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

Landmark/District: **Anacostia Historic District** (x) Agenda
Address: **1603 Good Hope Road SE**

Meeting Date: **June 1, 2023** (x) New construction
Case Number: **HPA 23-322** (x) Concept

Applicant Amir Irani, with plans prepared by Square 134 Architects, seeks conceptual design review for construction of a six-story plus penthouse residential and retail building located on a corner lot in the Anacostia Historic District. The site is currently occupied by a one-story non-contributing laundromat and surface parking.

Property Description

The site is located at the corner of Good Hope Road and 16th Street and adjacent to a vacant lot at 1605-1607 Good Hope where the Board recently gave final concept approval for construction of a five-story residential and retail building (HPA 22-445). The site is bordered by commercial properties on each side with residential properties at the rear behind the public alley. The block context includes the vacant non-contributing laundromat, a one-story non-contributing office building, and two- and three-story residential apartments. The grade gradually slopes down towards the west.

Project Description

The project calls for construction of a six-story building with a penthouse. The building would be clad primarily in brick, incorporating Art Deco motifs such as horizontal brick bands and vertical piers around the windows and at the corner. On Good Hope, the building would rise to 65' in height, with a five-story primary mass, a slight setback for the sixth floor, and a one-to-one setback for the penthouse. The building would have projecting bay-tower elements on each of the two primary elevations and step down to four stories in the rear, with a setback for the fifth and sixth stories.

Planning Considerations

The site is within an area from Minnesota Avenue SE to 18th Street along Good Hope Road that was modified in the 2021 Comprehensive Plan update, changing the designation on the Future Land Use Map from low to moderate density commercial use. The project will be seeking a zoning map amendment under this increased designation from MU-4 to MU-7.

The Comprehensive Plan specifically encourages retail development in Historic Anacostia and encourages combining upper story housing/offices and ground floor retail. The Anacostia Transit-Area Strategic Investment and Development Plan (2004) states infill buildings should be sensitive additions into the historic fabric and build to the existing street grid. Special design considerations should be considered to ensure appropriate corner treatments, ground floor uses, and the potential for a central piece of public art and/or gathering place at these commercial crossroads.

Evaluation

The Board has reviewed several new construction projects in the past few years for larger buildings along the Good Hope and MLK commercial corridors, many of which have raised questions about compatible heights.¹ Most of these projects have ultimately been approved at a height of five stories, typically with setbacks for the top one or more floors to help break down the buildings' massing and lower their apparent heights.

The current proposal is the first for a six-story building proposed in the Anacostia Historic District. The height is greater than that found within the established ranges of height in the district. Although larger scaled construction is found close by, historic and new buildings in the historic district are lower than 65' in height or set away from the historic commercial corridor. The top floor setbacks for the proposed project are also less than what the Board has typically seen in other new construction projects, making the sixth floor and penthouse visible down Good Hope Road on each side.

On the other hand, the project is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan designation that is intended to encourage additional density along the neighborhood's commercial corridors. The Art Deco/Moderne styling of the building is a good and familiar choice for this district, and the proposed design takes advantage of the style's character by modulating the massing to break down its size and provide visual interest.

If the Board finds that a sixth-floor building can be compatibly inserted into this location in the historic district, HPO recommends that the sixth floor be reduced in size and pulled back further on the Good Hope and 16th Street elevations to reduce its perceived height and mass. The penthouse should be similarly studied for how to further minimize its visibility, and consideration given to ensure that the materials of the penthouse are compatible in color and finish. Additional design attention should also be given to first floor retail base of the building, which would benefit from having larger storefronts, more prominent entries, and sign bands to help activate the building at street level.

Recommendation

HPO seeks the Board's direction on the proposed height of the building and recommends that if a six-story building is determined compatible, that the sixth floor and penthouse be reduced in size and visibility, that the base of the building be revised to provide a stronger retail presence, and that the project return to the Board for further review when ready.

HPO staff reviewer: Imania Price

¹ 1337 Good Hope, 1605-1607 Good Hope, 1901 MLK, 2220 MLK, and 2420 MLK