HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD
STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION

Landmark/District:	**The Maples/Capitol Hill Historic District**	(**x**) Agenda
Address:	**619 D Street, SE**	( ) Consent
		(**x**) Concept
Meeting Date:	**December 16, 2010**	(**x**) Alteration
Case Number:	**11-078**	(**x**) New Construction
Staff Reviewer:	**Amanda Molson and Steve Callcott**	( ) Demolition
		( ) Subdivision

Owner The Maples DC, LLC, with drawings prepared by Cunningham Quill Architects, PLLC, requests conceptual review of the restoration and redevelopment of The Maples at 619 D Street, SE. The site is an individual landmark and is also a contributing structure to the Capitol Hill Historic District.

Property Description
The original main house and stable (which later acquired the current brick façade) were designed by William Lovering for owner William Mayne Duncanson and were built circa 1795-1796. Designed in the Georgian style, the two-story plus attic main house is five bays wide and rectangular in footprint. The gabled roof of the main house includes chimneys at the east and west ends. The front porch, which had been removed as of photographs taken in the 1940s, spanned three bays of the front façade and featured a pediment.

After a long period of vacancy, the house was used as a hospital for wounded soldiers during the War of 1812 and was purchased by Francis Scott Key in 1815. Key's ownership was followed by that of Major Augustus A. Nicholson, Quarter Master of the Marines, in 1838, and then by Senator John M. Clayton starting in 1856. Clayton, who served as Secretary of State under President Zachary Taylor, added a ballroom addition immediately to the east of the main block (later replaced during the 1930s with a new east wing) and may also have added the north wing behind the main house. Owner Emily Edson Briggs, the first woman admitted to the White House Press Room, expanded the north wing during her ownership of the property beginning in 1871, and the Briggs family subsequently sold the site to the Friendship House Association in 1936.

The Friendship House Association constructed further brick additions to the east and west of the main house during the 1930s. The 1930s expansion was designed by Washington architect Horace Peaslee and included the current, two-story addition extending from the main block towards the west and a two-story addition attached to the stable. Landscape alterations in recent decades have included the installation of a fenced basketball court on the east side of the front lawn and the construction of a circular ramp meeting the sidewalk on South Carolina Avenue. The Friendship House Association retained ownership of the property until this year and utilized the site for their social services programming.

Proposal and Evaluation
The new owners plan to convert the property to accommodate up to twenty residential units, which will be dispersed amongst the rehabilitated existing building and four new, connected structures on the site. The owners and their architects have consulted closely with the HPO during the preliminary stages of review, and their plan to rehabilitate this significant, but suffering, landmark structure and to return the site to residential use should be commended. They have been receptive towards comments and have made themselves available to the community to share information.

The major preservation considerations are as follows:

- *Restoration*

  While generally sound, the property has suffered from deferred maintenance over the years, and the historic house is in need of substantial restoration work that will include the replacement of the roof and the windows and doors, masonry repair, and the modernization of all building systems. Decorative elements (mantels, moldings, etc.) will be salvaged reused when possible. Details on the rehabilitation should be coordinated with staff and presented to the Board in a subsequent review.

  Photo documentation from the late nineteenth and early twentieth provides design direction for reconstructing the missing front porch. Although it is unclear from available research whether the porch was built at the time of initial construction or added later, it is evident that the porch existed fairly early in the site's history as it appears in photographs from the late 1800s forward. The applicants plan to reinstate this element and should detail materials, dimensions, and profiles on final construction plans.

- *New Construction*

  Three new multi-unit rowhouses are proposed along South Carolina Avenue.[1] Two of the houses will be sited to the west (extending roughly the width of the existing basketball court fenced enclosure), with one to the east. Maintaining the open vista to and from the landmark as viewed from South Carolina Avenue, while accommodating some new construction on the site, has been a paramount priority in discussions thus far. Following a mockup conducted onsite with the HPO, the single rowhouse to the east has been slightly narrowed to limit the visual intrusion of new construction into the line of sight. Similarly, a setback has been added to side of the house flanking the lawn on the west side to further open the viewshed towards the landmark structure.

  The depth of all three houses is consistent with others along the row (and even shallower in the case of the houses to the west), and all are proposed as three-story

[1] The new townhouses will be connected to the remainder of the site via a porch structure to the rear of the western-most houses and access to the underground parking garage from the eastern-most house. No subdivision of the lot is being requested at this site.

structures of a height similar to nearby residential buildings. Further study of the third floor of all three structures is needed and may include the use of a mansard roof form, which would respond to the turreted bays and otherwise articulated rooflines of many houses on the block and would provide some relief in massing as viewed from South Carolina Avenue. The contemporary, glazed third floor of the houses to the west is a distraction from the traditional structures on the site and streetscape, resulting in infill that reads as a planned "bookend" rather than organic development over time.

Detailing on the houses should be further developed prior to re-review by the Board, including the addition of lintels over the windows and doors, consideration of adding decorative brickwork to break down the massing further, information on planned materials for lead walks, front steps and fences, simplification of the varying window sizes, and a commitment to coordinate the selection of masonry samples with the staff. These three new structures will become a "public face" of this project as viewed from South Carolina Avenue and the only new construction on this block in recent decades, so care should be taken to produce a design that complements the streetscape and which does not distract from the landmark.

