
**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:	March 25, 2021	(x) New construction
Case Numbers:	21-220	(x) Concept

The applicant, Vicki Davis, agent for the ground-lessee and developer TPWR Developer LLC (a joint venture of Hines-Urban Atlantic-Triden), requests the Board's review of a concept to construct 50 townhouses at the southern end of the Walter Reed campus, between Aspen Street, Main Drive, Building 17 (contributing) and Building 14 (non-contributing).

In July 2018, the Board approved the project in concept, with it to be developed to address the comments and recommendations in the staff report (attached below), with the exception that the sixteen-foot-wide houses were approved to have projecting bays. The Board observed that the lofts were unresolved and recommended that quadruple-ganged windows not be under a single jack arch. As more than two years (and less than four) have passed, an extension of that approval would now be necessary by regulation.

However, the applicant has not presented the same concept but a revision of it, reducing the number of houses by eight, which uncrowds the site plan, rationalizes the orientation of the rows, and allows for more landscaping.

The design of the units has changed somewhat, raising some issues.

1. The biggest issue is the reorientation of the roof terraces to the fronts of all the units and the increase in size of the penthouses to a partial story. While it is understandable that one might want terraces to face the campus and Aspen Street, rather than the internal circulation and parking, that orientation will reveal to public view the fiber-cement-sided penthouses and whatever stands on the terraces. This is unfortunate and a less compatible approach. It also means that drainage is handled on the facades. The massing is odd, as viewed at the ends of the rows. Likely overlooked are future privacy screens on the roofs between the units which, if tall enough to allow privacy, will be another visible element. The drawings suggest that the penthouses on the southernmost rows would not be visible from Aspen Street, but that is not the case. Still, they will be more visible atop the northernmost row as seen from the campus. Therefore, the penthouses' front elevations should not be left undesigned. But it would be more compatible to place the terraces on the backs of those houses that face outward from the project.
2. It is recommended that each row be arranged as a composition, to minimize a prescribed randomness that will not be convincing as organic. The project would benefit from each row being composed like a single building, like the recent townhouse project at Saint Elizabeths.

Short of that, there should be more attention to pattern. The rows are generally symmetrical in plan. Aspen Street's Building 2 does place the bay-fronted units symmetrically in the second and fourth places in the five-unit composition. Building 1 does the same, but it offputtingly places the triple-ganged-window units in the third and fifth place. (Building 3 is its mirror image, and Building 4 consists of each of the three unit types). The row facing Main Drive is happily similar to the more successful Building 2.

3. The mechanical units are not depicted, so they have to be assumed to be on the uppermost roofs, because the houses have no rear yards.
4. Just perceptible from the drawings are basement areaways in front of the north-facing units. These are bounded by fences taller than the railings shown in the 2018 design.
5. The 2018 staff report objected to the triple-ganged windows, but the Board did not. Still, they should not be stark white, which emphasizes them too much. White is a Colonial Revival trim color often employed on the campus, but these openings in narrow rowhouses are not analogous to the porches found on historic buildings. The triple-ganged windows are less successful on the two-story facades and should be revised there.
6. Of the rear elevations, the only thing to say is that the houses back up to each other and largely screen views of them, except for the end unit exposed on the second row from Main Drive, around which the brick should probably wrap.
7. Fences and railings should be kept to a minimum and should be of solid steel or iron, not tubular steel or aluminum.
8. Any venting should be through the back of the units.
9. The Board may take a position as to whether there should be freestanding "cluster" mailboxes here, as suggested on page 27.

