

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

Landmark/District: **16th St Historic District**
Address: **1600 I Street NW**

Meeting Date: **October 22, 2015**
Case Number: **15-575**
Staff Reviewer: **Kim Elliott**

☒ Agenda
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1600 I Street Corporation with Gensler Architects seeks conceptual design review for the recladding the Motion Picture Association of America building along with an interior modernization, improved site renovations, and an occupiable rooftop terrace in the 16th Street Historic District.

Property Description

The Brutalist-style 8-story office building, constructed *circa* 1968, sits prominently on the corner of 16th and I Streets one block from Lafayette Square. The top 6 stories are composed of a precast concrete egg-crate grid structure with deeply recessed windows and sitting on a 2 story recessed podium and a perimeter of stone-clad columns with exposed pin connections. Due to its date of construction, the building is non-contributing to the 16th Street Historic District.

Proposal

The architect's proposal calls for re-cladding the existing façade with limestone panels emphasizing the horizontal structure, and metal panel cladding over the existing precast structure for the vertical members, all set within a metal panel outframe at each elevation. The recessed glazing, currently set back a generous 5 feet from the outside wall, would be pulled forward but maintain a setback of 18 inches. An occupiable roof terrace would be created at the penthouse level - extending a terrace and green space to the 16th Street elevation with a small setback. The penthouse would be clad in metal panels and a limestone band with joints that would relate to the spacing of the building's expressed structural grid. The first two floors, which are now largely opaque stone clad walls, will be replaced with a storefront glazing system. The entrances at 16th Street and I Street will be upgraded to include new ADA lifts and a new sunken patio space linked to the main entry.

Evaluation

Architecture

The re-cladding treatment maintains the structural expression of the building – emphasizing the horizontal bands through limestone panels and maintaining the visibility of the unique pin connection at the heavy columns which support the building. Although the face of the glazing has been shifted by more than half of its original depth making it much less pronounced, the egg-crate grid pattern of the building would still be expressed, and would prevent the building from losing its sense of surface depth and shadow. The first two floors benefit from a change in material—from stone to storefront glazing—creating an inviting elevation and relationship to the street. The use of limestone is certainly compatible with buildings in the historic district, and the metal cladding is proposed in a natural color that is not incompatible.

The proposed sunken patio is pulled in from the sidewalk and remains subordinate in size to the overall public space landscape. At the southeast end of the building, the front elevation could be improved if

the lift was relocated on private property instead of in the public space and if there could be a smoother and more open transition for the exterior stair.

The proposed occupiable roof terrace elevations have been revised to relate somewhat better to the main building. However, due to the fact that the penthouse structure will be visible from many angles and sightlines up and down 16th and I Streets, it is important that the design and materials of the penthouse be fully commensurate in character with the underlying building. Similarly, while a one-to-one setback of a terrace railing can often be sufficient to ensure that it is not prominently visible, that is not the case on a wide street with long sightlines such as 16th Street. A greater setback for the railing – at least two-to-one -- should be employed so as to ensure that it will not be visible; this should also be confirmed through a flag test.

Landscape

While it is a street in name, 16th Street as an element of the L'Enfant plan was given the same 160' width and level of symbolic importance as the avenues. As such it has been the recipient of civic improvement efforts in the late 19th and early 20th century which continue to provide it a distinct sense of character both in its architecture and landscape.

An integral aspect of the city's late 19th century public works infrastructure improvements was the planting of over 60,000 trees to line the city's streets. On the avenues, and including 16th Street, double rows were planted on each side enhance the formality of L'Enfant's most important thoroughfares – one row of streets between the curb and the sidewalk, and another row in the public space between the sidewalk and the building line. This geometry had two goals: to echo the city's classical architecture with parallel rows of columns of trees, and to provide sheltered allées which buffered travelers from the roadway.

The planting plan for 16th Street called for a row of maples between the street and the sidewalk, and a row of tulip poplars in the public space front yards at the inside edge of the sidewalk. While the outer layer of street trees has been supplemented and changed in species over time, vestiges of the inner row of tulip poplars remain, albeit with many of the remaining trees coming to the end of their natural life. Neighborhood community groups, particularly along Massachusetts Avenue and more recently 16th Street, have been working to promote the replenishment of this historic landscape feature, and it is encouraged that the public space plans for the subject property be developed to support these tree planting efforts. These multi-generational trees can co-exist with and don't need to supplant the smaller, shorter-lived ornamental trees that currently exist in the public space, and over time will recreate the street's historic tree canopy.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Board find the concept consistent with the preservation act and consistent with the purposes of the preservation act and recommends that the Board delegate final approval to staff with the following recommendations:

- *Refine the penthouse elevations;*
- *Increase the setback for the roof terrace railing to ensure that it will not be visible from street view, and confirmed through a flag test;*
- *Include a planting plan that reinforces the historic planting plan for this important L'Enfant street.*