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

Property Address: **1501 9th Street NW**
Landmark/District: **Shaw Historic District**
ANC: **6E**

Meeting Date: **November 30, 2017**
H.P.A. Number: **#17-434**
Staff Reviewer: **Brendan Meyer**

(**x**) Agenda
() Consent Calendar
() Denial Calendar
(**x**) Concept Review
(**x**) Alteration
() New Construction
() Demolition
() Subdivision

The applicant, David Tracz on behalf of Chaplin's Restaurant, seeks concept approval for an enclosed sidewalk café at 1501 9th Street NW, a non-contributing building built in 2011 in the Shaw Historic District. Plans were prepared by Studio 3877.

Property Description and Context

The description of 1501 9th Street NW can be borrowed from the 2008 staff report when the concept design for the new building was being reviewed by the Board:

*"The plans call for a contemporary four-story brick building with a slightly recessed glazed corner tower element with a corner retail entrance. The P Street elevation would have three projecting bays (two narrow oriel and one wider bay that would extend to the ground) and the entrance to the residential units on the upper floors. The 9th Street elevation would have a flush storefront window on the first and second floors and smaller punched windows on the upper floors. Parking and trash storage would be placed at the rear of the site accessed from the alley; since this area would front on to P Street, it would be screened behind a brick wall."*¹

This concept was built largely as described with only a few variations of detail. The building sits on the northeast corner of 9th Street and P Street with a streetscape of intermixed historic and non-contributing buildings to the north and a three-story 20th century apartment building (contributing) to the east. The building does not occupy 100% of its lot like many of the historic buildings to the north, but rather has a 27 foot setback from the rear lot line at the alley. The parking portion of public space is negligibly narrow on 9th Street but 17 feet deep along P Street. Currently, the entire parking area of 1501 9th Street is paved and used as unenclosed café seating.

Proposal

An enclosed sidewalk café 49 feet wide and 17 feet deep is proposed for the east end of the lot. It would enclose the entrance door on P Street under the oriel, run along the garden wall that separates trash service from public space and end at the alley. It would align with the underside of the oriel making it 11 feet tall. The walls of the enclosure are designed to only be closed during winter months, as per public space regulation, and consist of steel and glass panels on its length and garage doors on its ends.

Evaluation

¹ HPA #08-279, May 2008.

Enclosed sidewalk cafes are substantially regulated by the public space regulations and reviewed by the Public Space Committee (DCMR 24). These regulations control for occupancy, sidewalk clearances, seasonal operation, adverse proximities, etc. but do not address compatibility with historic districts.²

The Board's *Design Guidelines for Historic Commercial Buildings* say little on the topic of enclosed cafes other than that they, "should complement the design of the [building] itself so the two components appear visually related" (p. 16). The proposed concept falls short of even this broadly stated principle. While 1501 9th is a new building, and not historic, the principle should still apply since it is a basic organizing principle of how commercial buildings intersect with our public realm. How buildings relate with public space is a determinative characteristic of not just the Shaw Historic District, but all of our downtown and commercial historic districts.

The enclosed café would barely be attached to its building and be a large stand-alone object with little relationship to the building. That the rear elevation of the building is setback 27 feet from the alley plays a significant role in this disjointed relationship. Even in its open state, with its garage doors and window panels either affixed open or removed for the season, the posts and roof structure of the enclosure would be a year-round and substantial intrusion into the long sight lines of the public space which are typically open in residential areas of historic districts. The staff report of 2008 anticipated the historic compatibility limits of any use of this public space when it recommended:

"Depending on the needs of the future retail tenant, it is envisioned that a portion of the public space would be landscaped for use as an outdoor café; the remainder of the public space would remain green space."

Although it does not fit the current programming of the applicant, an enclosed sidewalk café would have a more natural and compatible relationship with the building and the historic district if it were at the west end of the building nearest 9th Street. This would leave the east end of the site open and perhaps even afford some little amount of landscaping. This would let the space transition comfortably and compatibly to the residential and historically treated public space on the other side of the alley.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Review Board advise the applicant to revise the material and location of the enclosed café to complement the design of the building at 1501 9th Street NW as described above and return to the Board for further review.

² The Public Space Committee (PSC) has reviewed this design, but so far has declined to approve it until it can be designed with a more open nature. Staff for PSC has advised that this recommendation is reasonably attainable and that approval PSC approval would be forthcoming.