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

Landmark/District: **Walter Reed Army Medical Center** (x) Agenda
Address: **7144 13th Place NW**

Meeting Date: **June 22, 2023** (x) Alteration
Case Number: **23-366** (x) Concept

The applicant, Irene Thompson, agent for owner Children’s National Hospital, requests the Board’s review of a concept to add exterior and rooftop mechanical to Building 54. There is demolition of existing mechanical and of some non-character-defining elements, plus interior work, which is the subject of most of the plans.

Building 54, completed in 1955, contributes to the character of the historic district. The former Armed forces Institute for Pathology, it accommodated medical research laboratories for the study of disease. The institute was the culmination of a vision for uniting important Army medical institutions on a single campus, and its date is the terminal date for the historic district’s period of significance. The most Modernistic of the campus buildings, it was designed by Faulkner, Kingsbury and Stenhouse in reinforced concrete, meant to withstand an atomic bomb blast. A 1972 addition housed Army Medical Museum and Library. After the closure of the hospital, this parcel was transferred to Children’s National Hospital for laboratories and ancillary uses. The building’s rehabilitation is being reviewed as a potential federal tax credit project that also involves adding some windows to the largely blank walls, etc. The work depicted here is the subject of a currently proposed amendment to the initial tax credit submission. But the magnitude and character of this work requires Board review under the preservation law.

For the purpose of concept review, the two most important aspects of the work are the mechanical equipment and mechanical screening. Comparison of the proposed and existing conditions is easiest for looking at pages 29 through 32 of the concept presentation which includes perspectives.

Building 54 already had considerable exterior mechanical equipment, but the volume to be enclosed for that use is much greater. At the northeast corner of the building (page 32), very tall screening obscures from the north an original mechanical enclosure built from the same concrete as the building. The new work is essentially a mechanical addition. The west side of the building was its primary façade, and this side was treated as the rear, but the building was designed in the round, and the east is now effectively the primary entrance, with a new vestibule for the purpose. access from 13th place and the parking garage and two other buildings owned by the hospital.¹

¹ To provide foreign chancery sites, the State Department acquired the parcel immediately to the west and fenced it, putting the former main entrance at the terminus of a drive just this side of the common property boundary.

The more serious change is the rooftop work, as it is more prominent from several vantage points, affecting the roofline. The prior mechanical was lower, with some enclosed within the original, concrete penthouse. Very tall screening would partly encapsulate this penthouse, and the mechanical extends still taller, becoming the focal point at the top of the building.

The HVAC needs of a large laboratory building presumably necessitate such interventions, but HPO cannot clear them as compatible and requests the Board's input and decision.²

Recommendation

HPO requests the Board's direction on the concept.

² The National Park Service has not yet weighed in on the eligibility of the exterior work presented here. It would have been helpful to have this information earlier in that review.