HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD
STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION

Landmark/District:	**Walter Reed Army Medical Center Historic District**	(**x**) Agenda
Address:	**6800 Georgia Avenue NW**	
Meeting Date:	**October 5, 2017**	(**x**) New construction
Case Number:	**17-304**	(**x**) Alterations
Staff Reviewer:	**Tim Dennée**	(**x**) Design development

The applicant, TPWR Developer LLC, a joint venture of Hines-Urban Atlantic-Triden and the lessee of the District-owned portion of the Walter Reed campus, returns with design development of its proposal to construct an apartment-condominium-retail complex at the south corner of the campus, adjacent to contributing buildings 8 and 9 (General Officers Quarters) and 90 (fire station).

The Board first reviewed this project on May 4, in a hearing that was continued to May 25. The Board approved the project in concept, as revised in the interim, with the condition that the applicant address the staff comments [see attached May staff report] and the Board's following comments, with the Board to review later the design's development:

1. other colors may be considered for the attic/penthouse fiber-cement panels;
2. the landscapes around the buildings may be distinct from each other, but they must better relate to the buildings;
3. there should be no fences within the park-like space between Building A and Buildings 8 and 9; and
4. the courtyard within the U-shaped Building A should be shown in elevations, and the south façade brick should return farther into the courtyard.

The following is the project team's summary of revisions since May:

Building A (located at the corner of Georgia Avenue and Aspen Street NW):

- An alternate color was studied for the top floor per Board comments; however, the unified color palette is preferred.
- Brick has been extended into the courtyard the depth of two additional bays, improving the appearance when viewed from the corner of Georgia and Aspen.
- Courtyard elevations are included (Sheet 7) showing the previously proposed elevations and revised elevations.
- The fenestration has been revised in response to unit design.
- The penthouse material has been revised from the cementitious panel to a cementitious clapboard siding on all three buildings
- On the north side, Building A has shifted south two feet, increasing the space between Building A and historic Buildings 8 and 9

- Railings above the ground floor retail along Georgia Avenue and above the one-story bays on the north elevation have been set back.

Building B (located along Aspen Street and Cameron Drive):
- The base material has been revised to painted concrete with horizontal score lines (now matching the base on Building C).
- The balconies have been removed from along Aspen and Cameron Streets.
- Fenestration has been revised in response to the unit designs.
- The penthouse material has been revised from the cementitious panel to a cementitious clapboard siding on all three buildings.
- The stepped garden wall has been removed, replaced with a sloping landscape buffer between the sidewalk and building.

Building C (Cameron Drive along the Officer's Walk, wrapping the historic Fire Station (Building 90))
- The fenestration at the lobby entrance has been revised in response to HPO and HPRB comments.
- The fenestration has been revised in response to the unit designs.
- The penthouse material has been revised from the cementitious panel to a cementitious clapboard siding on all three buildings

Landscaping
- Landscape plans have evolved and been further defined throughout the site.
- North of Building A, fencing has been removed from residential yards, replaced with landscaped borders.

Evaluation

It is seldom that a project of this size undergoes only a single Board review. The complexity means that there are always questions at the conceptual level whose answers are only revealed through further development. That is why the Board requested a second review.

A comparison of the perspective drawings for Buildings B and C indicate that they would now be a several feet taller. The packet does not contain the same "before" and "after" drawings for Building A, but as the floors are intended to align, it too, is presumably a bit taller.

As yet there are no roof plans, and the elevations do not depict rooftop mechanical equipment. Only the perspective drawings for Building A show glimpses of its mechanical penthouses, and only the perspective on page 16 suggests units atop Building C, and a mechanical enclosure peeking out from the center of the roof of Building B.

Materials

The exterior building materials have not developed quite as expected. The principal issues are new ones: the proposed use of vinyl windows throughout and a revised base for Building B to be of painted concrete.

Vinyl windows are generally approved on rear elevations of buildings in historic districts. They may be approved on side elevations mostly obscured from public view. But it would be difficult to

compare these campus buildings, seen in the round, to the typical house. The historic preservation regulations (10C DCMR § 2312) state that:

> Windows in new construction within an historic district should be appropriate for the building and in most cases generally consistent in character with the windows found in the historic district. Windows should generally be made of the materials characteristic of similar building types within the historic district. This guidance is intended to promote design compatibility with historic buildings and districts, rather than to discourage good contemporary design or creative architectural expression.

