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

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Property Address:	<b>1250 U Street, NW</b>	<b>X</b>	Agenda
Landmark/District:	<b>U Street Historic District</b>		Consent Calendar
Meeting Date:	<b>November 4, 2021</b>	<b>X</b>	Concept Review
H.P.A. Number:	<b>21-421</b>	<b>X</b>	Alteration
Staff Reviewer:	<b>Steve Callcott</b>	<b>X</b>	New Construction
			Demolition
			Subdivision

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Shalom Baranes Associates Architects, representing EastBanc and Jamestown, seeks conceptual design review for construction of a 10-story plus penthouse apartment building at 13<sup>th</sup> and U streets and townhouses along the adjacent mid-block alley in the U Street Historic District.

**Property Description**

The site is located at the southeast corner of 13<sup>th</sup> and U streets in Square 274. It includes a four-story office/retail building that wraps around the U Street/African-American Civil War Memorial/Cardozo Metro station, the plaza of the Metro station plaza, two 19<sup>th</sup> century rowhouses at 1931-1933 13<sup>th</sup> Street, and lots along Temperance Court, an H-shaped mid-block alley. A WMATA chiller plant occupies a portion of the alley property.

**Proposal**

The project calls for demolishing the office/retail building and replacing the chiller plant. The front portions of the two rowhouses on 13<sup>th</sup> Street would be retained and incorporated into the new construction.

A 10-story (105 feet) apartment building would be constructed around and above the Metro plaza, composed of three primary massing elements. The masses at each end would be clad in brick with retail storefronts opening to 13<sup>th</sup> and U streets; these would book-end the center mass, clad in a glass and metal skin, that would hang from exposed structural hangers and leave a three-story high open plaza around the Metro plaza. The tenth story on each of the three masses would be set back on all sides and the south (rear) elevation would be modulated with light courts.

The center north-south leg of Temperance Court would be converted to a landscaped pedestrian walk flanked by unified rows of four-story alley buildings each containing a stacked duplex. The alley buildings would be clad in brick and have shallow three-story bays.

**Planning Considerations**

The zoning on the site is Mixed Use Uptown ARTS-1, which permits a height of 50 feet and a residential FAR of 3.0. The project will be submitted to the Zoning Commission as a planned unit development with a related map amendment to allow for a building of this height and density.

## **Evaluation**

### *Existing buildings*

The rowhouses at 1931 and 1933 13<sup>th</sup> Street were constructed in 1889 but were little more than burnt out shells when they were internally combined and incorporated into a redevelopment in the 1990s, prior to the designation of the historic district. While that project retained the historic facades, little of the original structure remained. The extent of demolition proposed as part of this project would not affect historic portions of the buildings and the rehabilitation of the facades is an appropriate and compatible treatment.

The office/retail building and chiller plant do not contribute to the character of the historic district.

### *Townhouses*

The site plan for the alley portion of the redevelopment retains and reinforces the original alley layout, with modest modifications to the dimensions of the secondary service alleys to improve access and circulation. The design of the new buildings is contemporary while being compatible in form, materials and rhythm with rowhouses and alley dwellings found in the district.

### *Apartment building*

Since the designation of the U Street Historic District in 1999, the Board has reviewed numerous new construction projects in the neighborhood and particularly along 14<sup>th</sup> and U streets. When the first proposals for new construction were proposed, the Board often struggled with issues of size, height and contemporary design for new construction, particularly when they were proposed immediately adjacent to smaller scaled historic buildings. While there was substantial property that was vacant or occupied by non-contributing buildings, there was not yet a context for larger buildings.

The successful integration of taller buildings with the street's historic character has been a result of careful attention by the Board to many inter-related design characteristics. Among the most important have been massing, where buildings have often incorporated setbacks or a differentiated use of materials for top floors; the rhythm of fenestration and projections; elevations that express a strong vertical emphasis that relates to that of surrounding historic buildings; proportions, such as the ratio of masonry to glass; the scale of building elements, such as openings, storefronts and projections, and the use of color, materials and detailing. As is shown in many large historic and new buildings, these characteristics can come together to create a design that is urbanistically and architecturally compatible with adjacent smaller adjacent structures despite disparities in height. Cumulatively, the new buildings have also created a context in which larger buildings no longer feel anomalous with the neighborhood's character.

The current proposal successfully incorporates many of these same design characteristics, including setting back and differentiating the top floor, using strong vertical proportions, the predominant use of masonry with articulated detailing in the two end masses, and crisp, dimensional detailing in the framing of the middle mass to provide texture and shadow. As is illustrated in the comparative photos of other projects reviewed by the Board over the past 20

years, the building is slightly taller and has somewhat less variation in massing than some of those surrounding new construction projects. In the hierarchy of blocks that make up this urban neighborhood, there is a reasonable argument to be made that a large site occupied by a non-contributing building sitting directly atop a Metro station is an appropriate place for one of the neighborhood's largest buildings. And the height and mass also need to be considered in the context of the site's unusually challenging requirements to retain the open Metro plaza and the inability to bear weight on the below-grade station. The Board needs to determine whether the revisions made to set back and distinguish the top floor and to revise the building's since the initial submission are sufficient in achieving compatibility with the historic district or whether further refinements are needed.

The design of the plaza surrounding the Metro station has been improved since initially submitted. The depth of the plaza has been reduced, greater glazing introduced to the building facing it, and refinements made to its finishes and lighting. The resulting plaza has the potential to be an accessible and activating space that can contribute to and reinforce U Street as one of the city's most important cultural and community arts centers.

**Recommendation**

*The HPO recommends that the Review Board find the general concept for new construction to be compatible with the character of the historic district and seeks Board's direction on whether further refinements to the design are needed.*