
**HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD
MASTER PLAN REVIEW**

Property Address:	North Capitol/Michigan Avenue, NW	X	Agenda
Landmark/District:	McMillan Reservoir		Consent Calendar
		X	Master Plan
Meeting Date:	December 6, 2012	X	Alteration
Staff Reviewer:	Steve Callcott	X	New Construction
		X	Demolition

Vision McMillan Partners (VMP) returns to the Board with revisions to a draft master plan and design guidelines for the McMillan Reservoir sand filtration site. VMP is represented by architect/master planner Matthew Bell (Perkins Eastman), preservation consultant EHT Traceries (Emily Eig), landscape architects Nelson Byrd Woltz (Warren Byrd), and project manager Anne Corbett. The team also includes the development partners for the projects that comprise the master plan -- Trammell Crow Company, Jair Lynch Development Partners and EYA. Bowman Consulting and Robert Sillman Associates (Kirk Mettam) have also been advising the team regarding the site's existing structural conditions.

Previous Review

The HPRB heard testimony on the proposed plan on July 12, 2012, after which it requested additional information and drawings. Additional testimony was given by the VMP team on the new submission materials in September, which included some revisions to the July plan.

While the Board members expressed their appreciation for the tremendous amount of thought and effort put into the plan and their general belief that the plan was moving in the right direction, a number of concerns and areas for further consideration and work were suggested. The comments fell into three general categories:

- The plan is trying to relate too closely to the many disparate conditions around it, rather than reinforcing and recreating a unique place that is specific to the character of McMillan and distinct from what is surrounding it;
- The north and south edge conditions and the loss of the site's topographical plinth (as well as the incomplete nature of the recreated Olmsted walk and loss of corner entrances), were specifically cited as problematic as part of the loss of the distinctiveness of the site;
- The design guidelines were thought to be too generic and not strong enough in citing what was important in preserving at this site; it was requested that the guidelines be revised to be more specific in representing the characteristics of the site.

Revised Proposal

The submission materials outline further refinements to the plan that was presented in September. In response to the Board's recommendation that the site's topography be more

fully retained, the eastern (North Capitol Street) side of the site has been revised by the elimination of parking in front of the grocery store. In addition to the central park and the retained cell at the corner of North Capitol and Michigan Avenue, both of which would be retained at their existing elevations, the area along North Capitol in front of the grocery store and the setback area adjacent to the townhouses has been raised up to evoke the plinth. In order to improve sight-lines and constraints due to new road grades being cut into the site, the plinth would be reconstructed at a height of approximately 165' above grade, slightly lower than its existing 170' height. The plinth would also extend at the 165' elevation through the center of the rowhouse development to Channing Street.

The Olmsted perimeter walk would be recreated and reinterpreted along the entire length of the site's eastern edge, as it already was along the north side the site. The walk would be elevated from and separate from the public sidewalk. At the southern and western edges of the site, the public sidewalk would serve as the extension of the perimeter walk.

It is proposed that architectural datum lines be established for the new construction that would acknowledge the height of the sand bins and regulator houses. The material treatment and coloration of the bases of the new construction may otherwise be informed by or evocative of the historic structures.

The design guidelines have been simplified and made more specific to the goal of encouraging that development relate to and reflect the character of the site. The guidelines are organized around five basic objectives: preserving the site as distinct and cohesive, preserving and celebrating its significance, preserving and adapting its historic resources, creating a cohesive community that connects to the surrounding neighborhoods, and designing landscapes and buildings that reinforce McMillan's unique sense of place.

Evaluation

Two issues were specifically outlined in the previous report: retention or replication of the service walls along the north maintenance corridor and improving the perimeter condition and recreating the Olmsted walk, with particular emphasis on the North Capitol Street edge. While below-grade site preparation and new construction will likely make in-place retention of the service corridor walls infeasible, recreation of these elements (particularly the large portal door openings) should be reinforced in the plan and the design guidelines. While precise replication of these elements may not be necessary, they should at least inform the architectural treatment of the bases of the proposed new construction along this corridor.

The removal of surface parking in front of the proposed grocery store, elevation of the grade to within several feet of the existing plinth height, and the extension of the Olmsted walk along the entire east perimeter are all improvements toward tying the plan together and having the property read as a single, unified site. As shown in the illustrations, the greater setback on North Capitol Street opens up public views of the park and southern maintenance corridor from the south, while also providing a landscape buffer for the townhouses. While not retained at precisely its original 170' elevation, the setback and raised berm will allow

the perimeter walk to remain, and will serve to distinguish the McMillan site from the surrounding neighborhoods.

Page 14 of the Master Plan Update (titled “Architectural Cohesion”) suggests that the sand bins and regulator houses might provide specific datum lines that would be carried through into the design of the new construction. For a site plan that was found insufficient in bringing the elements of the new construction together, establishing architectural principles to guide the new development might also help to unify the varied building types. For this approach to be effective, the principles would probably need to go further than simply establishing datum lines. While it not suggested that such principles be too tightly drawn or literal in echoing historic prototypes, establishing some further architectural principles that the new construction would follow – such as identifying a palette of materials, colors and finishes, as an example – might result in greater unity for the overall site.

Recommendation

The HPO seeks the Board’s comments regarding the proposed revisions to the master plan and design guidelines.