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

Landmark/District: **Walter Reed Army Medical Center Historic District** (x) Agenda
Address: **6900 Georgia Avenue NW**

Meeting Date: **December 1, 2016** (x) Alterations
Case Number: **16-641** (x) Additions

Staff Reviewer: **Tim Dennée** (x) Permit

The applicant, Help USA, the tenant (along with Wiencek + Associates, architects), seeks review of a permit application to make alterations to Building 14, Abrams Hall, the former enlisted quarters that was built in 1975. The non-contributing building is to be transitional housing for veterans.

Most of the work would be interior. Some landscaping and structures are proposed within an internal courtyard that is inaccessible except through the building. There are also to be a new ramp, steps, walls, etc. outside the building.

The areas of work that merit the Board's attention follow. Sheets cited in parentheses are references to the main permit drawings set. HPO received and included another set of drawings in a more legible scale that better depicts the present conditions.

Southwest corner of the building

At the southeast corner, some of the wall is to be demolished, and the end bays clad with EIFS (see cover rendering and the elevations on A3.0.1, plus demolition and construction plans). EIFS is discouraged by the Board as a façade material, but has been approved in some limited applications. EIFS is intended to appear as stucco, a material that was traditionally applied as a continuous skin (despite being applied with more control joints today). But the elevations suggest a panelized treatment, expressing the EIFS joints. If the cladding is to look like panels, then a better-quality metal panel would be preferable here, and on projects elsewhere in the campus, as metal panels are contemplated in the draft historic district design guidelines the Board first reviewed in July.

Projecting from this portion of the building would be a shelf supporting a flag staff (A3.0.1). Especially for a former military base, it would probably be more accessible and appropriate to place the flag staff in the ground.

Below that corner of the building would be a new ramp for rolling out a dumpster from a space on the ground-floor level behind a new steel roll-up door. A retaining wall of geo-block (tumbled concrete landscape block) would bound the edge of the ramp area. This type of block is generally discouraged on prominent portions of a site, but used to a limited extent in this spot,

it may be sufficiently compatible. A brick or concrete wall would be more compatible options for the character of this site.

EIFS on spandrels, piers, etc.

Between the projecting brick bays on the existing building are recessed windows. Between each floor and at and above the ground-floor level are proposed spandrels of EIFS, ostensibly for insulation at the building's slabs. If this is demonstrated to be necessary or advisable—through the provision of wall sections, for example—then the Board should consider this more limited application.

But EIFS is not advisable for applications at the ground level. The material is stronger with additional coats, but is not especially durable against impacts (thus the high-impact reinforced mesh called for in some locations).

West side, central section

A stair tower is to be added at a corner of the building's western bar due north of the above-mentioned corner (see A3.0.1). The tower itself is not a concern, but is also proposed in the same EIFS cladding. These corner pieces should resemble each other in exterior material, something other than EIFS.

At the ground level, to the north of the stair tower (A0.0.1 and A0.0.2) are to be a new ADA ramp and stairs, leading to an entry vestibule (A2.2.2, A3.0.1, A3.0.2 and A3.0.3). All of the walls should probably be concrete to match the existing, but portions of a couple of the stair wing walls are instead specified as clad with EIFS.

Recommendation

HPO recommends that the Board approve the alterations as sufficiently compatible with the character of the historic district for a non-contributing building, with the conditions that: 1) the EIFS not be the cladding for the new projections, 2) that EIFS of a suitable color may be used as insulation in limited locations if shown to be necessary, and 3) more information be furnished on the window systems for the entry vestibule and projections.