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

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Property Address:	<b>1317 G Street, NW</b>	<b>X</b>	Agenda
Landmark/District:	<b>Church of the Epiphany</b>		Consent Calendar
Meeting Date:	<b>September 28, 2023</b>	<b>X</b>	Concept Review
H.P.A. Number:	<b>23-508</b>	<b>X</b>	Alteration
		<b>X</b>	New Construction
		<b>X</b>	Demolition

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The Vestry of the Church of the Epiphany, with plans prepared by Teass/Warren Architects and a preservation assessment and recommendations plan prepared by EHT Traceries, seeks conceptual design review for demolition of their parish hall and construction of a ten-story building to house church functions and affordable housing.

### **Property Description and History**

The Church of the Epiphany is a Gothic Revival church, the oldest portion of which dates from 1844 and was designed by John Harkness. The church has undergone numerous alterations and additions over the years, notably in 1857, 1874, 1890, 1922 (the date of the current front tower), and 2011. Early congregants included President James Buchanan, Jefferson Davis, and Lord Ashburton. The building served as a Union hospital during the Civil War.

The parish house, located at the rear of the church, was constructed as a stand-alone building on the northwest corner of the property in 1865, and was expanded in 1886 and 1907. A large four-story brick addition was constructed in 1911 on the northeast corner of the lot and internally combined with the earlier structure; a formal lecture hall was provided on the first floor and a gymnasium on the top floor, with offices and classrooms in between. The formal classical styling of the interior of the lecture hall was largely eliminated in subsequent renovations, although a full exploration of remaining elements has not been undertaken.

### **Proposal**

The project calls for demolishing and replacing the parish house with a U-plan building to house church functions on the first three floors and affordable residential units on the upper seven. The building would connect to the back of the transept wings on each side, with a church entrance on the south and the residential lobby entrance on the north. The footprint of the building would retain a light court to allow natural illumination of a large stained-glass rosary window behind the chancel. The design for the building shows the first eight floors with large, punched windows grouped into double-height openings on the lower floors and punctuated by colorful spandrel panels and the upper two floors a clad in a metal framed glass curtain wall system.

The project raises two primary preservation issues for the Board's evaluation: demolition of the parish hall and the compatibility of the new construction.

### **Demolition**

The historic preservation regulations (10C DCMR § 305.1) provide the following examples of what constitutes demolition:

- (a) The removal or destruction of any façade;
- (b) The removal or destruction of all or a substantial portion of the structural components of the building, such as structural walls, floor assemblies, and roofs;
- (c) The removal or destruction of all or a substantial portion of the roof along with all or substantially all of one or more exterior walls;
- (d) The removal or destruction of all or substantially all of an entire wing or appendage of the building, such as a rear ell, unless the wing lacks physical or historic integrity, or is not a character-defining feature;
- (e) The removal or destruction of a substantial portion that includes character-defining features of the building or structure;
- (f) The removal or destruction of all or a substantial portion of a designated interior landmark, unless the elements to be removed lack physical or historic integrity, or are not character-defining features; or
- (g) Any removal or destruction requiring a partial demolition or raze permit under the D.C. Construction Code, including any demolition of non-bearing walls, interior finishes, or other interior non-bearing elements within a building where an interior space has been designated as a historic landmark.

While architecturally undistinguished, the parish hall is a substantial part of the Church of the Epiphany complex and reflects its evolution from the 1860s through the twentieth century to provide facilities for its parishioners. Unlike the church, its exterior was not intended for public view, but it contained public function spaces and private offices that were an important part of the church's fulfillment of its mission. While modest in design, the parish hall cannot be characterized as lacking physical or historical integrity, and its demolition meets the definition outlined in § 305(d).

HPO has discussed this recommendation with the applicants, who will be seeking review by the Mayor's Agent for demolition of the parish hall to pursue a project of special merit for construction of an affordable housing project. Such a review would involve the weighing of preservation benefits and losses, and it can be expected that the Mayor's Agent would inquire as to what mitigation could be offered to offset the loss of the parish hall. For example, a more complete documentation of the history and architectural evolution of church complex, an updated and improved National Register nomination, photographic recordation of the parish hall would be consistent with standard mitigation practice.

### **New Construction**

The new construction has been designed with respect to the plan of the church, taking advantage of the transepts to provide entrances to the two functions and retaining the light court for natural illumination of the rosary window. The existing high-rise office buildings surrounding the site already provide an urban context into which the addition will blend, while the substantial setback from the church's tower and roof will retain their picturesque profile and street presence. In addition to retaining the interior light well, the U-shaped form of the tower helps break down the

mass into smaller elements to prevent it from appearing forbidding from the vantage points in which it will be visible.

**Recommendation**

*HPO recommends that the Board find demolition of the parish hall to be inconsistent with the purposes of the preservation act, but that the conceptual design for the addition otherwise be compatible in height, placement and massing. In the event the Mayor's Agent finds the project to be one of special merit, HPO recommends that the Board request the Mayor's Agent to refer the project back to the Board for design development, including exterior materials.*

*HPO Staff Contact: Steve Callcott*