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

Property Address:	1776 Massachusetts Avenue, NW	X	Agenda
Landmark/District:	Massachusetts Avenue and Dupont Circle Historic Districts		Consent Calendar
Meeting Date:	March 24/March 31, 2022	X	Concept Review
H.P.A. Number:	22-184		Subdivision
			New Construction
			Demolition

1776 Mass Ave RE LLC, with plans prepared by Michael Graves Architects, seeks conceptual design review for façade and public space alterations to a non-contributing office building in the Massachusetts Avenue and Dupont Circle historic districts.

Property History and Description

1776 Massachusetts Avenue is an eight-story brick and glass office building constructed in 1969 as the Government Affairs Institute Building. Based on its date of construction well outside the periods of significance (1875-1931 for the Dupont HD, 1880-1940 for the Mass Ave HD), the building is non-contributing to both districts.

The Massachusetts Avenue Historic District represents one of the finest realizations of L’Enfant’s Baroque vision of grand vistas and diagonal avenues. It was developed largely between 1880-1940 as an urban boulevard of grand mansions, row houses, embassies and apartment buildings clad in stone and brick and set in a linear, tree-lined landscape. It includes some of the city’s most elegant turn-of-the-century residences by locally and nationally prominent architects in the Queen Anne, Richardsonian Romanesque, Beaux-Arts, Chateausque and Classical Revival styles. East of 20st Street, the avenue contains several purpose-built non-contributing office buildings and association headquarters, such as the subject property.

Proposal

The plans call for removing the façade of the building, including the five projecting bay windows, and carving out the front portion of the eighth floor to create an open terrace. The façade would be reskinned with three wider projecting bays clad in a grid of laminate wood veneer panels. Two options for the application of the panels are provided – one that extends across the entire façade above the second story and an alternative that applies the panels to the projecting bays extending to the ground with a glass curtain wall between the bays. The setback eighth floor would be clad in an undulating wall of glass, with an aluminum pergola projecting above the terrace.

Both façade options call for raising the base of the building to two stories, with a more prominent lobby entrance and a glass garage door opening to a new terrace in public space. Due to the grade of the first floor being lower than the public space, the front terrace would be set into and partially screened from the public sidewalk by landscaping. Two underground utility vaults would be relocated closer to the sidewalk to allow for the terrace.

Evaluation

While the initial option with the grid extending across the entire width of the façade ties the upper floors together nicely, HPO encouraged the applicants to consider whether more vertical proportions and a stronger base that grounded the composition would improve the proposal's compatibility with the historic district. The alternative option is successful in addressing both of those concerns however it may be worth considering bringing some of the grid vocabulary through the glass curtain wall sections so as not to completely fracture the façade into disconnected elements.

The siting of the first floor of the building partially below grade presents a challenge for creating a satisfying base condition. The existing building's bays start at the second floor, rather than the third, with the result that they almost appear to meet the ground as traditional bays do. In raising the bays to the third floor, the base is more prominent but in drawing more attention to it, the disparate conditions of the existing garage entrance, the double height lobby with the canopy floating a floor higher than the doors, and the new glass garage door opening to the terrace become more evident. Lowering the bays by a floor (or to the ground for the two eastern bays) might be worthy of study; alternatively, establishing a lower height for the entrance canopy at the midpoint of the second floor and a corresponding canopy over the new terrace entrance could provide some needed unity and a more human scale to the building's base. As the base of the building continues to be developed, an alternative door type for the new terrace opening that is less industrial and more compatible with the character of the avenue should also be considered.

In a district that is overwhelmingly characterized by formal, high-style buildings that display a rich variety of masonry cladding, wood laminate veneer is an unusual choice as the predominate material for the building's reskinning. Material samples should be submitted to the Board for review when selected.

As the landscape plan continues to be developed, the location of the vaults in public space should be coordinated with DDOT and the Office of Urban Forestry. The city's public space and preservation policies encourage the reestablishment of double allays of street trees on avenues – one row between the curb and sidewalk and another behind the sidewalk on each side of the street – which may require some adjustment to the proposed vault locations.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Board approve the general idea of recladding the building but that the façade and public space plan continue to be developed in coordination with HPO and DDOT.

Staff contact: Steve Callcott