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

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

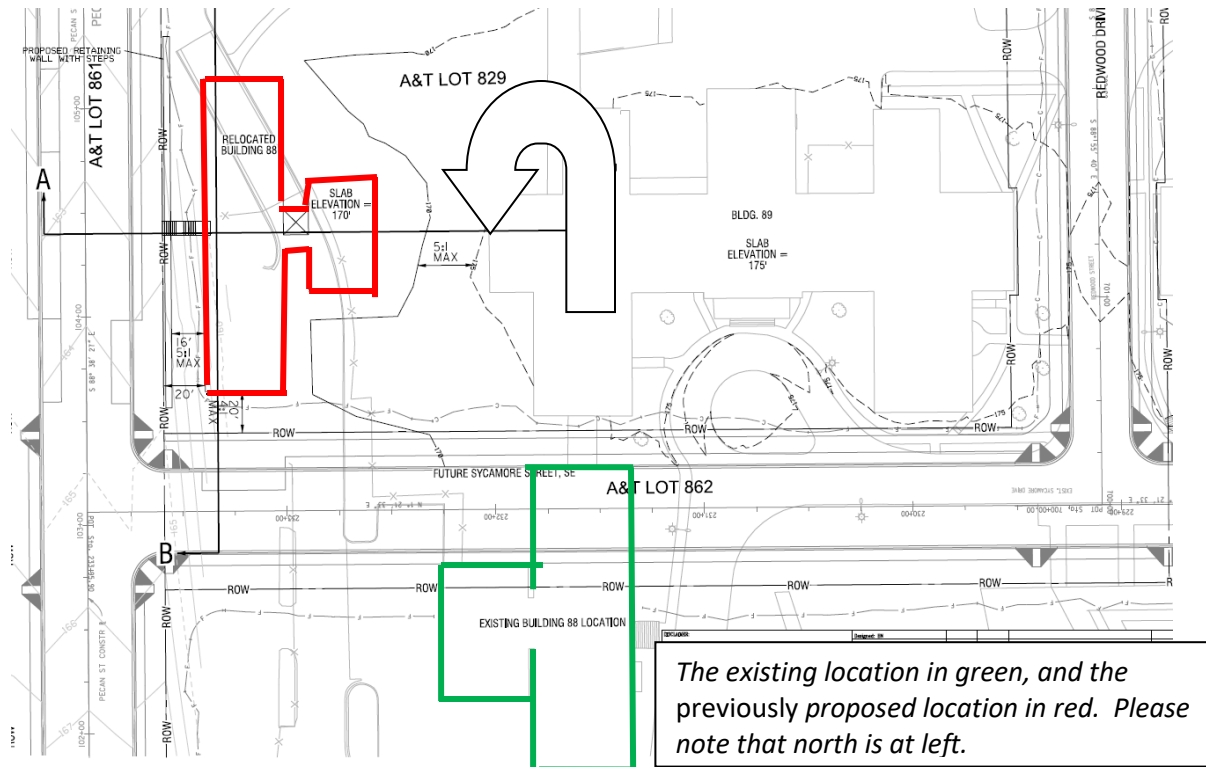
Meeting Date: **November 3, 2022** (x) Alteration  
Case Number: **22-279** (x) Concept

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The applicant, the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development, requests the Board’s review of a concept to move campus Building 88, the Blackburn Laboratory. Erected in 1923-1924, the building was named for the late Dr. Isaac Wright Blackburn, whose earlier lab on the West Campus was devoted to the study brain physiology and pathology.

The 2012 master plan for the East Campus of Saint Elizabeths called for the relocation of Blackburn Laboratory to make way for the straightening, widening and extension of Sycamore Drive across the front of Building 89 (or “R Building”), requiring at least a larger gap between the two buildings. The Board subsequently reviewed DDOT’s roadway plan in full and approved the concept of moving Blackburn to the northwest outside corner of the “Maple Quadrangle,” between Buildings 89 and 90, rotated 180 degrees to address Pecan Street (it would have faced the hospital now under construction).



A several-year-old Board approval is no longer in force, but the idea of extending the street is still compelling, to connect the bulk of the campus to the hospital and to the other uses at the northern end. It is important that the campus not be divided into independent compounds. The idea of moving Blackburn is still valid, if the context is appropriate.

The applicant proposes *not* the previous receiving location—which would have altered the building’s orientation and backed it up to the north end of Building 89—but simply to slide the main block or bar westward. This has the benefit of altering its context less. It does raise a couple other issues that need to be resolved.

First, for reason of cost, the rear wing—the former operating theater of the lab—is proposed to stay put, because its present location would already be clear of the proposed right-of-way. This means demolition of the link between it and the main block. It also means that the building’s plan would shift from a “T” to an “L” as the main bar is slid westward. This is regrettable, but it seems reasonable in light of the project’s purpose and challenges. But moving the masses relative to each other is easier said than done; because the ground drops away to the west (see the site section drawing and the mocked-up perspectives). Moving the main bar would lower it, on average, relative to the rear wing. Therefore, the project is going to require significant regrading at the front of the building, to elevate the main block on a base similar to its present height, and to keep it even and level with the rear wing.

Second, the drawings do not depict the necessary demolition and reconstruction in detail. Not only would the link between the wings of the building require reconstruction, but it would attach at a new location at the rear of the main bar. Still more important is the fact that the building will have to be set on beams in order to be rolled westward, and those beams will presumably be needed under the structure at the tops of the basement windows, meaning that the base of the building, above and below grade, will have to be reconstructed. Eventual permit drawings will have to depict the extent of this and how it is to be accomplished and what the finished grade will be.

### **Recommendation**

*HPO recommends that the Board support the concept as compatible with the character of the historic district and sufficiently retentive of the character and fabric of Building 88, if the site is appropriately regraded and the necessary reconstruction is carried out in a compatible manner, with matching brick and openings, etc.*