
**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: **November 2, 2017** (x) New construction
Case Number: **17-432**

Staff Reviewer: **Tim Dennée** (x) Revised concept

The applicant, TPWR Developer LLC, a joint venture of Hines-Urban Atlantic-Triden and the lessee of the District-owned portion of the Walter Reed campus, requests conceptual review of a proposal to construct an apartment-retail complex in the northern tier of the campus, at the small-area plan's "Town Center" site.

This project would stand at the eastern end of the present Building 2, which is to be demolished. New roads and an alley would bound the site. The building would face, and be centered on, a park that is to stretch between 12th Street and Georgia Avenue. A single building a block long, the project has an E-shaped plan above its ground-floor retail and loading. It would stand about 80 feet tall, six residential floors above the mostly retail ground floor.

The Board first reviewed this project August 3 and supported the concept's height and footprint. It requested that the project return to the Board with revisions. The applicant has tried to address the Board's recommendations in a narrative on page 4 of the drawings set as well as in the drawings themselves. This report will list the Board's previous recommendations along with a discussion of how the applicant has addressed them, plus some additional observations.

The Board recommended the following enumerated items.

1. The materials should be further developed, including on the alley side of the building.

The alley side of the building is depicted in a perspective on page 27. The materials have not been specified.

2. There should be further development of the landscape.

There is additional information about landscape on 38 through 41. Most of it is standard street-tree and planter boxes inside the curb. There are, however, small yards at the residential entrances on the south end of the complex, along Dahlia Street. That, and the lowering and reorientation of the entry stoops there improves the building's relationship to the street and continues some sense of front lawn that is typically present at the campus's historic buildings.

There is some green space proposed for the courtyard atop the loading area at rear.

On this project there is again special paving proposed, in front of the center of the east elevation. There may be a call for such *street* paving relating to the park across 12th Street, especially if the street itself is expected to be closed occasionally to serve public-assembly purposes. What is unclear is the relationship of that to the sidewalk at the middle entrance of this complex, which is merely one commercial space among several. A consistent pattern of sidewalk and street paving should be applied to the whole campus, to be broken at spots where there is a functional distinction.

3. The mechanical systems should be further developed in so far as they will be visible on the exterior.

The mechanical screening and penthouses look much as they did in the previous version. If the actual units and screening manage to fit within the proposed envelopes, then their setbacks should render them not too prominently visible.

4. There should be more variation among the heights and character of the storefronts between the three sections of the project.

This is one complex, but expressed as three buildings. While understanding that the floor heights are probably uniform throughout, one would expect storefront-opening heights in different buildings to be somewhat different building to building, yet probably uniform, and with similar storefront framing *within* each building. So, while allowing for tenants' personalization of the spaces, the variation within each building at the time of the complex's design should be minimal, although changing from building to building has been encouraged by the Board.

The principal purposes of storefront openings are access, display and light. The openings on these buildings extend higher than the storefronts themselves, each with some kind of horizontal filler above the glazing. As the signage is mostly depicted hanging lower than that, one imagines that the purpose of these bands is to conceal each space's HVAC ductwork behind. But as the storefronts themselves are naturally pretty high to begin with, it seems at least unnecessary to extend the openings still higher only to fill them—unless the idea is to provide space to insert exhaust vents for restaurants. One of the effects of the design, especially at the central building, is to leave little wall between the storefront opening and the second-story windows.

The main residential entrance is right of center on the façade of the center building (in some perspectives, it looks like another store). Because of its separate function, it is acceptable that its storefront be distinct. To divide the storefront with many mullions is also acceptable, but it should avoid the appearance of having transoms atop transoms.

5. The exposed column at the project's southeast corner should be eliminated.

The corner's supporting structure has been incorporated within the volume of the building.

6. The widths of the hyphens should be equalized at the greater (20-foot) width.

The hyphens or recesses between the three main masses have been given equal widths and similar expressions, at somewhat less than the previous twenty-foot width.

