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

Landmark/District: **Saint Elizabeths Hospital Historic District** (x) Agenda
Address: **1100 Alabama Avenue SE**

Meeting Date: **November 16, 2017**
Case Number: **17-589** (x) Addition/alterations

Staff Reviewer: **Tim Dennée** (x) Revised concept

The applicant, Laura Hughes for EHT Tracerics, consultant and agent for developers Flaherty & Collins Properties and the Anacostia Economic Development Corporation, requests conceptual review of the proposed rehabilitation of the 1930s-era Continuing Treatment quadrangle on the District of Columbia-owned East Campus of Saint Elizabeths Hospital.¹ As government property, the exterior work is being reviewed by the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts concurrently.

The property is also subject to review by HPO and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation under a 1987 deed covenant. Proposed alterations to character-defining features of the interiors will be reviewed as well. The project team is seeking federal rehabilitation tax credits, so the property will undergo an inside-and-out review by HPO and the National Park Service in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation.

Much of the exterior work will retain or replace in kind historic materials, removing some later features. The plans call for new glazing in the former porches at the end of each wing, but the mullions are intended to mimic the appearance of the frames for the original screens. There are also plans for some additional basement windows.²

The major exterior alterations proposed are: paving; the addition of dormers as mechanical vents; and the construction of stair/elevator towers and mechanical enclosures.

The Board first reviewed this project October 5 and unanimously supported the project in concept, with the condition that the proposed entry pavilions on the outside of the ring of buildings be redesigned or relocated to become more compatible, and that the existing lead walks remain. The Board also commented that the landscaping should be carefully studied all around the complex and that the applicant should consider alternative locations for, and/or sinking, the exterior air-conditioning units.

¹ The property would be leased long term. The project team also includes Cunningham Quill Architects PLLC, Oehme van Sweden Landscape Architecture, Silman Engineering, Wiles Mensch Civil Engineering and Setty Engineering.

² While the proposed basement windows mimic the existing ones, it is probable that some of these openings will later be proposed to be lengthened into window wells or areaways. We can revisit this question if that is proposed.

Dormers

The Board supported the idea of new dormers to vent attic mechanical equipment, and they are being developed further (outside the present set of drawings).

Paving

New, double lead walks have been eliminated from the project (although not all of the colored renderings have caught up).

Mechanical enclosures

Even with the mechanical equipment in the attics, there is more that must be sited elsewhere, proximate to the units served. Much of it would be placed in large metal-screen enclosures on the ground adjacent to the historic buildings. Much of the equipment is within the quad. But there are several locations where there are such enclosures proposed for the side yards, prominently visible from the street.

The last pages of drawings address the mechanical enclosures at the ends of Buildings 106, 108, 110 and 112. The enclosures for the air-conditioning units have been shifted rearward, behind the projection at the end of each building. Their aluminum screens are similar to rooftop screening, but they are proposed to be no more than five feet tall. Consideration might be given to alternative screening that is more fence-like.

There is a larger enclosure proposed for a generator and a transformer alongside Building 112. The siting of these is constrained by various factors, but it may be possible to switch the location of this enclosure with that of the mechanical enclosure immediately behind. The transformer must be located at least ten feet from the building, so the volume of the enclosure might be reduced by about a third, opening a gap between it and Building 112, allowing the space between to be landscaped and the transformer and generator to be screened from a first-story view.

The enclosures for the equipment are dual-purpose, providing security and visual screening. The air-conditioning units themselves are not as tall as their proposed screening, so it may be possible to drop the height of the screening a foot or so. The same may be true of the ten-foot-tall screening around the transformer and generator. Even if either of those pieces of equipment reaches that height, their setbacks within the enclosure probably allow for some reduction in the screening height without exposing too much. It would be preferable to expose the top of the metal housings of these objects within the enclosure than to have the much larger volume of the metal enclosure cover them entirely.

Fences/gates

Although they have not been detailed in the drawings thus far, fences are proposed to enclose the open ends of the interior courtyards, with vehicle gates across the driveways at the four corners of the site. These spaces have been previously enclosed with chain-link fences. Replacement fences will have to be carefully detailed in compatible materials and kept relatively low and mostly open.

Stair/elevator additions

The ends of the quad's north-south connecting corridors always had their own entrances off Sycamore and Oak Drives. The original stair towers were replaced with taller towers when elevators were added in the 1980s. The present towers are not very conspicuous, yet they are

easily perceived as later interventions. These towers are proposed to be replaced with larger additions to serve the same purpose. To their number would be added similar structures in the middle of the quad, along the east-west corridors. Those in the courtyards are sufficiently compatible as rear additions. Not only are they largely screened from public view, but they would be appended to the middle of the covered walkways, secondary locations that affect important, yet secondary features. These additions within the quad are now proposed to be shifted slightly, so that they do not open directly onto parking spaces. In one of the two instances, this places the addition on the footprint of the existing stair tower, requiring less intervention into historic fabric.

Because they are so prominently sited, it is the north and south entry additions, on the street-facing sides of Buildings 106 and 112 and Buildings 108 and 110, that deserve more scrutiny and for which the Board requested revisions. The initial option was too glassy, not sufficiently compatible with the historic buildings in materials and proportions, lacking a base, and exposing the inner stair and elevator—and nighttime light—to view. The additions should take more cues from the proportions of the historic porches.

The drawings offer two revised options for the north and south additions. Both raise the addition roof above that of the corridor behind. The additions have also been adjusted to avoid covering windows where they join the corridor. Option B is lightly framed above a brick base. This retains some of the compatibility issues of the original proposal, and the relationship of the light framing to the heavier base is similar to that of a storefront. While matching the height of the building's water table, the base is too solid relative to what is above. And with an at-grade entrance, it makes sense to have more visibility into the building at eye level.

Option A provides more substantial walls, to be clad with weathered copper. The front elevation depicts only a schematic base, with the introduction of a horizontal element suggesting a water table. But a sketch identifying the materials (two pages later) indicates that the base might instead be of a contrasting masonry material. This latter approach, with a masonry base compatible with the building, is the better one for tying them together. This option should be developed further, possibly with a brick base that would roughly match that of the building. The coloration of the storefront system might be made closer to the color of the historic porch-screen mullions.

Recommendation

HPO recommends that the Board support the project in concept and delegate further review to staff to address the issues raised above.