

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:	October 27, 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, return to the Board for concept review to construct a new retail and residential building at 18th Street and Columbia Road in the Washington Heights Historic District. The triangular lot is currently occupied by a non-contributing bank building and paved open plaza.

In June of this year, the Board had no objection to the removal of the existing bank building and its forecourt plaza, constructed in 1978, or to the erection of a substantial building on this site. However, the Board took no formal action on the concept, instead making a number of recommendations for improving the compatibility of the design.

Project Description

The overall concept for a 7-story building, with recessed top floor remains the same, although with some significant modifications in response to HPO and HPRB comments:

- The overall building height has been lowered by 5 feet;
- The mechanical penthouse has been removed and rooftop mechanicals have been shifted to a lower roof, where they are shielded by a parapet;
- The interior floor plate has been stepped down on 18th Street to lower the height of the storefronts as they follow the descending street grade southward;
- The 18th Street façade has been reworked to better address the adjacent historic buildings (as described below);
- Metal bays have been replaced by masonry bays;
- Projecting balconies have been eliminated in favor of recessed balconies;
- Traditional punched windows are used on all elevations between the storefronts and top floor;
- The oriel over the garage entrance has been removed.

The most substantial change is the redesign of the 18th Street side of the building, which has been split into two parts. The northern portion continues the design aesthetic and the use of buff brick of the Columbia Road side and wraps the corner. The southern portion has been designed as a distinct red brick edifice that is lower in height and steps even lower with a “rear addition” where the new construction abuts the end of the historic row of buildings. The bays on the buff and red brick parts of the building have been shifted so that they are proportional to the building elements on which they are located. The cornices, string courses, and storefronts have been treated differently to differentiate the two parts of the façade.

Evaluation

The elimination of a mechanical penthouse, decreased heights, change in massing, and the 18th Street design modifications are all successful in improving the compatibility of the design with the surrounding historic context. The 7 story height is compatible with the Columbia Road context of 6-9

story historic apartment buildings, as was discussed in the previous report. Similarly, the stepped down, red brick southern portion of the building, which eliminates the previous 2-story oriel over the garage, provides a more contextual transition that is compatible with the heights of buildings extending southward on 18th Street.

The massing and proportions, too, are compatible with the surrounding context and historic district, eliminating projecting balconies, mimicking the neighborhood's rhythm of bays, and adapting a more typical ratio of masonry to glass. The material palette is also appropriate, although the HPO recommends smooth finish on the red brick, rather than a screen or tapestry finish.

As the design progresses, the HPO will work with the design team on cornice and brickwork details, materials selection, and the treatment of the forecourt, a design for which has not been fully fleshed out.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Board find the concept compatible with the historic district and consistent with the purposes of the preservation act and delegate final approval to staff.