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

Landmark/District	Mount Vernon Triangle Historic District	(x) Agenda
Address	443-459 Eye Street Avenue NW	() Consent Calendar
Meeting Date	February 2, 2006	(x) Alteration/Demolition
H P A Number	06-064	(x) New Construction
Date Received	6/23/05	(x) Subdivision
Staff Reviewer.	David Maloney	(x) Conceptual Design

Walnut Street Development and Hellmuth, Obata + Kassabaum architects seek conceptual review of a development project in the newly designated Mount Vernon Triangle Historic District (the designation is expected to be effective in the next few months) The Board heard an informational presentation on the project on December 15, 2005, and gave preliminary comments on the initial concept

Historic Buildings

The historic buildings on the project site are.

- Central Auto Works at 443-51 Eye Street, NW, a two-story concrete-framed automobile garage built in sections between 1918 and 1929.
- William Beuchert blacksmith shop, 443 Eye Street Rear, a two-story brick and wood frame structure built in 1912;
- 445 Eye Street Rear, a two-story brick addition to the blacksmith shop, built in 1915,
- The John Wyess House at 453 Eye Street, a three-story brick row dwelling in Second Empire style, built about 1876-78, and
- The Charles Hermann House at 455 Eye Street, a similar three-story brick row dwelling built in 1883

Non-contributing buildings on the site are:

- A one-story brick garage or warehouse at 457 Eye Street, probably from the 1950s,
- An insignificant brick garage at the rear of 453 Eye Street, dating from 1915, and
- A collapsed brick garage at the rear of 455 Eye Street, dating from 1919

Proposed Project

The proposed project is a 130-unit apartment building incorporating the historic buildings on the site The two rowhouses would be rehabilitated as separate walk-up units The non-contributing buildings would be replaced with major new construction that would also extend above the auto service garage and the addition to the blacksmith's shop The original blacksmith's shop would be rehabilitated with no construction directly above it

Structural support for the new apartment building would be needed through the existing buildings so that demolition would not be required Excavation for a parking garage would be limited to the area of the site where buildings are to be cleared

Mount Vernon Triangle Development Issues

The staff expects to submit development guidelines for the Mount Vernon Triangle Historic District for Board consideration by the time the designation becomes effective. These guidelines will address the unique development circumstances and historic characteristics of this district. The area is zoned for maximum density new construction, and there are several vacant lots within the district on which construction of large new buildings is anticipated (the applicant's submission shows for example a possible building envelope on the adjacent site). The staff expects proposals similar to this project on other sites. In the interim, the staff recommends that the Board judge the compatibility of this project on the basis of its existing policies and precedents, giving due consideration to the zoning regulations. This may be viewed as perhaps a test case to formulate more concrete development standards that may be applicable specifically to Mount Vernon Triangle.

Evaluation and Recommendations

While the proposed building is very large, the applicant has attempted to retain the historic buildings in a sympathetic if dense urban context. The proposal is successful in disposing the basic mass of the building so that the maximum amount of open space is retained around the most important and most delicate historic structures, namely the two rowhouses and the blacksmith's shop. New construction directly above the historic buildings is limited to the more industrial structures, consistent with the Board's sometimes more relaxed standard to allow greater intervention in such structures.

The architects have responded directly to the Board's initial comments by pushing the new construction as far back to the alley as possible, staying off the footprint of the blacksmith's shop, and stepping back from the west side of the rowhouses so that their mansard roofs remain free-standing. A rectilinear building mass is also retained throughout, eliminating the idea of an angled façade above the auto works.

