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

Landmark/District:	Walter Reed Army Medical Center Historic District	(x) Agenda
Address:	7185 13th Street NW	
Meeting Date:	May 23, 2019	(x) Alteration
Case Number:	19-319	(x) Permit

The applicant, property owner Children’s National at Walter Reed LLC, requests the Board’s review of a permit application to construct a solar array to cover the entire upper deck of the five-tier Building 3, Water Reed’s northernmost parking garage. The panels would be tilted to best catch the sun’s rays from the south.

Constructed in 1993, the huge garage does not contribute to the character of a historic district whose period of significance ends in 1956. Like many of the campus’s later and utility structures, it was erected near the perimeter of the campus. It stands close to three contributing buildings (52, 53 and 54) that are also in the ownership of the applicant and undergoing review for a federal tax-credit-assisted rehabilitation.¹ It should be noted that these are not delicate little buildings. One is a taller, mostly windowless, concrete laboratory building, built in the mid-1950s to withstand an atomic blast; another is a similarly blank brick-faced-block theater; and the third is a three-story 1930 hospital-ward barracks. On the other sides of the garage is parking, a tennis court, another noncontributing building and, formerly, the enormous 1970s Building 2, now demolished.

This installation is not unlike some other solar “canopy” projects that have been introduced on large parcels, such as at the hospital parking lots at Saint Elizabeths. In this case, however, the parking and the “canopies” are atop a building rather than ground-mounted. The upper tier cannot be occupied by both cars and solar panels without the latter being elevated well above the paving.

The preservation design guidelines for rooftop solar installations state that they should be concealed from street views. The guidelines offer little guidance on conditions such as this, where the array becomes a visible roof on a noncontributing, accessory building. The garage is visible from many points; there is no concealing these panels and their support structure. The garage is already a visual intrusion in the historic campus, albeit one that has stood for a quarter century. The solar canopy would somewhat affect its appearance, but it is essentially just putting a roof on the uppermost tier. It does not fundamentally alter its effect on the character of the historic campus. The same would not be true, perhaps, in more of a neighborhood context, where a noncontributing building were hemmed in by contributing ones and not at a campus edge among other noncontributing features.

¹ Modification of this adjacent building will presumably require an amendment to that rehab application for approval by the National Park Service.

Recommendation

HPO recommends that the Board recommend clearance of the permit as compatible with the character of the historic district and consistent with the purposes of the preservation law.