a member of the vestry. The building's polychrome exterior is composed of white Maryland marble and pink and orange Ohio sandstone, punctuated with a corner spire that soars almost 190 feet. The parish social hall to the west of the church was constructed in 1919-1920, and an interstitial circulation space between it and the church was built in 1965. The church was designated as a landmark by the Joint Committee in 1977 and listed in the National Register in 1983.

The property also includes two adjacent town houses that were independently constructed but have long been owned by the church. Each are constructed of red pressed brick and illustrate variations on the Romanesque Revival style. 1217 Massachusetts Avenue was constructed in 1890 and 1219 was constructed in 1887. The houses are on the same tax lot as the church but are not part of the landmark. Together with the church, all three are listed as contributing buildings to the Shaw Historic District.

**Proposal**

The project has two components: construction of a seven-story residential building behind 1217 and 1219, and construction of a two-story parish hall on the site of the social hall that would also provide accessible entry to the church.

For the residential building, minor portions of 1219 and a fire-damaged/reconstructed two-story wing of 1217 would be removed. The new building would rise flush with the rear elevations of the houses, with its façade massing responding to the two different setbacks of the houses. While the design and materials have not yet been developed, the building would have vertically-oriented windows and balconies on the side elevations.

The new parish hall would remove the 1965 infill and the rear portion of the 1920 social hall. New stairs and an elevator would provide access to the basement and first floor of the church and

the two levels of the parish hall. Two design options have been developed, each of which would retain the exterior wall and windows of the church. Option 1 (the applicant's preference) would provide a sky-lit atrium that would rise the full height of the nave's side windows and a glass wall behind the retained front of the parish hall to enclose a roof terrace behind. Option 2 would provide a lower atrium – rising to the mid-point of the nave's windows - and a lower wall behind the retained front of the parish hall.

### **Evaluation**

The alterations to 1217 and 1219 will not result in substantial demolition or removal of significant rear wings. While the two-story rear wing of 1217 was likely original to the building's 1890 construction, its integrity was compromised by a fire in 2002 that resulted in the interiors and structure being substantially reconstructed.

The height and mass of the proposed seven-story residential building is compatible with the context of Massachusetts Avenue and the broader Shaw Historic District. The slight modulation of the height and mass in deference to the different setbacks of the historic buildings, together with vertically-oriented window openings, helps break down the size of the tower and relate it to its historic context. As the design continues to be developed, HPO would encourage that masonry in a scale and color that relates to the historic district be used for the elevations. Incorporating the unfenestrated portion of the stair well on the front exterior wall into the composition will require some study and finesse.

While the parish hall project will result in removal of the back portion of the 1920 social hall, it is very much a secondary element to the building that is given only a passing reference in the National Register nomination. Within the context of a project that seeks to provide the church with needed office and meeting spaces and which provides universal accessibility to the site, the extent of removal and modification seems justified.

Option 2 for the parish hall is certainly the better preservation approach. While more challenging in terms of how it connects to the church and its double-height windows, this option reads as more subordinate to the landmark church, retains the public visibility of the west façade as experienced from street view, and results in a better proportional relationship to the retained portion of the parish hall. This option would not preclude having a roof terrace as shown in the first option, which could still be achieved with a lower wall or railing pulled back from the new front wall.

### **Recommendation**

*HPO recommends that the Board find the proposed concept for a seven-story building behind 1217 and 1219 Massachusetts Avenue to be compatible in height and mass with the Shaw Historic District and option 2 for the parish hall to be generally compatible with the landmark, and that the project continue to be developed and return for further design review when ready.*

*HPO Staff Contact: Steve Callcott*



*Church of the Ascension and St. Agnes, 1201 Massachusetts Avenue NW*



*Parish social hall*



*1217 and 1219 Massachusetts Avenue NW*