
HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION

Landmark/District:	Mount Pleasant Historic District	(x) Agenda
Address:	3146 16th Street, NW	() Consent
Meeting Date:	December 15, 2011	(x) New construction
Case Number:	11-345	(x) Addition
		(x) Alterations
Staff Reviewer:	Tim Dennée	(x) Concept

The applicant, contract purchaser Bozzuto Homes, Inc., with Martinez and Johnson Architecture, requests the Board's conceptual review of a proposal to convert a church to residential use, to demolish the rear of the building, to make some exterior alterations, and to add taller side and rear additions. The Board first reviewed the proposal in July and approved in concept the demolition of the rear of the building and the general design approach to the additions (i.e., the height and massing and the setback of the side addition even with the façade of the church) in concept, with the conditions that the mechanical equipment and penthouses must be located and concealed and that the design continue to be revised and refined. The Board approved in concept terrace alterations to the church roof if they can be concealed from public view (see page 39). The Board did not support the concept of the new window openings in the church walls.

The drawings have been substantially revised, with the exterior materials and fenestration changing. The applicant does not now propose to add new openings in the 1927-1928 limestone church. The terraces and openings at the side of the church roof appear to have been lowered and set back enough that they would likely not be visible from the ground.

The principal exterior materials of the new construction are now masonry—brick, with a limestone façade on the side addition. A roof terrace has been introduced at the front of the side addition, resulting in a set-back, partial top story.

Issues

Height and mechanical equipment: With the introduction of masonry parapets, the new construction is a few feet taller than previously, a sensitive issue given its relationship to the lower church. The step-down at the front of the side addition may help mitigate this somewhat. Hopefully, the higher parapets will hide the mechanical equipment (see page 27) because putting additional equipment or penthouses atop building would be just too tall, messy and incompatible.

Limestone façade: Constructing a limestone façade is a sufficiently compatible approach that could help relate the side addition to the church without making it look like a part of it. This kind of stonework is compatible with the staid classical institutional buildings of 16th Street.

If the material is to change from the façade to the side walls of the building, however, the transition must be made carefully. There is a long tradition of changing from a higher-grade façade material to a more common one—usually stone to brick or pressed brick to common brick, but even one type of siding to a simpler one. The return of the face material is sometimes a full structural bay—more often on some large, detached or corner buildings—but it is common to return it just a foot or two, frequently with quoins toothed into the side wall. In the present instance, the return of a bay's depth is not successful because of the setback of the top floor; it makes the limestone portion appear as a box tacked onto the front of the building. If the façade alone is limestone, it should return only a short distance, not equal to the attic setback.

Roof terrace: As suggested above, the setback of the attic story may be a good way to mediate between the height of the church and that of the apartment building to the south. It should be noted that much of the set-back portion is merely walls around a void, an additional terrace area. The openings in its front and side are just that.

The prominent canopy competes against the recess and draws too much attention to itself. A 1950s-type feature, it is out of place on 16th Street and damages the appearance of what could be an elegant massing. If a portion of the terrace is to be roofed over, this could be done within the enclosed set-back area.

Garage: Whereas in the former design, the garage opening was to be deeply recessed, the present design has it just beyond the depth of the stone façade. It is also slightly wider than previously. As drawn, the garage becomes the focal point of the composition, something that is very unfortunate in any building and especially on 16th Street. It is also of too great a scale.

While a garage door may be necessary and pardonable in this location, as this building replaces a parking lot, such a wide door is just not compatible with either the church or the building above it. It is too prominent a feature and renders the new building inscrutable and unfriendly.

Not only does the door need to be deeply set and very thoughtfully designed (both the door itself and the exterior treatment around/over it), but the opening should be narrowed as well. This would reduce the scale of the opening to more nearly the size of the large window openings above and allow the masonry to come to the ground more, without such an unnaturally wide span. By narrowing the vehicle door toward the north, it would permit another door or window at the left side of the base that could open up the building a bit more. Although this would make two-way car travel less convenient, there is sufficient space to allow one car to stop near the entrance while one traveling in the opposite direction proceeds.

The staff recommends that the Board approve the concept with a smaller and deeply set garage door flanked by a window or pedestrian door opening; with no canopy projecting forward over the roof terrace; with the limestone façade to return little beyond the corner; and with the rooftop mechanical and penthouses to be concealed from view from the ground. Further development is in order, especially of the window and door details.