7. The central pavilion design should be resolved as an abstracted portico.

The center of the complex is much more successful now as an abstracted portico than it was as the originally proposed glass box. The storefront beneath it is also more successful without so much recess as before.

8. The Dahlia Street side should be further developed and depicted in relation to future buildings on the opposite side of that street.

The south elevation has developed a little, revised in a positive direction. In perspectives on pages 12 and 13 it is shown in relation to a streetscape that includes massing models of potential new buildings across Dahlia.

Small yards have been introduced at the residential entrances on the south end of the complex, along Dahlia Street. That, and the lowering and reorientation of the entry stoops there improves the relationship to the street and continues some sense of front lawn that is typically present at the campus's historic buildings.

The brise-soleils at the top of the building have been lightened, which is an improvement.

The southeast corner element has been improved in the sense that the area of deep recess has been reduced by broadening the corner "bay." The danger of the former version was that the bold corner gesture would be visually eroded by recessing so much, largely to serve the end of providing balconies within that void. While it is not entirely resolved, it is better. The fact that the brick framing has to return so far to reach the plane of the fenestration, even *over* the top floor (see especially page 12), communicates a bit of falsity to the masonry wall. The framing holding the glazing should better engage with the masonry and even look like it is supporting it to some degree. That is not to say that the glazing should be in the same plane as the masonry wall. No, the brick wall should be the outermost plane, with the "bay" framing next inboard and the glazing set in beyond that, so that there is sufficient texture to the bays.

9. The balconies on the north building should be resolved.

The previously proposed balconies have been removed. New wider-but-shallower balconies have been added at the top floor and at a Barcelonesque chamfered corner. The latter at least allows those balconies to be bracketed by the ends of the side walls, an improvement over the previous version of the building bristling with deeper balconies.

10. The solid-void ratio on the north building and its relationship to the cornice should be resolved.

The vertical piers have been beefed up to give the building more of an impression of solid wall. The revised cornice and attic story should be further revised. The cornice is better with a lesser projection, but its higher position, relative to the previous proposal, adds to an impression of a very tall "attic" story, an impression that is emphasized by the fact that cladding material comes down to the windows of the floor below. To remedy this, one might eliminate the horizontal band beneath the balconies and lower the cornice.

On a related note, the attic stories of the center and south buildings are also higher, but the effect is mitigated by their setback behind parapets. These parapets, however, look rather low in the renderings, so we cannot be sure whether railings will be proposed there.

11. The projection of the central pavilion's canopy should be reduced.

The projection has been reduced perceptibly, but the only drawing useful for judging the new condition is the perspective on page 10, with the "portico" partly obscured by an imaginary tree. The canopy should project only slightly beyond the face of the wall beneath, supported by the

columns of the portico; it is intended to cover the recess at the uppermost story, not the ground below.

12. The project should return to the Board with materials samples.

The materials are not noted in the drawings but should be. The colors and conventions used often successfully indicate the intended material, such as brick, while details such as joints sometimes suggest fiber-cement panels. Some materials might be interpreted as wood, metal, masonry or stucco or some substitute. It is recommended that the applicant bring to the hearing materials samples for wall cladding, storefronts and windows, mechanical screening, etc.

13. The Board acknowledged that the park landscape is separate from this project, but encouraged the applicant to consider the design of all new buildings in light of their contexts.

As mentioned above, the south end and rear of the building are shown in relation to portions of massing models of potentially adjacent buildings. The conceptual site plan on page 3 gives a broader plan view of relationships with nearby existing and proposed buildings. The proposed park and the surrounding buildings across 12th Street are depicted in several perspectives.

Recommendation

HPO recommends that the Board approve the concept as compatible with the character of the historic district, after consideration of the comments raised above and pending approval of materials samples. HPO recommends that the project then be delegated to staff for further review, with it to return only if the staff finds that elements have changed substantially in an incompatible way during further development or that incompatible materials, including but not limited to vinyl, are later proposed.