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

Property Address:	2001 Massachusetts Avenue, NW	X	Agenda
Landmark/District:	Massachusetts Avenue and Dupont Circle Historic Districts		Consent Calendar
Meeting Date:	July 26/August 2, 2018	X	Concept Review
H.P.A. Number:	18-515	X	Alteration
Staff Reviewer:	Steve Callcott		New Construction
			Demolition
			Subdivision

2001 Mass Ownership LLC, represented by architectural historian Anne Adams and the Eisen Group architects, seeks conceptual design review for construction of a three-story roof addition on a two-story building in the Massachusetts Avenue and Dupont Circle Historic Districts.

Property History and Description

2001 Massachusetts Avenue NW, located at the corner of Massachusetts Avenue and 20th Street, was constructed in 1935 as a three-unit apartment building. The limestone-clad building illustrates Art Moderne characteristics with a horizontal streamlined aesthetic, a rounded corner with a bank of ganged windows on each floor, and stylized ornamentation. It has been claimed that it may feature the first use of glass block in Washington (albeit on its interior). The building was designed by architect Gertrude Sawyer, the first female architect to obtain an architecture license in the District of Columbia. It is an unusual and early work for Sawyer, who was better known for her single family residential work in historical revival styles.

Soon after construction, the first floor was leased by the Junior League of Washington but by 1938 it had become the headquarters of the Hungarian Reformed Federation of American (HRFA). The building was subsequently named in honor of Lajos Kossuth, a 19th century statesman considered the father of Hungarian democracy. The Kossuth Foundation, a charitable, heritage-focused organization carried out by HRFA, would continue to occupy the first floor and cellar of the building upon completion of the project.

The building is located in two overlapping historic districts. It falls within the period of significance for the Massachusetts Avenue Historic District (1880-1940) but outside the period for the Dupont Circle district (1875-1931). The building retains a high level of integrity on its exterior, although its original metal (presumably aluminum) windows have been replaced.

Proposal

The proposal calls for constructing three stories plus a penthouse atop the existing building. The additional floors would be set flush with the existing outside walls, and feature paired and banked groupings of metal windows. Separating each floor of windows would be a masonry band of either light colored brick or limestone. Two color options are shown for the window

framing and spandrel panels – one light colored, one dark gray. The windows on the existing portion of the building would be replaced with new metal windows.

A portion of the first-floor slab would be removed for excavation of an expanded basement and the roof would be removed for the additional floors. The balance of the first-floor slab and second floor assembly would be retained.

Evaluation

The Massachusetts Avenue Historic District is significant as the most fully-realized manifestation of an elegant City Beautiful avenue in Washington. Its extraordinary Beaux-Arts architecture is integrated with and is among the finest realizations of the urban planning vision of L'Enfant, and has been carefully preserved by the clubs, museums and foreign missions which have succeeded the original residential owners. While the predominant character of the Massachusetts Avenue Historic District is that of Embassy Row, the district also includes a number of mid-20th century large-scale apartment houses and institutional buildings (primarily east of Dupont Circle), and a few smaller-scaled banks and commercial buildings on Dupont Circle, that contribute to its character.

The subject building's modest size and character are atypical for the Massachusetts Avenue Historic District, and not reflective of its expression as an avenue of grand buildings intended to impress. In the midst of the 1930s Depression, the Beaux-Arts ideal of an avenue of mansions likely seemed hopelessly out of date. The building is similar in size and use of limestone cladding to the stripped classical commercial buildings of the 1920s along Connecticut Avenue, but is distinct from those in its quiet residential character and lack of monumentality.

The Board has typically discouraged visible roof additions to historic buildings for the reasons outlined in their design guideline:

Under most circumstances, roof additions that are visible from a public street are not appropriate, as they would alter an historic building's height, mass, design composition, cornice line, roof, and its relationship to surrounding buildings and streetscape – all of which can be important character-defining features.

However, the guideline also acknowledges:

In rare cases, a visible roof addition may be found acceptable if it does not fundamentally alter the character of the building and is sufficiently designed to be compatible with the building and/or historic district.

In instances where the Board has found roof additions set flush with the façade of a building to be compatible, it has been when the existing building has been of an unusual architectural or historical character, where character-defining features of the façade would not be altered or diminished, or where adjacent buildings establish a compatible context for such an addition.

Examples of visible roof additions set flush with the existing walls of contributing buildings that the Board found compatible with their historic districts include 1902-06 14th Street NW, where the Board found one-story roof additions on three adjacent one-story commercial buildings to be compatible with the 14th Street district and due to the modest character of those buildings. In two separate but immediately adjacent projects at 1511 and 1515 11th Street NW, the Board found three-story additions set flush atop a one-story auto service building and one-story limestone commercial building to be compatible, again due to the modest character of those buildings and because the resulting four-story buildings were compatible with its Shaw streetscape. At a two-story carriage house/garage at 2161 Florida Avenue in Sheridan-Kalorama, the Board also found a one-story addition atop the building to be compatible with the building's character and its context of larger buildings. The applicant's submission includes images of 2160 California Street NW in Sheridan-Kalorama, where the Board found the addition of two stories atop a one-story commercial building to be compatible with both the classical character of that building and that district. At 501-07 7th Street, NW, multiple stories were approved rising flush with the elevations of the four-story cast iron May Building located at the corner of 7th and E Streets in the Downtown Historic District.

The subject building and the concept proposal have many of the same conditions as these past projects: it is an unusual building atypical of the historic district, the additional floors could be added without removing or altering character-defining features roof features, and the addition would be compatible in height for the immediate context and historic district; as well, the extent of building removal would not constitute demolition as defined in the preservation regulations. From an urban design perspective, additional floors would help the building hold the corner in a way that it currently does not, as well as conceal the unfenestrated brick party wall of the adjacent rowhouse from public view.

Some further design refinement would improve the relationship of the addition to the underlying building and to the Massachusetts Avenue Historic District. Further attention to the alignment of the windows between the existing building and upper floors, differentiation of the detailing in the limestone on the new floors from the underlying building, the detailing of the windows at the rounded corner to ensure that the windows look rounded rather than faceted, and the use of glass block on the addition should all be further studied. Of the various material and color options, HPO encourages pursuit of the limestone, as the scale and coloration of the brick options appear crude and heavy by comparison. The darker color for the window framing and panels also reads more sympathetic to the design of the building than white, however, the dark option reads very differently in the various images (the less dark color shown in the photo rendering on page 37 is more successful than the much darker and graphically contrasting rendering on page 34).

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Board find the conceptual design for additional floors to be compatible with the character of the Massachusetts Avenue and Dupont Circle Historic Districts, and that the design continue to be refined in consultation with HPO.

Roof Additions Referenced in Report



One-story roof addition, 1902-1906 14th Street NW



Three-story roof additions, 1511 and 1515 11th Street NW



One-story roof addition, 2161 Florida Avenue NW



The May Building with five-story roof addition, 501-507 7th Street NW