An additional multi-unit structure is proposed between the western-most new townhouses and the Maples itself. At two stories, the massing has been broken down into a corner block with a modified hipped roof that matches the roof form and height of the 1930s addition to the west, and a more contemporary side extension with a lower hipped roof. While the massing is generally successful, further restudy should include streamlining variations in the size of windows and transoms and reconsidering the employment of siding on the side extension when all other structures on the site are masonry. The practicality of such extensive glazing in residential units may also merit reconsideration. This structure serves as a visual transition between the new townhouses on axis with the angle of South Carolina Avenue and the historic house on axis with D Street; it thus faces the difficult challenge of successfully bridging the two styles and the abrupt change in directionality. The end result is somewhat reminiscent of the Prairie style, which seems atypical in the context of the site and the historic district, and the juxtaposition may be helped substantially by streamlining the fenestration and limiting the material to masonry.

- *Demolition*

  Demolition at the site is limited to the small connection between the former stable along D Street and the east wing. Additionally, the transitional piece between two of the west wings will be altered in order to insert a staircase connecting outdoor spaces on South Carolina Avenue and D Street. Both of these small additions are minor, and their removal or alteration is not significant.

- *Landscaping*

  Development of the site presents the considerable challenge of how to space new trees in the informal landscape of the front lawn facing South Carolina Avenue, place

walkways to serve new construction, and treat a formal outdoor area off D Street that will presumably be enclosed with a new fence. It is the dilemma of how to make a "planned" development appear less deliberate and forced and to ensure that it does not assume the inaccessible "gated community" appearance more common to suburban development projects.

With a deep yard fronting South Carolina Avenue and views that originally stretched to the river beyond, an early document described the house as, "Although charmingly sequestered in profuse wood, from the portico he could catch the sheen of the wide waters beyond the slope…The Captain's domain was an ample site square and imitated a prosperous English estate."[2] The plans follow this informal, English garden inspiration by interspersing new trees across the lawn. The overwhelming circular ramp that was added in recent decades will be removed and the sloped berm on this elevation restored. A walkway will lead from the front door facing South Carolina across the lawn, though it is unclear whether it will lead to access down to the sidewalk or awkwardly terminate at the sloping berm.

Further study should be directed to the walkways planned to serve the four new structures and to the quantity of paving proposed around the reconstructed front porch, both of which seem excessive considering the "profuse wood" that surrounded the house in its earlier years. The long walkway alongside the single new rowhouse to the east could be eliminated completely, as that structure's units are served by their own lead walk. Likewise, that building appears to have two lead walks from the sidewalk, one of which presumably serves the basement with the other serving the main entry door. In order to retain as much green space as possible in the front yard, this should be limited to one lead walk from the sidewalk, which could include a secondary branch to the basement entrance.

The long lead walk alongside the townhouse to the west could also be eliminated, with the center walkway on axis with the house branching off to the west in an informal curve to serve the new construction. Alternatively, the lead walk to west could be used as a handicapped ramp, with attention paid to railings and material for the ramp's surface. Paving around the front porch should be limited in its width and the formal planted areas directly in front of the house softened.

The fence and gate shown along the D Street elevation's courtyard should be further coordinated with staff to ensure that it is of an appropriate height and that it is an open, metal fence that allows views of the house beyond.

Finally, the existing courtyard located just inside the gate facing D Street is shown on the plans to include a new lawn. This courtyard has long been hardscaped and should retain this formal character, making it a better candidate for potted plantings than grass, especially as the result creates quite narrow walkways around the periphery.

[2] Allen C. Clark, *Greenleaf and Law in the Federal City*, 1901, p. 269.

Other pertinent issues include a proposed, underground parking garage with access from the public alley and the preparation of updated documentation on the history of the site to reflect new information and the results of archeological exploration already in-progress.

- *Archeology*

  The proposal includes a new underground parking garage, which will be excavated under the front lawn off South Carolina Avenue. Access to the new garage will be achieved via an existing alley entered from Sixth Street and via an existing alley from D Street that will be widened somewhat to overlap the edge of the property for easier passage. The proposal also shows that there will be at least 4' of ground fill atop the parking garage, which should allow the new trees and bushes to grow successfully. Because the parking will be located underground, it is not an issue directly related to preservation concerns. However, the excavation of the front lawn raises the potential for archeological exploration, and the applicants have already begun this work in consultation with the City Archeologist.

- *Documentation*

  The archeological study in-progress and extensive research already prepared by EHT Traceries as part of the planning process have created a significant opportunity to revisit the brief and outdated existing landmark nomination for the Maples. The applicants have agreed to produce a revised landmark nomination that expands upon past research and includes information gathered during the archeological investigation. This is a preservation priority for the Maples that helps mitigate the effects of new construction at the site, and completion of this document will be a condition of final approval of the construction plans.

Recommendation

<u>The HPO recommends that the Board:</u>

- <u>approve in concept the siting and general massing of proposed new construction, on the condition that a revised and expanded landmark nomination will be produced by the applicants before final approval of the construction plans</u>

- <u>approve in concept the excavation of the front lawn for an underground parking garage on the condition that archeological investigation and documentation will be conducted in consultation with the City Archeologist</u>

- <u>direct the applicants to continue refining the plans following the direction outlined above, paying special attention to the development of a restoration plan for the landmark, detailing of the new construction, and restudy of the landscape plan. The applicants should return to the Board for final review of the conceptual plans when ready.</u>