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HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION

Property Address: **7051 Spring Place NW**
 Landmark/District: **Takoma Park Historic District**
 ANC: **4B**

Meeting Date: **November 1, 2012**
 H.P.A. Number: **11-518**
 Staff Reviewer: **Brendan Meyer**

☒ Agenda
☐ Consent Calendar
☐ Denial Calendar
☒ Concept Review
☐ Alteration
☒ New Construction
☐ Demolition
☒ Subdivision

The applicant, Bruce Levin (owner) seeks concept review for a 142-unit, two-building residential development in the Takoma Park Historic District. Plans were prepared by Don Tucker of EDG Architects, LLC. This case was heard by the Board once before (December 2011) at which time it received unanimous concept approval for the site plan, building footprints, massing, height, and number of units. However the Board also recommended further study of the choice of materials to reduce their complexity and commercial character and to submit elevations for secondary facades.

Property Description and Context

The existing site is tucked in an isolated corner of the Takoma Park Historic District nearly adjacent to the above-ground platform of the Takoma Park Metro station. It is a triangular shaped collection of small building lots that straddle a small public right-of-way (Bull Place). Spring Place is to the south, the rear property lines of four Chestnut Street houses are on the west, and the Metro and railroad track rights-of-way are on the north.¹

Proposal: Revised Elements

The proposal has been revised in several notable ways. Where the previous design restricted brick materials to the first floor base of the building, brick now extends through all or most floors at many corners of the two buildings, acting as cantons to the overall composition. Use of brick has also been expanded on the west elevation facing the backyards of the houses on Chestnut. Another material revision is the replacement of fiber-cement wood-grained siding with a smooth, board-and-batten fiber-cement system. The pattern of vertical and horizontal battens creates a grid of random widths which ties into the size and location of the windows. The windows themselves have been significantly reduced in size. What previously had been nearly continuous areas of sliding doors/windows and spandrel panels is now a fenestration pattern of residential scaled, individual and paired, double-hung and casement windows.

Although the site plan and massing were conceptually approved by the Board in December, some minor revisions have been made to these aspects as well. The upper-story sawtooth projections above the sidewalk along Spring Place still exist, but the entire building has been pushed back from the street four feet such that the sawtooth projections are no longer over the sidewalk. The once inset balconies are now projecting. All together, these changes have the effect of reducing the perceived number of bays. For instance, the southwest building along

¹ Being a triangular site there is no "east" side. While technically the site is angled within the street grid, this staff report uses simplified ordinal references. South is arbitrarily assigned to the Spring Place side because site plan drawings orient Spring to the bottom of the page.

Spring gave the effect of ten bays alternating between projecting bays and large inset balconies. Now the rhythm is better described as five bays with small projecting balconies attached.

The buildings are the same height as previously and the significant regrading that will lower the site is still included in the proposal. The setback on the west has been reduced slightly in one place from 17 feet to 15 feet.

Proposal: New Elements

The largely secondary north elevations and Bull Place elevations are submitted for the first time. They are extensions of the organizing system of the board-and-batten fiber cement panels. Wall planes are not sawtoothed like the projecting bays like on Spring, but rather flush with a brick ground floor. On the north elevation, facing the Metro tracks, projecting balconies are regularly stacked and spaced with privacy panels to one side between units. On Bull Place, due to its narrow 25 foot width, there are no projections, with balconies and entrances inset.

Evaluation and Recommendation

The design revisions are consistent with the Board's recommendation to simplify the elevations and reduce their commercial character. The number and color of differing materials has been reduced, the extent of glazing reduced, and the proportion of brick expanded. The overall effect is a more residential character of domestically scaled bays and windows bookended by traditional brick. Material selection also benefits from the elimination of the rustic "wood graining" in favor of a smooth finish for the fiber-cement panels.

The elevations on Bull Place and along the railroad tracks on the north, which have no dialogue or relationship with character defining elements of the historic district, are expectantly secondary and simple. Although long (175 feet on the east building and 100 feet on the west building), the north faces are enlivened by the small balconies and privacy screens without becoming monotonous. The break in the façade because of Bull Place is helpful in relieving the long elevations.

"Not incompatible" is the standard in the preservation law for new construction in historic districts. This standard allows the Board to guard against clearly incompatible new construction that would otherwise diminish the historic character of our protected neighborhoods, but it also allows the Board to be open to contemporary, modern 21st-century designs. The revised concept surpasses this standard.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Review Board:

- *find the concept design to be compatible with the character of the historic district, and consistent with the purposes of the preservation act, and delegate final approval to staff*
- *reiterate that no portion of this recommendation shall be construed as approval or endorsement for any necessary zoning relief.*