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

Property Address: **1515 9th Street NW**
Landmark/District: **Shaw Historic District**

Meeting Date: **May 30, 2013**
H.P.A. Number: **#23-215**

Agenda
 Consent Calendar
 Denial Calendar
 Concept Review
 Alteration
 New Construction
 Demolition
 Subdivision

The applicant, owner Blue Ridge 1515 9th Street LLC, seeks concept approval to demolish a non-contributing building and construct a new six-story plus penthouse building at 1515 9th Street NW in the Shaw Historic District. Plans were prepared by Monarch Urban.

Property Description and Context

The property is a wide lot which hosts a low, non-contributing building and side parking lot with a curb-cut to the street. The site straddles two areas of distinctly different buildings in terms of height and date of construction. To the south, below P Street, is a series of eight- and nine-story buildings on 9th and 8th Street which establishes an area of large-scale buildings on this edge of the Shaw Historic District and into the recent development done in conjunction with the O Street Market historic landmark. Between 1515 9th Street and P Street, and north of 1515 for the remainder of the block, are clusters of lower height historic buildings. Styles, materials and rowhouse types are substantially varied and include flat- front three-story houses, two-story Victorian rowhouses with projecting bays, and vernacular frame houses. Historic Shiloh Baptist Church and its large contemporary addition dominate the opposite side of the street.

Project Summary

The applicant proposes to clear the site by razing the non-contributing building and to construct a new six-story plus penthouse brick building. The front-façade is broken down into four large areas. Sitting flush to the property line are two 5-story tall sections interspersed by a column of balconies and a 3-story tall section at the north end of the façade. This latter section contains the front entrance for the building. Setback behind these sections is the main body of the building; a 6-story block fenestrated profusely on all four sides except the south side. Lining nearly the entire frontage of the building is a row of three long areaways. Regularly spaced groups of windows and metal panels are spaced equally across the façade sections which are rendered in two different shades of light gray masonry.

Evaluation and Recommendation

The concept generally succeeds at the difficult task of bridging two different contexts, but some aspects of the front façade need further attention.

The concept would introduce a large building amongst smaller historic buildings. While recent new construction in this vicinity has created a nearby context of large building, the site is nestled amongst smaller historic buildings. The front façade is broken down into sections that can be read as individual “buildings” which relates to the height of the immediate neighbors. The effect is tested to its limit by making these “building” sections five stories instead of a more compatible four. However, lowering

these sections to four stories would increase the prominence of the main block of the building which backdrops them. This strategy of “building sections” produces its best result at the north end where there is no backdrop at all behind three-story section so that it reads as a true three-story building adjacent to a two-story historic building. The concept uses fenestration to bridge the small scale of the historic buildings and the large scale of the new building. Rough openings in the masonry are sized proportionally to the overall building, while the individual windows and panels within the openings are proportional to the smaller windows of the historic building.

Where the concept is least successful and incompatible is at the street level. While the modern buildings to the south and historic buildings to the north are so different in height, the one feature they hold in common is a rhythm of doors, storefronts and entrances which engages the street. Rather than replicating this rhythm, this concept would erect a barrier of raised areaways that disengages from the street. The areaways and first floor street frontage of the concept should be revised to match the pedestrian scale and rhythm which has been established by the historic buildings and continued by the large modern buildings approved previously by the Board.

The quality and clarity of the concept drawings is commendable, but the choice of perspective views is telling. All views tilt to look southwards so that the proposed building compares with the other large buildings in that direction. Absent is any view northwards which would show the Board how this concept would compare with the lower rooflines of the historic buildings to the north. This relationship is important. The Board’s deliberation may not be complete until the applicant develops and shares with the Board views of the proposed building looking north along 9th Street.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Review Board find the general concept to be compatible with the character of the historic district, but that revisions are needed for the first floor and areaways and that additional renderings are needed showing the new building in context with the rowhouses to the north. The project should return to the Board for further review when ready.

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