Vinyl windows are not good substitutes for traditional windows, as they do not resemble them in their profiles or finishes. Vinyl windows tend to have broad, squarish sections of sash and frame. The fact that so many window units are to be mulled together in the proposed project suggests that the ganged windows will look especially blocky. If the ganged windows have mullions between them, as suggested on page 10, for instance, then these would almost certainly be wrapped with vinyl. Then there's the question of appropriate brick molds, as such flat windows would certainly have to be set back into their openings to provide some relief to the elevations. Finally, the false muntins in even the best vinyl windows are not good substitutes for traditional muntins. Most often, they are between the interior and exterior glazing. This would be an issue on Buildings B and C, which have multiple lights of glazing.

The design guidelines for the historic district identify most of the existing windows as wood or metal, concluding that "The following materials are character defining for the campus:… Windows and window trim are painted wood." The campus guidelines recommend that traditionally inspired buildings draw from some of the details of the historic windows. Aluminum or aluminum-clad windows can be more suitable than vinyl as they often have better profiles and muntins and even a better finish.

The revised base of Building B is proposed to be of painted concrete. There are many elements on the campus that are concrete: curbs, foundations, slabs, steps fountains, etc. But the design guidelines properly state that "Concrete exists as a secondary material. For example, concrete is found in building entry stairs and sidewalks." The material is not a primary façade material. According to the design guidelines:

> As a defining element, it is desired that Walter Reed continue to read as a campus.
> a) In order to maintain a campus reading new buildings should:
> 1) See adjacent diagram for suggested campuswide primary material pattern.
> 2) Incorporate brick in buildings, and other compatible materials, that reflect the campus character and the surrounding neighborhood. The suggested use of brick is intended to provide a coherent sense of campus across The Parks at Walter Reed, but should not result in an all brick community.
> 3) Have one primary material, but also incorporate a secondary material.
> 4) The corners of Georgia Avenue and Aspen Street, and Georgia Avenue and Fern Street, act as markers and their position makes them the first buildings that are experienced as part of the campus. The prominent corner architectural feature/building segment at these corners should consider having brick to reinforce the historic campus character and image of Walter Reed.

It is conceivable that some new buildings could have some concrete foundation exposed or otherwise use it as a secondary material for some details, but one expects brick to come to the ground. The rusticated base of Building B is a major feature of its elevations. At eye level, the concrete will be the more conspicuous for its contrast with the adjacent brick. It will lack the vertical joints and the textured surface of the brick. It would also be practical to avoid having to maintain a painted surface in contact with the ground.

The occupied penthouses are now shown as having horizontal fiber-cement lap siding. This gives them some texture, but they could also end up looking somewhat shed-like in contrast to the floors below.

The extension of the brick into the courtyard of Building A is a great improvement, although the building would be further improved by continuing the brick inward an additional bay's depth, so the joint between the materials cannot be seen from the intersection of Georgia Avenue and Aspen Street.

Landscaping

The important preservation principle to be observed for the landscape between Building A and historic Buildings 8 and 9 is that it serve as a buffer for the historic buildings without being interrupted by fence-type barriers. Some paving for individual patios is proposed, but most of the area on either side of the walk is to be planted. Fencing has been eliminated in favor of planted berms bounding the private patios.

Special paving at the corner of Georgia and Aspen seems out of place, as the sidewalk should be similar to the rest of the campus frontage. More appropriate locations for special paving are those that are functionally differentiated from the standard sidewalks and streets, such as the apron in front of the firehouse and the new loading drive/pedestrian circulation between these three new buildings (see yellow areas on page 27). Celebrating this intersection with paving and sculpture is unnecessary, because it will already be the campus's "100-percent corner" in terms of highest visibility and accessibility. There is no reason to object to sculpture per se, but it makes less sense on Aspen Street—which must accommodate commercial and residential entrances plus a new multi-use through-trail—than at numerous spots within the campus, into which people should be drawn by such flourishes. We should take a broad and long view of the campus as a whole and in all its particulars, rather than going for broke on this first project. Resources to be expended on special paving and sculpture would be better dedicated to quality materials for the buildings themselves.

Potential Building T

The drawings portray a building site west of Buildings 8 and 9. That is not part of this application, nor did it appear in the 2015 master plan. The Board excepted this potential lot from its conceptual approval of parcel subdivisions last year, and any such project would have to be reviewed on its own merits in the context of the Buildings 8 and 9 and the adjacent copse of trees.

Recommendation

HPO recommends that the Board delegate to staff further review, with the conditions that the windows be aluminum or aluminum-clad with traditional profiles and dimensions; and the base of Building B not be of concrete, but of brick.