
**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: **January 28, 2021** (x) New construction
Case Number: **21-131** (x) Concept

The applicant, Urban Atlantic, agent for ground lessee TPWR Developer LLC, requests the Board's review of a concept application to construct a five-story, 300,000-square-foot, mixed-use building with residential over street-fronting retail, over a parking garage. The project necessitates the razing of two buildings, one noncontributing, and the other the former guardhouse (Building 38) previously approved for demolition by the Mayor's Agent.

The building would mainly face Georgia Avenue, but would also have frontage on Dahlia and 12th streets. It would back up to the historic four-story Building 7 and the noncontributing Building 6. The underground parking would be accessed from a rear driveway off 12th Street, and the loading dock from a driveway near the Georgia Avenue entrance to Main Drive, between a children's playground and historic Building 12.

The proposed building is referred to as "QRS," because the small-area plan and master plan for the campus depicted three separate placeholder buildings in this location. Q, R, and S have here been applied to sections of the new construction. At one and a half blocks, the proposed building is remarkably long, but the approach to modulating its length is fairly successful. With the use of hyphens and changes in materials, the single building is expressed as three, with minor and major recesses breaking up the mass.

The vertical organization is appropriate; there is a base, a middle, and an attic story sometimes set back. There is no penthouse; exterior HVAC would be a relatively low field of units on the rooftop—as at the project recently constructed at the campus's southeast corner—and setbacks and parapets would largely address screening. Despite its size and overall greater height, the building relates reasonably well to adjacent contributing Building 7, because the nearest portion of the new construction would be four-story wings.

One of the drawbacks to expressing a single building as three is that each has no true focal point, at least on their longest frontage. The major residential entrance is off Dahlia Street, so that the Georgia Avenue frontage presents pavilions or recesses that suggest a center and perhaps the location of an important entrance, but offer none. Instead, most of the street frontage is occupied by storefronts.

The storefronts are a conspicuous area for further development. They present an almost forced variety. Storefronts may diverge over time as tenants replace each other and the appurtenances

of business. Yet, within a newly erected building, storefronts will typically be consistent in materials, heights, fenestration and location of sign bands, perhaps with particular differences related to initial function. A principle applicable to the project as a whole is that there should be more consistency within each “building,” and more variety—of overall height, materials, colors, fenestration, storefronts—*between* Q, R and S. The same cornice, for instance, need not be employed across the entire project. Characterizing the storefronts generally, there seem to be more divisions to the glazing than necessary or even desirable, and little thought to potential HVAC intakes and exhaust. On the upper floors, however, some thought has been given to the location of vents, which should be minimized in size and number and regularized while worked into the architecture.

The Board’s comments are welcome on the exterior materials (that are not in hand, only “virtual”). Views of the rear of the building would be largely obstructed, and there lesser materials are employed, such as vinyl (windows) and fiber-cement (panels and lap siding), presenting a pretty flat aspect. The street-facing portions would be mostly clad with brick, containing aluminum-clad windows. Necessary is further information on the transition between the brick walls and the fiber-cement-clad top story. The contrasting-colored fiber-cement panels over the windows in this attic are questionable without some detail or depth. Also needing further consideration is the broad band of contrasting, apparently soldier-course brick that acts as a storefront cornice or beltcourse over the base of much of the building; it is arguably too broad, but also inconsistent in width.

It is recommended that the sliding doors opening onto projecting balconies be wholly reconsidered. In addition to not being compatible with the historic portion of the campus, they sometimes force the fenestration into an odd rhythm of alternating wide and narrow openings.

Recommendation

HPO recommends that the Board support the concept’s overall size and footprint, general massing and materials and request revisions, including especially further development of the base of the building, some fenestration changes, etc.