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

Landmark/District: **Garfinckel's Department Store** Agenda
Address: **1401 F Street/600 14th Street, NW** Consent

Meeting Date: **December 16, 2010** New construction
Case Number: **11-079** Addition
 Alterations
Staff Reviewer: **Tim Dennée** Concept

The applicant, Clyde's Restaurant Group (with Rust Orling Architecture), agent and tenant of property owner SRI Six Hamilton Square LLC, requests the Board's conceptual review of proposed alterations of the ground floor.

The Garfinckel's building was erected in 1929, in the heyday of the urban department store. As Garfinckel's was becoming the most upscale of Washington's stores, founder Julius Garfinckel engaged the New York firm of [Goldwyn] Starrett and [Joseph] Van Vleck, America's pre-eminent department-store architects. In New York alone, they designed the flagship stores for Lord & Taylor, Abercrombie & Fitch, Saks, McCreery's, Abraham & Straus and Bloomingdale's between 1914 and 1930. Garfinckel's resembles the 1924 Saks building most closely, with somewhat simpler detail, suitable for the prevalent stripped classicism of Washington's limestone buildings. The buildings are very comparable in size and each has a three-story base with a further division of storefront level from the two above; a single "attic" story below a setback "penthouse" floor; and monumental door surrounds arranged symmetrically on the principal elevations flanked by large, undivided display windows, setting up a strong rhythm of openings. The principal difference is that the Saks stone and metal storefront is projected slightly and topped with cresting. Garfinckel's show windows are in the plane of the wall and were designed to accept retractable awnings. These openings are now unfortunately topped instead with boxy, early-1990s, metal canopies that project substantially.

The applicant's program calls for a large restaurant occupying most of the ground floor, plus an entertainment venue in the basement. The proposal includes access and signage improvements as well as alterations to accommodate a kitchen. All alterations would occur on the F Street side of the building. Beginning from the west end of the building and moving east, the proposed alterations include the following items.

1. The introduction of a kitchen at the southwest corner of the building requires vents. They would occupy the upper portion of the window openings in the westernmost three bays and would have metal covers pierced in a Deco-like "half shell" pattern (see attached).
2. The kitchen work and storage spaces would be located behind the westernmost two windows, which would be obscured.

3. An additional entrance would replace the third display window from the west, meant to provide another means of egress from the building and an additional entrance to the kitchen.
4. As the main entrance to both the restaurant and performance space would be located in the center of the F Street façade, alterations to the canopy there are proposed. It is mounted too high to be of much use as cover from the weather, and the applicant wishes to enlarge it by combining it with the two flanking window canopies.
5. Signage would be hung from the front and sides of this enlarged canopy to advertise the shows at the basement venue.
6. The signage for the previous tenant, Borders Books, would be removed from atop the large canopy in the middle of the F Street façade and from the canopy at the corner and replaced with similar signage for the restaurant.
7. A revolving door and a single swing door would replace the swinging doors in the central entrance. These new doors would be recessed into the building so that there is sufficient space to accommodate both doors within the width of a single bay.
8. A second revolving door would be installed at the present corner entrance. For the purpose of emergency egress, the building code requires an accompanying swing door within ten feet of a revolving door. The applicant proposes to replace the easternmost display window with such a door, in a tripartite arrangement with two fixed pieces of glass under a metal fascia as at the existing doors. The purpose of both revolving doors is to create an air lock at the entrances of what is expected to be a very busy restaurant. Clyde's 7th Street location experiences problems in cold weather, with the many customers keeping the doors open a great deal of the time. (Of course, pedestrians tend to favor swing doors to revolving ones, so there has to be a way to discourage the use of the former.)

Evaluation

In the aggregate, the proposed alterations are substantial, although the applicant has revised the plans, making several aspects more successful. The primary problem lies with the existing canopies. They are clumsy and detract from the elegance of this "stripped-classical" limestone edifice. They obscure the etched detail in the masonry, and their installation damaged the stone. It is difficult to understand the intended function of most of the canopies and hard to conceive them as helping to market the building. The removal of at least the majority of them would make the proposed alterations of the storefront more palatable. But the accretion of changes strays from straightforwardness, symmetry, and rhythm of the original design.

Each of the proposed alterations is addressed below in the same order as described above.

1. The introduction of prominent exterior vents is necessary to accommodate a kitchen in a building that abuts other buildings on the sides not facing the street. The area chosen for both the kitchen and its vents is the best location as, in this longer, F Street side of the building, it is at the farthest remove from the prominent entrances and in a two-bay portion of the building that is a 1940s addition. The design of the vent covers is compatible with the style of the building.
2. For the same reasoning as with the vents, obscuring two windows with etched glass, or a film to mimic it, is acceptable. The applicant has successfully shifted and reduced some of the cold storage on the interior in order to reduce the number of windows to be covered from three to two, with these two at the extreme west of the facade.

3. To alter a single additional display window for egress and a secondary entrance is acceptable for functional reasons and because it occurs at the joint between the original building and the addition, well away from the other entrances on a long facade.
4. As long as there are to be rigid canopies on this building, it makes a lot of sense to improve the function of an entrance canopy against the weather by lowering it nearer the doorway. In light of the fact that this building has two dozen large canopies, combining the central three over the F Street entrance seems of little marginal utility, but it may be a negligible difference in terms of appearance.
5. Signage hung from the entrance canopy is understandable, as good locations for signage are limited. In fact, it is not certain yet that the amount or location of the signage proposed will fully satisfy either tenant. Without projecting the entry canopy so far—and without all of the other canopies—there would not be a need for signs on the sides, as primary signage is usually affixed to the façade or near it. But as long as the area of the signage is limited (additional panels proposed to “connect” the front and side signs seem unnecessary), it would be sufficiently compatible.
6. The replacement-in-kind of the signage atop the two entrance canopies is sufficiently compatible.
7. Although it is not ideal to have a central F Street entry recessed in a roofed vestibule in the first-floor space (as opposed to keeping flush doors), it does solve the problem of accommodating both the revolving and swing door there. There is precedent for constructing air-lock structures in lobbies. The applicant should restudy this, however, to explore providing *both* a recessed revolving door *and* retaining swing doors at the plane of the storefront. This would certainly form a more effective air lock and would retain a more natural entrance at the street.
8. The second revolving door is the most problematic piece. With the present layout, it can neither be projected nor recessed sufficiently to achieve the geometries necessary to fit both a revolving and a swing door in the same opening at the face of this chamfered corner. This second revolving door is presumably intended to accept more of the foot traffic when a show in the basement venue is drawing more patrons through the common F Street entrance. But the other changes to openings proposed—one recessed, one converted to doors, two obscured, and those two and another accepting vents—add up to too great an alteration of the character of the storefront to require yet another display window, at the prominent corner, to be given up to doors. While adding to the original two entrances to this building is understandable, a total of three additional doorways is excessive and harms the array of display windows too much. The applicant should explore recessing the revolving door and altering the placement of the wheelchair ramp on the interior—or eliminating the second revolving door and having the bar accessed through either a single or double set of doors—to avoid altering another display window.

Recommendation

The staff recommends that the Board approve in concept the alterations necessary for the kitchen (items 1, 2 and 3); support the canopy and signage alterations (items 4, 5 and 6) with some further development and simplification; approve in concept the recessed main doors (item 7), with a preference for a wholly enclosed vestibule; and approve a revolving door at the corner (item 8) only if it can be accomplished without altering adjacent display windows; all to be delegated to staff for further review.