These revisions have substantially improved the project massing relative to the historic structures. The architects have also begun to organize the elevations so that they will read as distinct but compatible contemporary additions. As the plans are developed, the staff recommends the following be considered:

- It may be useful to express the building mass and elevations as a series of interlocking blocks, with a tall central core and secondary wings stepping down to the historic structures. As shown, the east wing is effective at stepping down to the Auto Works with a mediating block expressed with a different skin. The west wing is perhaps less effective because it is part of an irregular U-shaped mass that could be more elegant if subdivided into simple geometric shapes that could be emphasized by changes in skin type. Lowering the west wing by removing the architectural embellishment and perhaps one floor would help to make its mass distinct from the background block. This should also help organize the elevations. Some kind of break in the plane of the long side wall (which is not a party wall) could also help differentiate the components of the design.
- The continuous oriel projection over the building line at the west wing should be reconsidered. This element should probably be no more than about a third the width of the frontage of the wing, which would relate to the proportions of the adjacent rowhouses. If somewhat lower than the full height of the wing, the oriel would also help introduce a

mediating scale to the facades

- Similarly, on the rear alley elevation, dropping the top floor or two in the “industrial window” section would help to create a variegated alleyscape and rationale for changing skin types
- Allowing the building mass to align directly above the side alley façade of the auto works helps to depose the mass effectively on the site, but it creates an inherently awkward architectural condition. One way to deal with this could be to express the upper building as an object floating above the alley walls. This may be particularly appropriate here as it was at the Tenleytown Sears project (the new building is in reality to be structurally separate; the upper walls can easily be cantilevered, and the suggestion of a rooftop deck is apposite for a vehicular garage)

The staff recommends the Board support the revisions made to date and request refinement of the project design for further review by the Board

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Landmark/District	Mount Vernon Triangle Historic District	(x) Agenda
Address	443-459 Eye Street Avenue NW	() Consent Calendar
Meeting Date:	March 23, 2006	(x) Alteration/Demolition
H P A. Number	06-064	(x) New Construction
Date Received	2/23/06	(x) Subdivision
Staff Reviewer	David Maloney	(x) Conceptual Design

Walnut Street Development and Hellmuth, Obata + Kassabaum architects has submitted revised concept plans for a development project in the newly designated Mount Vernon Triangle Historic District (the designation was officially noticed in the *D C Register* on February 24 and is effective March 26, 2006). The Board heard an informational presentation on the project in December 2005 and reviewed the concept on February 2, 2006.

The project involves rehabilitation of the Central Auto Works at 443-51 Eye Street (built 1918-20), the William Beuchert blacksmith shop at 443 Eye Street Rear (built 1912-15), and two Second Empire rowhouses at 453 and 455 Eye Street (built 1876-78 and 1883). Three non-contributing garages on the site would be demolished. The non-contributing buildings would be replaced with a new apartment building that would also extend above the auto service garage and the addition to the blacksmith's shop. Structural columns for the new apartment building would extend through the existing buildings so that demolition would not be required.

Evaluation and Recommendations

The basic massing of the building remains essentially the same as reviewed previously by the Board. The large mass is disposed so that the maximum amount of open space is retained around the Second Empire rowhouses and the blacksmith's shop. New construction above the Central Auto Works steps down toward the front in an intermediate step that helps unify the disparate structures into a coherent streetscape. On the alley, a similar series of elements steps down to the historic blacksmith's shop.

The applicant has incorporated Board and staff comments in revising the architectural design. The massing and facades are now clearer and simpler, with fewer skin types and a more unified expression overall. The facades are based on repetitive grids, yet overt references to the industrial sash of the historic garage are eliminated in favor of a more modern expression in two types—a glass curtain wall and a masonry skin with narrow brick piers and spandrels. Both grids are at a large scale, relating to the large openings in the auto works, yet both echo the lightness of the industrial windows—the glass curtain wall in its sophisticated elegance, and the brick wall in the tracery effect of the thin grid. Balconies are also redeployed so their effect is far more subtle, creating vertical recesses that accentuate the massing components. The block above the auto works now floats effectively, and its glass frontispiece is an elegant counterpoint to the older billboard-like façade. The tall oriel has also been reduced to a 3-foot projection, bringing it into better proportion.

Recommendation

The staff recommends that the Board take the following action

- Find the concept compatible with the character of the historic district,
- Request the applicant to continue working with the staff during the design development stage, and submit design details, the preservation scope of work, and materials selection for final review at the end of design development; and
- Consult with the Board archaeologist on any potential archaeological issues

This action is valid for a period of two years under DCMR 10A Section 332 It should not be construed as an endorsement of any needed zoning relief.