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

Landmark/District: **Walter Reed Army Medical Center Historic District** Agenda
Address: **7101 13th Street NW¹**

Meeting Date: **June 30, 2022** New construction
Case Number: **22-332** Concept

The applicant, Toll Brothers Apartment Living, builder and agent for long-term lessee TPWR Developer LLC, requests the Board’s review of a concept to construct a five-story apartment building on the east side of 13th Street, north of historic Building 1 and backing up to another project the Board reviewed in 2019.

Like most of the new-construction projects at Walter Reed, this one stretches a block, visually divided into smaller parts to suggest multiple buildings. Proximate to the most important historic building, it has a quieter, more institutional feeling than some of the other residential projects, eschewing balconies/decks, for instance, in favor of stronger compatibility with the historic fabric.

The setback hipped-roof penthouse(s) is generally successful and properly Georgian, but it becomes too much of a good thing when extended across the whole project. It unifies parts that are instead trying to be at least somewhat distinct, and it constrains efforts to ameliorate this. Holding a single sea-level elevation across the project makes the northern end too squat—a penthouse over just two stories and a raised basement—because of the higher grade coupled with the lowering effect of the setback. These two related problems would be helped by *not* setting back at the uppermost level at the north end, instead carrying the primary walls straight up, breaking the penthouse pattern, and effectively stepping the project with the grade. One challenge is that the applicant reports that doing so would enclose more area than the project is entitled to under zoning’s floor-area-ratio rules. It points to the larger difficulty of extending a single building over a long, sloping frontage.

Because of the squatness of the north end, the degree to which it is sunk into areaways is especially apparent, but the extent of areaways is pretty remarkable around all the street-facing elevations, and something that tends to undermine the building and separate it from the public realm by excavation and railings. Maintaining a reasonable symmetry of the tripartite southern half of the project along 13th Street requires sinking the northern “wing” into the rising grade, but the areaways should be studied more carefully elsewhere.

In its tripartite organization, the southern half of the building works reasonably well. The engaged portico helps scale the building and properly signals the major entrance. The upper

¹ No street number had been assigned to project, but this will likely be its address based on the block and orientation.

canopy seems superfluous, however, neither useful as a covering nor visually compelling or compatible with the expression of the rest of the building. It should be eliminated.

The northern half of the building has less clarity of composition. The northernmost mass is narrow, turned end-on to 13th Street. It seems this end should be anchored by a larger mass, to balance that of the south end—again, something that would be helped by greater apparent height, but also greater width/depth, taken out of the lighter-colored intermediate mass. This latter piece seems tentative about what it should be, betwixt and between, not quite reading as its own building, nor the wing of another. An alternative approach might recompose it as one with the northernmost mass.

Recommendation

HPO recommends that the Board support the overall plan, height and materials, but request revisions to address the issues raised above.