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

Property Address:	1624 Crescent Place, NW	X	Agenda
Landmark/District:	White-Meyer House/Meridian Hill Historic District		Consent Calendar
Meeting Date:	May 4, 2017	X	Concept Review
H.P.A. Number:	15-205		Alteration
Staff Reviewer:	Steve Callcott Kim Williams	X	New Construction
			Demolition
			Subdivision

Meridian International Center, in partnership with Westbrook Partners, seeks on-going concept design review for construction of an eight-story plus penthouse apartment building on the site of the landmark White-Meyer house, a property that is also located in the Meridian Hill Historic District. The revised plans have been prepared by Perkins-Eastman DC Architects and Wolf/Josey landscape architects.

The project will also include meeting and conference facilities for Meridian, as well as provide an endowment to allow the organization to continue its on-going restoration of the White Meyer and adjacent Meridian house in accordance with a 2005 preservation master plan. Over the past decade, Meridian has completed substantial restoration and rehabilitation projects on the two landmarks.

Property History and Description

The White-Meyer house is a large red brick and limestone Georgian Revival mansion designed by architect John Russell Pope. It was built between 1910 and 1912 for diplomat Henry White, and later owned by Eugene and Agnes Meyer. The 16th Street site proposed for redevelopment was purchased by the White family in 1930 and converted to a garden and tennis court; it has served as a surface parking lot for the past several decades. Meridian House, a part of the Meridian International property to the west, was also designed by Pope in the style of an 18th century French townhouse; it was constructed in 1924. The houses are recognized as “the finest and most important of Pope’s domestic architecture,” and are listed in the National Register of Historic Places at the national level of significance.

Previous Reviews

The Board has reviewed this project twice before. In April 2015, the Board determined that it was appropriate to review the proposal as new construction to the historic district (rather than as an addition to the White-Meyer house), and found the part of locating the taller primary mass facing 16th Street and the lower secondary mass on Crescent Place, with a separation between the new building and the White-Meyer house, to be compatible and appropriate. The Board also found that visibility of the building from Meridian Hill Park was compatible with the urban park’s character. As a new construction project, the Board accepted the general height and

massing as compatible for 16th Street but found that further work was needed on improving the relationship of the building to the raised berm and its orientation to the street. The building's entrance, materials and detailing, integration of the penthouse into the building's design, and the design of the Meridian meeting rooms and parking court were among the elements identified as needing modification and further development.

In December 2016, the Board reviewed a substantially modified design and found the project "very close to being compatible" The building's height and the lack of prominence of the 16th Street entrance were cited as the primary issues requiring further revision. The perimeter condition on Crescent Place, the architectural treatment of the vehicular entrance court, and the stairs and landscaping on 16th Street were also noted as needing additional refinement. To address the height, the Board recommended either removing some or all of the berm to lower the building closer to street grade, or to remove a floor.

Revised Proposal

The proposal has been revised in response to the issues raised at the December meeting, albeit as it pertains to height, not in the specific ways suggested by the Board. Rather than removing the public space berm and lowering the building to grade (an approach that has been rejected by the DC Department of Transportation and Urban Forestry Administration) or reducing the building by a floor (which had the potential for making the composition incompatibly horizontal in its emphasis), the building's mass has been revised to include setbacks for the eighth floor and increasing the setbacks for the penthouse level. The corners of the building have also been pulled in and corner balconies introduced. To address the concerns about the lack of prominence given to the entrance, the front façade has been recomposed to provide a wider opening for the entrance and with the center bay been brought forward to slightly project from the façade rather than be recessed; this projection would extend to the roof culminating in a modest tower element at the roofline.

Other revisions include lowering the fence and wall heights on Crescent Place, providing a clear distinction in materials and vocabulary between the perimeter walls of the White Meyer house and the new building, and refinements to the design of the Meridian meeting rooms and the motor court. The entrance stairs to the apartment building on 16th Street have been widened and more fully designed.

Evaluation

Height and Mass

While the revisions to the height, mass and setbacks are different from those suggested by the Board, they are effective in demonstrably reducing the building's apparent size. As shown in the renderings in the April 14th submission on page 18 and 32 (previous design) and 19 and 33 (current design), the increased setbacks on the eighth floor are effective in lowering the apparent height and giving greater emphasis to the cornice at the seventh floor as the perceived top of the building. As shown in the view study on page 61, the increased prominence of the seventh floor cornice also helps step the height of the building down when seen in perspective view in relation to the neighboring Envoy. The revised composition of the side elevations provides a narrower profile that is most appreciable from the south.

Prominence of Entrance

The change in façade proportions, respacing of the oriel projections, pulling of the entrance bay forward of the façade, and the tower element all work together to provide a more prominent and visible entrance along 16th Street.

Crescent Place

The lowered the wall and fence along Crescent Place no longer presents a looming or forbidding edge condition to the pedestrian, while it still maintains separation and a degree of privacy for the building's first floor units.

Meridian Conference Center and Parking Court

Greater clarity of architectural language and separation between the mansion and the apartment building have been provided through the use of distinct materials and detailing for each – a continuation of smooth red brick trimmed with limestone for the White-Meyer house, and articulated stone for the base of the new apartment building.

Entrance Stairs and Landscaping

The stairs leading to the apartment building's primary entrance have been widened, provided with landings and low cheek-walls, designed to flare out at each corner, and punctuated with stone piers capped by contemporary but classically-inspired urns. The piers and urns are the same as would be used to mark the entrance to the parking court. The vocabulary of the side perimeter walls would extend across the 16th Street frontage as a stepped retaining wall, necessary to hold the eroding hillside. While the engineering and construction plans will need to be developed to ensure that the trees are protected during construction, the concept for a more formal and classical treatment of the architectural elements is compatible and appropriate to the character of the Meridian Hill Historic District. The architectural formality would be contrasted with a naturalistic planting plan of woodland understory plants to help stabilize the hillside's steep slopes.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Review Board find the revised concept to be compatible with the character of the White-Meyer house and the Meridian Hill Historic District, and that final approval be delegated to staff.