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

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

Meeting Date: **October 5, 2017**
Case Number: **17-589** (x) Addition/alterations

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

The applicant, Laura Hughes for EHT Tracerics, consultant and agent for developer Flaherty & Collins Properties, 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 also to be reviewed by the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts.

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 the HPO and National Park Service in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. Therefore, this report will concern itself with only certain aspects of the proposed exterior work.

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.

Paving

The layout of the seven buildings and their connecting corridors create four courtyards, only one of which is now mostly paved. The proposal would increase the paved area on these courtyards for parking and access. This seems reasonable, as most of the work would be within the quad. It also offers the opportunity to improve these spaces in other ways.

¹ The property would be leased long term. The project team also includes the Anacostia Development Corporation, 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 when that is proposed.

However, the amount of paving proposed at each entrance could be somewhat reduced to retain additional green space (see the landscape drawings). Some of the site plans depict single lead walks to the main entrances, as there are today. Others suggest the replacement of the single walks with two parallel walks at each. We believe that the single walks represent the team's present take on the subject.

While the double walks could save a few steps when one is coming from either direction, if that is the aim, then diagonal walks starting at the outside corners of each front yard would be better. The present lead walks are not striking in appearance, yet they are one of the major landscape elements, they are typical of how such walks were situated at buildings on this campus, and there is no compelling reason to alter their original location, extent or alignment.

Dormers

Several new dormers are proposed (see pages 22-24) to hold vents for ventilation intake and exhaust for equipment located in the attic spaces. They probably will not look quite as drawn, as they will hold vents, not windows, but the vent covers could be fashioned similarly to the six-light sash in the existing dormers. Additional dormers is not ideal—either blending in and giving a false sense of history, or standing out as new—but they represent an approach probably preferable to alternatives.

Mechanical enclosures

Even with the mechanical equipment in the attics, there is more that must be sited elsewhere. Much of it would be placed in large metal-screen enclosures on the ground adjacent to the historic buildings. While this is understandable at the rears of the buildings, within the quad, it is not compatible on the outside of the quad, where preserving the original appearance of the building facades—without additions or fencing—is essential.

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. The present towers are not very conspicuous, yet they are easily perceived as later interventions. These two brick towers are proposed to be replaced with larger glass 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 rear additions, not only screened from public view, but also clearly appended to the middle of the covered walkways.

But the proposed north and south entry additions are not sufficiently compatible in their locations between and on the street-facing sides of Buildings 106 and 112 and Buildings 108 and 110, respectively. The all-glass expression, the sweeping roofs, the lack of a response to the base of the adjoining building are all compatibility shortcomings. Even the decorative elements are out of place, presumably an effort to obscure the fact that the structures are just enclosing—and exposing—a typical stair and elevator shaft. Even if enough money was lavished on their detailing to make them “jewel boxes,” they are still too grand, too prominently sited, and too sharply discordant with the character of the adjoining buildings. They will distract from the historic buildings, and when lit at night, they will become the complex's focal points. They are not sufficiently compatible with the historic architectural features to protect the historic integrity

of the property. They could also be reduced in footprint, specifically in depth. If they cannot be designed to be more compatible, then alternatives should be explored, such as devising a smaller, simpler entrance through the corridor to reach a stair/elevator tower in the courtyard.

The courtyards are the best places for most alterations. Those will only hold so much, but that being the case, it may be necessary to reduce the parking to make room.

Recommendation

HPO recommends that the Board support the project in concept, with the conditions that:

- 1. the elevator/stair towers on the outside of the ring of buildings be redesigned or relocated, to be more compatible;*
- 2. the mechanical equipment not be placed on the street sides of the buildings; and*
- 3. the lead walks remain or be replaced in kind.*