
**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: **September 26, 2019** (x) New construction
Case Number: **19-560**

Staff Reviewer: **Tim Dennée** (x) Design development

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, presents the development of designs to construct an apartment-retail complex in the northern tier of the campus, at the small-area plan's "Town Center" site, and an associated one-acre public plaza.

In June, the Board reviewed concepts for the buildings ("O" and "P") that flank the park/plaza.

Park

On May 24, 2018, the Board approved a concept for the park/plaza that was proposed in the campus master plan. The Board requested that the project return for review when further developed. Specifically, the Board asked to see:

1. further design development of the kiosks and pergolas, with the expectation that the pergolas shall never be roofed or enclosed;
2. simplification of the paving materials in accordance with the campus design guidelines;
3. restudy of the arc of contrasting pavement within the plaza, so its alignment has a purpose relating to elements of the park and/or the surrounding buildings;
4. restudy of the relationship of the outdoor seating to both the plaza and the walk along the face of the major buildings, so that walk does not feel isolated; and
5. the creation of onsite interpretation of the hospital's history.

The paving is nearly as various, but the color variety has been reduced. Overall, the area is divided into many "rooms" by the different paving, curbs and low walls/seating, and edged planted areas. The presumably sunken bioretention planting just inward of the Georgia Avenue right-of-way will probably not become a genuine "multifunction lawn zone," but more of a visual buffer from the street. The historical interpretation needs to be developed, but need not be limited to the subject of the Heaton Pavilion (Building 2, whose former use is more important than is its architecture or former landscape).

New building(s)

The block-long E-plan building would front 12th Street and face the plaza, standing about 80 feet tall, six residential floors above the mostly retail ground floor.

On November 2, 2017, the Board approved the concept for the new building(s), conditioned on the project being revised to address the staff-report recommendations and the Board's recommendations for:

1. less projection of the balconies on the north building and removal of the balconies from its second story;
2. refinement of the attic at the north east corner;
3. changing from faux-wood materials to real wood; and
4. installing the metal panels, especially at the north building, so as not to manifest "oil canning" and prominent joints.

The staff report had recommended:

5. specification of the materials on the rear of the building and provision of materials samples generally;
6. clarification of the relationship of "special" paving extending from the plaza across 12th Street, to the entrance of this building (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);
7. ensuring that the mechanical equipment fits within the proposed mechanical screening and penthouses to minimize their visibility;
8. more variation of the storefronts between the three sections of the building, but uniformity within, with not too much spandrel panel or stacked transoms;

Revisions

Regarding the Board recommendations above, the applicant has:

1. reduced the projection of the balconies but not removed those from the second story;
2. left the attic elevations much the same, although the fenestration has changed, vents are beginning to show, and the northwest corner has changed;
3. proposed a metal panel to mimic the wood, for non-combustibility.

The applicant has introduced some unsought revisions. One is the creation of two-story "townhouse" units on the north elevation, which puts their floors out of alignment with the rest of the elevation and necessitates large areaways.

Another is the substitution of vinyl windows at all the residential openings. The preservation design guidelines discourage vinyl windows for their finish and their typical profiles. The applicant should bring to the hearing a sample of the proposed window product (and samples of all materials). The plans compare a line drawing of the proposed product to that of an inferior aluminum product—inferior in the sense that the latter is very flat in profile and has wide frames. The most important consideration is how all the units look when mulled together (as on page 25, for instance). Most wood, vinyl and aluminum units are more suited to installation singly, in punched openings or ganged with mullions. On a building with nearly floor-to-ceiling openings, a storefront-like system, rather than a bunch of units stacked together, is more successful.

The building's southeast corner has improved. The mechanical enclosure on the south wing has grown northward but will not be too prominent.

Recommendation

HPO requests the Board's direction on the revisions of both the park and the new construction.