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

Landmark/District:	Meridian Hill Historic District	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agenda
Address:	2437 15th Stret NW	<input type="checkbox"/> Consent
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Concept
Meeting Date:	October 30, 2014	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Alteration
Case Number:	14-709	<input type="checkbox"/> New Construction
Staff Reviewer:	Kim Williams	<input type="checkbox"/> Demolition
	Steve Callcott	<input type="checkbox"/> Subdivision

The applicant Washington Parks and People requests concept review for a rear addition and façade restoration to the Old Hungarian Embassy at 2437 15th Street, a DC landmark and contributing building in the Meridian Hill Historic District.

Property Description

The former Hungarian Embassy is located on the east side of 15th Street, directly across from the upper esplanade of Meridian Hill Park between Chapin and Euclid Streets and directly on-axis with Clifton Street on the east. It was built in 1927 by Mary Henderson as part of her development of Meridian Hill, and was designed by architect George Oakley Totten, Jr. in a Mediterranean Revival/Renaissance Revival style. The building is frontally oriented; its primary façade faces 15th Street and Meridian Hill Park and is highly articulated with an arched porte-cochere and a balustrade atop it, accessed from the second floor by a tri-partite vaulted opening. This second story opening is capped with a carved stone cartouche. Although not as ornate, the building's side walls still have highly articulated surface treatment, while the rear elevation is strictly utilitarian in appearance. This rear elevation, which is the focus of the proposal, fronts the building's parking lot and the rear lots of the adjacent buildings. The building rises three stories on the front and four stories at the rear and is covered with intersecting hipped and flat roofs, respectively.

Proposal

The proposal calls for improving the circulation of the existing building to accommodate new museum exhibition areas and to make the building ADA accessible. In order to do so, an addition is proposed on the rear elevation to house a new entry with two new stair/elevator towers that will make the building accessible at all levels, and to accommodate exterior balconies between the new stair towers. The proposal also includes the restoration of the façade, including the terra cotta, marble, iron work, exterior terrazzo, wood, stucco and Spanish tile roof.

Evaluation

In concept, the proposed addition is appropriate for the mansion and the historic district in that it is concentrated at the architecturally undistinguished rear of the building and away from the principal elevation and important streetscapes. Furthermore, the addition is tightly held within

the center of this rear wall covered by the flat roof, setting itself apart from the section of the mansion covered by the hipped roof. Based upon the drawings as presented, the addition would not be visible from the principal right of way, nor would it be visible from the park. However, the stair towers would rise above the current height of the flat roof at the rear of the building and would be slightly higher than the existing chimneys of the hipped roof section.

The applicant has worked with staff to reduce the height of the towers from an earlier scheme and to reduce the width of the produced addition to within the central section and in the process has reduced the addition's overall massing. The removal of the rear wall in sections to accommodate access to the addition is kept to a minimum on the interior and respects existing window and door openings, leaving the plan and spatial arrangement of the historic building intact on the interior.

While the addition, as proposed, would not be visible above the roofline of the building from important public vantage points, it could be further reduced in height to below the building's cornice line or intersect the roof in order to be truly deferential and subordinate. Such an approach would rely on providing access to the fourth floor from the interior of the existing building, allowing the height of the stair towers to be reduced by a full story. This suggestion has been made to the project team, but has not been considered feasible by them.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Board find the general concept for the addition to be compatible with the landmark and the historic district, but seeks the Board's direction on whether the height of the proposed addition should be reduced to fall below the building's cornice line.