

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

Property Address:	1800 Columbia Road NW	X	Agenda
Landmark/District:	Washington Heights Historic District		Consent Calendar
Meeting Date:	June 23, 2016	X	Concept Review
H.P.A. Number:	16-388	X	New Construction
Staff Reviewer:	Anne Brockett		Alteration

P.N. Hoffman and Potomac Investment Properties, working with architects at Eric Colbert & Associates, seek conceptual design review for construction of a new retail and residential building of seven stories plus a penthouse. The triangular lot is currently occupied by a non-contributing bank building and paved open plaza. It was historically occupied first by the Knickerbocker Theater, which partially collapsed in 1922, and then by Ambassador Theater, demolished in 1969. Both buildings covered the entire lot, standing 4 stories in height.

Project Description

The design calls for a tripartite, traditionally-inspired apartment building of brick and precast stone construction with alternating brick and metal bays. A tall retail level, clad in cast stone, provides the base for five stories of residential units above, with a setback 7th floor, and a penthouse above that. The building fills the triangular lot, but holds back from the corner at Columbia and 18th to allow some open space recalling the existing plaza, to give a little more breathing space along the sidewalk, and to allow views around the building. Projecting bays line both the 18th Street and Columbia Road side with alternating brick and metal construction. On the Columbia Road side is a more prominent treatment at the main entrance, with the cast stone framing the entrance doors and rising up to the second floor. Balconies on the Columbia Road side project out in various locations creating a rhythmic but not overbearing presence.

The 7th floor is set back 13' on the Columbia Road side and 17' on the 18th Street side and is pulled in further on the south and north ends. The 7th floor is constructed of the same brick as below, but features larger openings. The penthouse, which would be clad in curved walls of EIFS, is set back 12' from the 7th floor.

On the south end of the 18th Street elevation, the building steps down two floors to align with the façade plane of the low-scale historic buildings next door and to provide a transition between their heights. This bay of the building is also recessed 4' from the main block and contains the garage entrance with a projecting bay above.

The treatment of the small plaza is with a variety of paving materials and patterns and seat walls framing organically shaped planting beds.

Evaluation

The existing bank building and its forecourt plaza, constructed in 1978, were built outside the period of significance for the Washington Heights Historic District (1891-1950). The demolition of the building and plaza do not raise preservation concerns.

The historical development patterns of the Washington Heights Historic District and the adjacent Kalorama Triangle Historic District provide the context and rationale for constructing a substantially-

sized building on this large site. The expansion of streetcar lines along Columbia Road in 1897 opened the corridor up to intensive development, and the land along it was quickly deemed too valuable for the rowhouse construction that predominated on the neighborhood's side streets. Between 1895 and 1925, more than a dozen large-scale apartment buildings were constructed along Columbia Road (with others constructed outside the periods of significance of the corridor's two historic districts). The proposal's seven stories (70' as measured from Columbia Road) is compatible with this context of 6-9 story historic buildings along the corridor. While more often separated by an alley or shallow rear yard, it is not unusual for these historic apartment buildings to also abut smaller rowhouses. The proposal's use of a four-story massing element provides a needed transition between the different heights and street planes of the new construction and the historic buildings to the south.

The proposed height also has to be judged within the context of the proportions of its lot, the width of its street frontages, and its corner lot location. Like the historic apartment buildings on the Columbia Road corridor, the project's 70 foot height is proportional to its wide frontage, such that its height-to-width ratio is commensurate with those found in the historic district. A lower height would likely result in a building mass that would be horizontal in its emphasis, which would be uncharacteristic of buildings in the historic district. The proposal appropriately uses narrow projections and vertically-oriented windows to enhance the verticality of the elevations.

Since initially submitted, the project has evolved over several design iterations, and substantial revisions made to improve its massing, and the scale of its projections, fenestration, and storefronts. As the design continues to be developed, it is recommended that further study be given to the following:

- 1) Refining the scale and detailing of the large three-part window systems;
- 2) Further reducing the scale and enhancing the detailing of the storefronts;
- 3) Developing the detailing for the masonry and the projecting bays (including lowering the height and/or reducing the weight of the parapets on the projecting bays);
- 4) Further developing the form, design and materials of the penthouse to ensure that it is fully integrated into the building's design;

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Board find the concept compatible with the historic district and consistent with the purposes of the preservation act contingent on further refinement of the design as outlined above.