

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

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Property Address:	<b>1815 Columbia Road, NW</b>	<b>X</b>	Agenda
Landmark/District:	<b>Kalorama Triangle Historic District</b>		Consent Calendar
Meeting Date:	<b>October 27, 2016</b>	<b>X</b>	Alteration
H.P.A. Number:	<b>16-160</b>	<b>X</b>	Concept Review
Staff Reviewer:	<b>David Maloney</b>	<b>X</b>	New Construction

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Applicant Lisa Drazin, representing the Bernice J. Drazin Trust and with plans prepared by Gordon & Greenberg Architects, seeks concept design review for construction of a five-story addition above a one-story, non-contributing building in the Kalorama Triangle Historic District.

**Property Description and History**

1815 Columbia Road was originally built as a one-story brick commercial building in 1929, designed by architect Julius Wenig. In 1940, Oscar Gildenhorn opened Comet Liquor in the building, subsequently turning the business over to his son-in-law Howard Speisman in 1965. While it is not documented precisely when, the façade of the building was significantly altered and replaced in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, possibly when it changed hands in 1965. A veneer of exposed aggregate concrete masonry units and an angled aluminum storefront replaced whatever remained of the 1929 façade. In 1980, Sidney Drazin purchased the building and continued operations, adding a deli counter a few years later. The building has been unoccupied in more recent years.

Based on the extent of alterations to the building after the period of significance for the Kalorama Triangle Historic District (1893-1939), the Board made a determination in 1995 that 1815 Columbia Road did not contribute to the historic district due to a lack of architectural integrity (HPA 95-114).

To the south, the building abuts a row of eight one-story, limestone-faced Classical Revival commercial buildings constructed in 1931 to the designs of Frederick Pyle. To the north is a two-story brick corner commercial building built in 1929. Based on their date of construction and architectural character, these immediately adjacent buildings are all contributing to the historic district.

**Proposal**

The plans call for removing the existing storefront and masonry cladding, redesigning the façade, and adding five stories atop the building. The first floor façade would align with the faces of the adjacent historic buildings, while the upper floors would be set back at the corners with a central bay projecting out to the building restriction line.

The first and sixth floor would be 15 feet in height, while each of the interstitial floors would be 10 feet in height. A parapet approximately 3 feet tall would run along the perimeter of the roof with a stair tower projecting in the center along the south side, for a total height of 73 feet.

The first floor of the building would be clad in granite, the upper floors would be clad in EIFS, and a metal and glass system would be used for the storefront and glass bay above. Three options have been presented for the treatment of the side walls: Option A would have a false storefront assembly with metal panels in place of windows, Option B would have a built up assemblage of EIFS to articulate a window system, and Option C would include a trompe l'oeil mural to create the appearance of windows and a light well within the side elevation.

## **Evaluation**

New construction is reviewed by the Board according to the principles and considerations outlined in its design guideline “New Construction in Historic Districts.” The guideline provides the following (in italics):

*1.1 The key to the design of a new building that enhances the existing environment is its compatibility with neighboring buildings.*

*1.2 Compatibility is achieved through careful attention to the following design principles of building: Setback, Orientation, Scale, Proportion, Rhythm, Massing, Height, Materials, Color, Roof Shape, Details and Ornamentation, and Landscape Features*

*Compatibility is based on a thorough understanding of the design principles of existing buildings. Compatibility should also involve analysis of how these design principles are used in the neighborhood and how they can be interpreted using today's materials and construction techniques.*

The proposal is consistent with some of the principles outlined in the guideline (setback, rhythm, and roof shape), and one principle is not relevant to an urban row building (landscape features). However, the concept is not consistent with several important characteristics – including height, proportions, massing, materials and orientation – and is therefore incompatible with its context and the Kalorama Triangle Historic District.

## **Height**

*8.1: While a new building does not necessarily need to be exactly the same height as its neighbors to be compatible, it should be designed to respect existing building heights. For example, a new five story building in a block of two- and three-story buildings usually detracts from the character of a street. Similarly, a new one-story building in a block of four- or five-story buildings will be out of character.*

*8.2 Typically, if a new building is more than one story higher or lower than existing buildings that are all the same height, it will be out of character.*

The proposal is incompatible in height within its context of low-scale historic buildings. It is discordantly tall and overwhelms rather than enhances the one- and two-story contributing buildings within its row.

## **Proportions**

*5.1 The design of a new building should respect, but not necessarily exactly duplicate, the existing proportions of neighboring buildings.*

While buildings of the same and greater height are found in the historic district, and new construction of this height could be compatible, the proposal has a height-to-width proportional relationship that is not found in and is incompatible with the taller buildings within the historic district. Taller heights are found only on buildings that have a substantially larger footprint than the subject property's 25 foot width.

## **Massing**

*7.1 A new building should respect the massing of neighboring historic buildings. Massing is derived from the articulation of a building's facade through the use of dormers, towers and other roof projections, as well as facade projections such as bays, porches and steps. A building's massing significantly contributes to the character of a street, particularly in districts containing rowhouses or contiguous commercial buildings.*

The arrangement of recessed upper floors with a wide central bay is not a compatible massing for this historic district. The combination of the flat storefront (in a commercial district that is typified by ground level storefront projections) and the recessed primary mass above with an oriel results in a composition that is top heavy and unnecessarily complicated. A projecting bay at street level with a flat wall surface above would be a more compatible architectural arrangement.

### ***Materials***

*9.1 In some districts, where most or all of the buildings on a street use the same exterior materials, the new building should normally use those or similar materials.*

The use of EIFS as a primary exterior wall material is not compatible with the materials that characterize buildings in the Kalorama Triangle Historic District. EIFS (Exterior Insulation and Finishing System) is a lightweight synthetic wall cladding system that has not been found by the Board to be a compatible material for primary elevations in historic districts such as Kalorama Triangle that are characterized by the quality, craftsmanship, richness, and longevity of their masonry materials. The Board has found EIFS acceptable only on secondary elevations or mechanical penthouses that are not visible from street view.

### ***Orientation***

*3.1 A new building should respect the primary orientation of its neighbors.*

The options for the sides of the building are in response to HPO's recommendation to explore the use of at-risk windows to help improve the compatibility of what would otherwise be blank exposed side walls. However, the proposed treatments are not consistent with this recommendation, and the extent of fenestration suggested is not compatible for a mid-block row building that typically has its primary orientation to the street.

### **Recommendation**

The HPO recommends that the Board find the concept incompatible with the character of the Kalorama Triangle Historic District and inconsistent with the purposes of the preservation act.