
**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 17, 2016** (x) New construction
Case Number: **17-047**

Staff Reviewer: **Tim Dennée** (x) Concept

The applicant, Events DC, with architects Marshall Moya Design, requests the Board’s review of a concept to construct a basketball arena and practice facility on the East Campus of Saint Elizabeths Hospital. The two primary uses/spaces are contained within and expressed as two boxes, with support and accessory spaces arrayed around and beneath them.

This project is also being reviewed by the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts and the National Capital Planning Commission.

The arena project takes the place of two demolished non-contributing hospital buildings, located mostly on a lot identified in the East Campus master plan as “Parcel 12,” but with a parking lot extending onto the east end of Parcel 9, an area mostly occupied by the Renaissance-Revival-style Building 102, lately known as the Behavioral Studies Building, but completed in 1932 as a tuberculosis sanitarium. The parcels are defined by the existing roads and by the wider right-of-ways envisioned by the master plan and reviewed by the Board in 2012. Unfortunately, one of the streets anticipated by the master plan, 13th Street to the east of the site, has not yet been constructed. It appears that it will not be complete, except as a temporary construction entrance, until after this facility is in operation.

The building

The building would occupy most of the site, with paving for parking and loading at the north end. The bulk is mitigated by visually dividing the main spaces into separate blocks, allowing the practice facility roof to sit lower. The slope of the site also allows the arena to be sunk.

The facility is taller than the former “Continuing Treatment” buildings quadrangle across Oak Street, which is a tall two stories atop a basement and with a hipped roof. Yet the height difference is not uncomfortable or incompatible. While particular heights were not blessed by the Board at the time of its review, the East Campus master plan recommended a range of heights for this parcel, up to seven stories, but buildings were to step down toward Oak Street and the CT quad. The arena’s maximum height above the Oak Street grade is proposed to be 64

feet, with the lower, practice-facility portion of the building at the north end, adjacent to historic Building 102.

Horizontal elements such as the clerestory at the arena façade and the canopy and storefront on Oak Street help unite the pieces and break down the scale. It is very important to open up the street-front ground floor as much as possible, to make the building friendly at that level, and to break up what has to be largely blank box. Revisions of project to this point have much improved this aspect. Unfortunately, the 13th Street side is probably unavoidably less friendly, because the facility needs a ‘back of house.’ This relative blankness is less of an issue today, but will be more apparent when 13th Street is completed and development takes place on the parcels to the east.

The facility’s principal wall materials are metal panels, a large-module cream-colored utility brick, and storefront systems. It is important to employ high-quality materials, especially for the very conspicuous wall panels. Each painted metal panel *might* end up being completely uniform in its surface color. One might infer from the renderings that the use of more than one color or shade of panel is intended to compensate for this, introducing some warmth, variation and visual texture. But if we are relying on only the change in color to achieve a finer texture, then the panel modules seem overly large, and not related to the finer grain of the materials and plane changes in the nearby historic buildings. The same comment might be extended to the module of the proposed brick suggested by the renderings. On the other hand, it is possible that metal panels are intended to be laser painted for variation in shade within each panel, a quality that cannot be presented well in our printed packets. Such finishes would be more appropriate and more compatible with surrounding buildings.

The landscape

The size of the facility relative to its site means that there will be little true landscape around it. The building will have some green roofs, there will be street trees, and a parking lot.

The master plan discourages additional surface parking on the campus. For reasons of cost and the lack of a finished 13th Street, however, parking will not be provided beneath this facility, yet secured surface parking is still wanted for the players and staff attending practice, as is access for loading at the lowest level of the building’s rear. The most important consideration is defending the setting of Building 102 from harm. The fact that the two buildings meet at an angle provides a corner area for parking, if the parking does not extend into Building 102’s front yard. In fact, the paving and perimeter fence have been pulled back (pages 22 and 23) since the civil drawing (page 26) was prepared.

A couple of the features associated with the parking lot deserve more consideration. The proximity of the perimeter fence pushes a stormwater retention feature into the front yard of Building 102. As discussed in another pending case, stormwater-retention features, whether bare or well-planted, are incompatible features in most front yards. The landscape of Building 102 was historically informal in the distribution and species of trees. At the ground plane, however, it exhibits the typical formal pattern of a direct leak walk across a lawn to a central entry.

The security fence itself could be improved upon. Welded solid-steel fences are more appropriate to historic districts than are hollow-section fences, because of features of the latter

such as wider pickets, pinched finials and channel-type rails (and the multiple rails on this product add strength at the expense of being more easily climbed).

The fenced area has a long frontage on 13th Street, where loading and trash storage is to occur. The building plan for Level 1 (page 28) indicates that the fencing would be ornamental, transitioning into a screen wall at the trash and recycling containers. These are not apparent in the renderings (page 42). Again, 13th Street will one day be developed and is expected to be a major circulation path through the campus, including to the arena itself. As the building is to be blanker on that side, the margin between it and the street becomes more important. The broad paved loading ramp and the trash enclosures, and perhaps even the fence itself, should be better buffered from the street and public sidewalk.

The plans call for a treatment of the public space in front of the building that is different from the sidewalk and planter areas found elsewhere on the campus. The complex would have its own sidewalk pavers, lamp standards and bicycle racks. There is certainly an argument to be made for a unique treatment of this sort of facility. But in the development of this site, we all must keep in mind the importance of landscape and street furniture that ties together the entire campus despite localized variation in the character of new and old buildings. That is, not every parcel can or should have its own distinctive approach to front yards, paving and furniture.

It was once thought that the campus infrastructure would be at least partly funded with federal highway money. That led to a Section 106 memorandum of agreement that included among its mitigation measures a landscape study of the historic campus that would lead to a landscape plan for its redevelopment. Without the federal funds, the memorandum of agreement is a dead letter, yet the planning for the landscape remains an important 'to-do' item. The 2012 master plan calls for street paving and tree boxes to conform to DDOT's *Public Realm Design Manual* and depicts some typical sidewalk sections. The plan even specifies some general landscape treatments for each parcel. But it does unify all with specific recommendations for furniture and public-realm planting.

Recommendation

HPO recommends that the Board approve the project in concept, taking into consideration the above comments about materials and landscape elements.