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

Landmark/District: **Saint Elizabeths Hospital Historic District** (x) Agenda
Address: **2700 Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue SE**

Meeting Date: **December 5, 2019** (x) New construction
Case Number: **20-044** (x) Concept

The applicant, Carl Skooglund (Wiencek + Associates), architect and agent for the property owner, the government of the District of Columbia, requests the Board's review of a concept to construct a building as a permanent replacement for the "801 East" shelter for single and otherwise homeless men. It is a design-build project, with Coakley-Williams Construction and Blue Skye Construction to erect the facility.

The 86,000-square-foot building would be constructed behind the brick stable near the north end of the East Campus. It would consist mainly of dormitories, including an overnight shelter, transitional quarters for employed men, and beds for seniors and for those needing medical attention. It would also accommodate a day center and health clinic for supportive services. Because of the several uses, the facility would be constructed as three connected pavilions. The tallest pavilion would be five stories, largely because of a practical limitation on the number of beds that can be supervised per floor.

The facility would be reached by a new driveway branching off and then paralleling the access road to the Unified Call Center (UCC).

Other reviews

The deed for the 1987 transfer of the East Campus from the federal government to the District required that the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation review projects at or adjacent to the buildings and greenspaces identified as important in the National Register listing of the campus. The ACHP will release a letter containing its official comments on the proposal by the end of the month, but its staff has expressed an interest in the provision of visual buffering between the new project and the historic stable and adjacent barn.

Because this is a D.C. government facility on D.C.-owned land, its design is subject to review by the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts. The project will continue CFA review through "final" or permit-level drawings. The Commission discussed the concept on November 21 and made the following recommendations:

- 1) That the main entrance facade, proposed to have a long entrance canopy, should be reconceived as a front porch with places for people to sit and linger when entering or leaving the facility.

- 2) That the exterior-mounted vertical mechanical enclosures be eliminated in favor of adding more windows to the facades, especially on the wings housing the longer-term residents. If the enclosures cannot be eliminated, they should be given less prominence, such as by reduction of their height and making them the same color as the facades.
- 3) That the cladding be simplified in its color palette to give the building a calmer and more dignified appearance.
- 4) That the landscape be more naturalistic, playing off its present informality, which could be augmented with a large-scale bosque of trees to provide a shaded place for people to sit.
- 5) That the proposed storm-water retention basins be moved to locations within the landscape where they can function as both bio-retention areas and wildlife habitat.

Evaluation

The area immediately behind the barn and stable is relatively flat scrub land, a former dump for fly ash from an incinerator. This poses some practical challenges, but it is not especially sensitive from a preservation point of view, if new construction proves compatible with the surrounding buildings.

One of the pavilions is considerably taller than the roughly two-story historic structures, but that portion of the new facility is to be positioned the farthest from them. Turning two of the pavilions' ends toward the avenue reduces their impact, as does trying to screen the facility by placing it behind the historic buildings. Some vegetation is suggested to buffer the historic buildings from the driveway, the parking, and the building itself, but this is not yet specified.

Obviously, one of the major drivers of the design is cost. The pavilions are to be largely fiber-cement-panel-clad boxes with vinyl windows. Aside from the large canopy that connects the buildings, the pavilions' end stair towers, clad in brick, are the principal focal points. The number of materials and colors have been reduced through the CFA review. In fact, the CFA recommendations are generally sound.

The perspective drawings are not very accurate as to the appearance of the fiber-cement panels. Even if they ultimately are cut to multiple shapes and sizes, their appearance will be flat and uniform in color—as indicated by the materials samples shown on Sheet HP35—rather than the subtly varied ashlar-like units suggested by the drawings. The windows are to be plastic, with the exception of the Kalwall storefront systems in the stair towers. The window trim is unspecified. The HVAC system is largely externalized, within the louvered chases that form vertical ribs on the buildings. It would be better if those systems were internalized. The building should employ better materials at least on its primary elevations.

The project raises broader planning issues for the campus. The campus master plan discourages surface parking other than along the anticipated streets. For the area of the farm complex specifically, the plan calls for “develop[ing] safe and adequate site circulation with minimal hardscape—although it did contemplate a parking garage at the edge of the ravine, to accommodate cars once anticipated for a Federal Emergency Management Agency headquarters, now abandoned. It is unfortunate that a redundant driveway and parking area would be constructed so near that of the Unified Call Center, but the reason is that UCC has always been fenced off for security reasons. With its own driveway and its own perimeter fence (only

depicted on the site plan), the shelter is to be the second enclave in a row—soon to be joined by a hospital immediately to its south, with its own entrance and own perimeter.

Recommendation

HPO recommends that the Board request revision, to provide more compatible materials, at least on the primary elevations.