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

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

Meeting Date: **June 28, 2018** (x) New construction/Alteration  
Case Number: **18-368** (x) Concept

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The applicant, long-term lessee and developer TPWR Developer LLC (a joint venture of Hines-Urban Atlantic-Triden), requests the Board's review of concepts to widen and realign 12<sup>th</sup> and Dahlia Streets within the Walter Reed campus and extend 12<sup>th</sup> and Elder Streets across the present site of Building 2. The proposal also involves the raze of Building 38, the former base guardhouse.

The work would be part of a larger road-improvement project that the Board reviewed in schematic form in the 2015 campus master plan. The Board supported the proposed road improvements in general, but asked for additional information on the proposed finished topography of the segment of 12<sup>th</sup> Street between historic Buildings 1 and 7, the latter of which stands immediately south of Building 38. But the Board found that razing Building 38 is contrary to the purposes of the preservation law, pointing out that, if the applicant proceeds to the Mayor's Agent, a project of special merit would have to be developed for the reuse of the site. The roadwork itself is now put forward as a special-merit project necessitating the removal of Building 38.

Most of the campus's road improvements would be extensions and widenings of existing streets or the re-establishment of the Highway Plan grid that was superseded by the Army medical center's roadway system. Most changes—and especially the streets crisscrossing the site of the soon-to-be-demolished Building 2—would have little impact on historic resources.

The widening of Dahlia Street will bring paving closer to the rear wing of Building 1, resulting in the demolition of a modern concrete stair outside its north entrance, but the original entry stoop will remain. The proximity does not harm the character of the resource and would be useful to a building that is proposed for a hotel/conference use. Dahlia was never a through street, but re-grading and the connection of its segments will make it the second and most direct east-west route across the campus, so it needs to be sufficiently commodious.<sup>1</sup>

The biggest proposed change from historic alignments is the alteration of 12<sup>th</sup> Street between Dahlia and Main Drive. From its present straight run, it would be widened and incorporate two

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<sup>1</sup> Dahlia Street was expected to be only a bicycle and pedestrian path on the western half of the campus, running between foreign chancery parcels. Now, it will be the dividing line between a Department of State foreign missions center and the facilities of the Children's National Medical Center, so it will presumably become a means of automobile access to both.

curves. The reasons for the curves are two. First, there is a considerable drop in grade from Dahlia Street, and simply ramping up the present road to that level would make it too steep; the northern curve increases the run, moderating the slope. The southern curve is used to create a T intersection with Main Drive, to eliminate a more dangerous acute angle and three-way intersection. The broader 12<sup>th</sup> Street would approach historic Building 7 (see Sheet CIV0432), possibly removing a later approach stair. But the full effects of the road work cannot be evaluated from the materials presented, because we do not have a section showing the proposed finished grade beyond the right-of-way. As the Board observed in 2015, this piece of the roadway needs more study, perhaps sections and a site plan showing proposed topographic contours.

The principal potential effect of the roadwork in this area—and the reason for this submission at this time—is the proposed demolition of Building 38. The vicinity map shown in the present plans depicts all of 12<sup>th</sup> and much of Dahlia, as well as Elder, but the details focus on just the 12<sup>th</sup> and Dahlia intersection. The plans do not address road improvements elsewhere, including 13<sup>th</sup> Street, Main Drive, etc. The roadway realignments require further development, to better illustrate their effects on the historic buildings expected to remain.

As depicted on most of the sheets, the proposed eastern edge of the 12<sup>th</sup> Street right-of-way encroaches on the building. That does not mean that the roadway itself encroaches, however, or that the adjacent sidewalk or bioretention areas (shown on Sheet L0110) must. No, the greatest threat to the building is the re-grading, which could pile up earth as much as a story high at the rear of the historic building. It is conceivable that this load could be held off the building with a retaining wall, at some cost, but such a wall would have to be located very near the building. The burden will be on the applicant to demonstrate to the Mayor's Agent that this part of the road improvements is a project necessary in the public interest and that there is no feasible alternative to building the streets as shown.

### **Recommendation**

*HPO recommends that the Board approve the concept for the road construction in this location, with the following conditions:*

- 1. that Building 38 not be razed unless approved by the Mayor's Agent as necessary in the public interest, as the demolition of a contributing building would fail to retain and enhance the building, or be compatible with the character of the historic district or consistent with the purposes of the preservation law; and*
- 2. that the road-improvement project be further developed and reviewed by the Board, particularly as it relates to the proposed finished grades and their relationships to historic buildings and adjacent and contributing landscapes, both in this immediate vicinity and as planned elsewhere.*

*Staff contact: Tim Dennee*