Recommendation

HPO recommends that the Board approve the site plan and request that:

1. *the penthouses be pushed back farther on at least the northernmost and southernmost rows or, better still, the terraces be returned to the rear of those rows;*
2. *any rooftop privacy screens be concealed;*
3. *the pattern of the units be revised slightly as discussed above;*
4. *the triple-ganged windows be eliminated from the two-story facades, and be painted a darker color, complementary to the brick color, on the three-story facades;*
5. *the brick wrap around the rear of the east-end unit exposed on the second row from Main Drive;*
6. *the mechanical units be positioned so as not to be visible from public space;*
7. *any vents be through the roof and/or rear walls; and*
8. *areaways, fences and railings be further developed, and fences and railings be kept to a minimum number and height, made of solid steel or iron.*

**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: **July 26, 2018** (x) New construction
Case Numbers: **18-512** (x) Concept

The applicant, EHT Traceries, agent for the long-term lessee and developer TPWR Developer LLC (a joint venture of Hines-Urban Atlantic-Triden), requests the Board's review of a concept to construct 58 townhouses at the southern end of the Walter Reed campus, between Aspen Street, Main Drive, Building 17 (contributing) and Building 14 (non-contributing).

The houses would be three stories tall, on average, and sixteen or twenty feet wide, arranged in rows of four to nine. They would have garages on rear alleys and lofts giving access onto roof decks. The fronts and exposed sides of the buildings will be faced with brick, and the rears will be sided with fiber-cement lapped board. A green "mews" and storm-water pond would be located near the center of the project.

Two non-contributing buildings have already been demolished to clear the site, and one non-contributing roadway next to Building 17 would be altered. The topography drops from north to south, and the parcel would be re-graded in a more terraced fashion. This southern margin of the campus is something of a jumble, a place where utility uses and later support buildings were placed irrespective of the main axes through the campus.

The small-area plan and master plan for the campus had called for a large, single building in this location, but the zoning allows single-family dwellings, and that is a use compatible with the homes that lay on the opposite side of Aspen. The layout of the project responds properly to its frontages on Aspen and Main Drive. The orientations of the rows minimize views of the wide alleys and the rears of houses from important vantage points. It should be noted that the design of the multi-use trail along Aspen Street, upon which eighteen houses would front, has not been finalized and submitted to the Board.

The drawings must be further developed in order to understand many of the details, including the cornices, door surrounds, brick details, etc. (And the cover renderings are out of date.)

1. Scarcely perceptible from the drawings are the basement areaways the houses would generally have in front. It is difficult to comment on these, as there is little information provided.
2. At three stories tall, the proportions of the sixteen-foot houses are quite narrow. What is more problematic, but not as noticeable in the renderings as it will be in life, is that facades of several of these are divided by bay projections, into which double-ganged

windows will be fit on each floor. This is likely to look cramped, with unusual proportions and narrow windows and masonry corners. The bays should be eliminated from the sixteen-foot-wide houses.

3. Roof decks are generally not objectionable when integrated into new construction as these are, bounded by a parapet. The rows' irregular side/end elevations created by the loft might be resolved by placing the stair pop-ups more in the center of the roofs, over the party walls so that one structure can cover the stairs in two adjoining homes. This could also help visually screen the decks from each other, avoiding owners seeking fences atop their houses. It may also help separate the decks from rooftop mechanical.
4. The side/end elevations show the buildings' front masonry corners going straight up. But the elevations depict mostly mansard roofs, which would be canted rearward. This suggests that the mansards would be sandwiched by firewalls that do not appear in the elevations.
5. It is recommended that the ganged-window-and-panel arrangements that appear in the upper elevation on page 18 and the lower elevation on page 20 be eliminated in favor of punched openings. The inspiration for this arrangement is a larger historic building on campus, one of a different type and use. The impression given by the brick piers framing the windows and panels on three abutting houses is one of a single, monumental building. Although it is conceivable to design what appears to be a single building and divide it vertically between multiple units, that approach is less successful within an otherwise plainly townhouse row.
6. Fencing should be kept to a minimum and should be of solid steel or iron, not tubular steel or aluminum.
7. Any venting should be through the rear of the units.
8. Vinyl or vinyl-clad windows should be limited to the rear elevations. The aluminum-clad windows proposed (page 29) could be improved upon because they have odd profiles—flat but for a quarter-round projection that is presumably used for stabilizing against wracking, and perhaps serves as a screen track.
9. The applicant should bring brick samples to the hearing for the Board's review.

Recommendation

HPO recommends that the Board approve the project in concept, with it to be developed to address the comments and recommendations above, including the further depiction of the basement windows and areaways.