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

Property Address:	655 New York Avenue, NW	X	Agenda
Landmark/District:	Mount Vernon Square Historic District		Consent Calendar
Meeting Date:	May 23 and June 4, 2015	X	Concept Review
H.P.A. Number:	15-299	X	Alteration
Staff Reviewer:	Steve Callcott	X	New Construction
			Demolition
		X	Subdivision

Douglas Development Corporation, represented by architect Shalom Baranes Associates, seeks concept review for a project involving historic building renovation, relocation of two buildings, and construction of a new office building in the Mount Vernon Square Historic District. The proposal would include combining multiple parcels into a single lot.

The project is the second of a two-phase development on this square. In 2012, the Board approved a concept plan on the west side of the block that included renovation of 15 historic buildings, relocation of two buildings, and construction of a 12 story office tower; that project is currently under construction. The current proposal would be an extension of that building.

Property Description and History

The property is located on the eastern side of Square 450, bounded by New York Avenue on the south, 7th Street on the west, L Street on the north and 6th Street on the east. The site contains four contributing buildings, four non-contributing buildings, and several vacant parcels.

1. *605 New York Avenue*: A two-story building constructed in 1887 as a residence and later converted to retail use through alterations to its first floor. Since the mid-20th century, the building has been clad in formstone, which the applicant is currently removing in consultation with HPO.
2. *607 New York Avenue*: A three-story building originally constructed as a residence and later converted to retail use. Like 605, its brick façade is clad in formstone, which the applicant is currently working to remove.
3. *614-616 L Street*: A two-story building originally constructed as a millwork shop in 1931. The second story was added in the 1990s.
4. *618-620 L Street*: A one-story contributing brick warehouse constructed in 1932.
5. *1028 6th Street*: A one-story brick non-contributing building constructed in 1960, outside the period of significance for the historic district (1845-1945).
6. *606 L Street (and 1026 6th)*: A two-story concrete and brick building constructed as an ironworks in 1931. It has been extensively altered from its historic appearance and was determined non-contributing to the district at the time of designation in 1999.
7. *610-612 L Street*: The western portion of this building was constructed as a one-story garage and stable in 1916, and was connected to the eastern portion of the building in

1924. Subsequent alterations in the 1950s included the construction of additional floors, altering the façades and changing the pattern of fenestration. The Board determined that the buildings no longer retained integrity to be considered contributing to the district and approved their demolition in 2005 (HPA 05-401).

8. *1024 6th Street*: A two-story building originally dating from 1905 but substantially rebuilt and its façade clad in formstone in the 1950s. The Board determined it to be non-contributing and approved its demolition in 2005 (HPA 05-401).

Proposal

The project calls for demolishing the four non-contributing buildings, retaining and restoring the facades of the two L Street structures (including removal of the 1990s second floor on 614-616), and relocating the two New York Avenue buildings to the west edge of the site, adjacent to the 1880s livery stable building at 621-25 New York (which now has the relocated 639 New York located immediately adjacent on its west side).

The new construction would be of a similar character and vocabulary as the first phase, clad in a skin of glass and terra cotta fins compositionally organized to break the building down into smaller horizontal and vertical elements. The new construction would be served by the same parking and loading entrance as that approved on L Street for the first phase of the project.

Evaluation

As turn-of-the-century structures, the remaining buildings document the historical evolution of the New York Avenue corridor from a residential area to a strip dominated by commercial and auto-related service shops. In recent weeks, the applicants have been working in consultation with the HPO to remove the formstone of the two New York Avenue buildings to determine their underlying condition.¹ While the results show that extensive repairs will be necessary and the scope of work will likely involve some degree of reconstruction, retaining the buildings will help maintain some sense of scale and continuity to relate this site to the remainder of the historic district.

As was discussed by the Board in the review of the first phase of the project, relocating historic buildings is not standard preservation practice and is generally discouraged by Federal preservation standards. However, while not frequently proposed, the Board has acknowledged and approved relocation as an appropriate treatment in limited instances, particularly when a resource is isolated and where the relocation could improve its historic context. It was for those

¹The HPO also considered whether the façade alterations should be judged historic in their own right. AV Ristorante, which was responsible for the alterations, was a well-known establishment in Washington for almost 50 years, and was the type of local icon that might be considered for its cultural significance: the classic Italian family restaurant, complete with fountains and faux-Michelangelos in the parking lot, old neon signs, and buildings altered to look something like the old country. For several reasons, however, there does not seem to be a persuasive case for according historic significance to AV's itself. The buildings are isolated from any relationship they might have had with Washington's "Little Italy," (which was located further east around Judiciary Square), and the permastone phenomenon has not traditionally been considered significant to the city's cultural heritage as it is, for example, in Baltimore. In terms of Mount Vernon Square, the alterations also date from after the period of significance of the historic district.

reasons that the Board was comfortable with the idea of relocating 639 New York Avenue to the east (to abut the historic building at 621-25) and 632 L Street to the west (to abut 638 L), both of which have since been successfully moved. The rationale for moving 605 and 607 New York to the west is similar, in that it would locate these small scaled buildings adjacent to and clustered with similarly sized historic buildings that would create a stronger critical mass of historic buildings rather than have them separated from other historic buildings by a large infill building.

Proportionally, the first phase of new construction struck a balance with the retained historic buildings that resulted in a compatible coexistence. The new construction also had a strong vertical orientation, particularly on New York Avenue, that related well to the historic buildings. However, by using the same architectural language for the east portion of the tower, the proportional relationship of historic buildings to new construction is now thrown out of whack; the new construction dominates the composition and overwhelms the historic structures. As rendered, the new construction also has a blocky, horizontal orientation that doesn't relate well to the historic buildings on this block or to the historic district. While it is understandable that the applicants would want the new building to have some commonality in its identity, this could be done by developing a language that is related to but distinguishable from the first phase and which is used to further break down the mass of the building in a manner that better relates to the historic district.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Review Board:

- *Find the proposed lot combination subdivision to be consistent with the purposes of the preservation act;*
- *Find the proposed relocation of 605 and 607 New York Avenue to be consistent with the preservation act in the context of this project because it will result in the retention of those structures within a compatible new setting;*
- *Determine the new construction to not yet relate to the character of the historic district, and that it be restudied to reduce the proportional disparity between the new construction and historic buildings, and to relate more closely to the scale and vertical orientation of buildings in the district.*