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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: **1100 (1110)<sup>1</sup> Oak Drive SE**

Meeting Date: **April 27, 2023** (x) New construction  
Case Number: **23-287** (x) Concept

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The applicant, Jonathan Mellon, agent for the property owner, the District of Columbia, requests the Board’s review of a concept to demolish two contributing buildings and to construct an approximately seven-story-tall residential/retail/hotel/office complex.<sup>2</sup> Because it is on District land and District-sponsored, the project is being reviewed by the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts concurrently. Because it involves, and is next to, historic buildings listed in the 1987 deed that transferred the property to the District, the project must also be submitted to the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation for review by the terms of that deed.

**Demolition**

Parcel 15 is the location of the recently erected “interim retail village,” which would be retained while the first parts of the complex are constructed and then be razed.

The proposal calls for demolition of the twin Buildings 115 and 116. Constructed in 1943, they were similar to and an extension of the residential treatment buildings in the adjacent Continued Treatment Quadrangle (recently rehabbed by Redbrick), each with 164 beds. They contribute to the character of the historic district as designated in the D.C. Inventory of Historic Sites (2005) and as listed as a National Historic Landmark (1990). The two show signs of neglect and of the salvage of roof tiles for reuse on other buildings, but their integrity was adequately addressed in a 2011 historic resource inventory:

The exterior of the building is largely intact and in good condition, with retention of original windows, roof, and masonry. No major additions have altered the building’s form or footprint. The interior of the buildings have been substantially altered, and the original floor plan is no longer legible. The only original interior features are the stairwells and the enclosed porches.

The 2012 master plan for the East Campus called for the demolition of Buildings 115 and 116

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<sup>1</sup> The application identifies this parcel as 1100 Oak Drive, but the District’s current GIS base map calls assessment and taxation Lot 810 in Square 5868S 1110 Oak Drive (with the adjacent Parcel 12, or A&T Lot 838, being 1100 Oak).

<sup>2</sup> The design team is identified in the drawings. The project is here characterized as approximately seven stories, because it ranges from six to eight stories, plus a penthouse. The master plan for the campus set the upper height limit at this “transit hub” at seven stories. The application describes it as five buildings, but because the masses are connected above and below, it is almost certainly one building for zoning purposes (including allowing a portion to rise to eight-plus stories at its immediate grade) and a single, connected complex for architectural purposes.

and the redevelopment of their site as a mixed-use “Congress Heights Transit Center.” The Board reviewed the draft master plan that year, and the staff report observed that:

Demolitions of contributing buildings are by definition contrary to the purposes of the city’s preservation law. Any raze of a contributing building would have to be reviewed by the Board and the Mayor’s Agent once application is made for a permit to construct a replacement building. Clearance of the raze application would be contingent on a finding by the Mayor’s Agent that the demolition was necessary in the public interest or that failure to issue the raze would result in an unreasonable economic hardship.



*Top: Building 116. Bottom: Building 115 and, at right, the connecting corridor between the buildings.*



This remains the case. The preservation law states that, “No permit shall be issued unless the Mayor finds that issuance of the permit is necessary in the public interest, or that failure to issue a permit will result in unreasonable economic hardship to the owner.” The destruction of a historic building is not consistent with the purposes of the law, because it does not “retain and enhance those properties which contribute to the character of the historic district” nor does it “encourage their adaptation for reuse.” Demolition may be found “necessary in the public interest,” however, if it is “necessary to allow the construction of a project of special merit.” Thus, the Board cannot approve the demolition of Buildings 115 and 116 but can acknowledge that a Mayor’s Agent hearing is required to pursue the project.

### **New construction**

The concept provides an opportunity for the Board to give direction on the potential new construction, in the event a project is approved by the Mayor’s Agent.

The new construction responds to its irregular site by itself being irregular and curvilinear. At its south end, it opens onto Dogwood Drive to the southeast, facing the public plaza between the new buildings on Parcel 17. These are the aspects that are the most contextual.

Reference to an Algonquian village is a laudable idea, but even with curvilinear forms, it may be inapt. While the image of a palisaded village may not be something especially at home in the middle of a campus, the close connection of tall masses is more evocative of the Watergate complex (in use, too) than of grouped longhouses, or of the often-linked pavilions on a greensward that typify the East Campus.

By internalizing most of the green space, it can be combined into a larger plot and made accessible and more useful to visitors and residents alike. Although the size of trees will be constrained by an underground garage, the “gathering plaza” will add to the number of recreation spaces—the original Pavilion on Martin Luther King Avenue, the Parcel 17 plaza, the market area(s) in the farm section—available to the public. A single green roof allows elevated circulation the length of the complex.

The complex is to have a structure of mass timber and concrete, with wood cladding and trim, something of a departure from the campus’s traditional architecture.

### **Recommendation**

*HPO recommends that the Board find the proposed demolition of Buildings 115 and 116 to be inconsistent with the purposes of the preservation act and provide comments on the compatibility of the proposed site plan and building design.*