HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD
STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION

Property Address:	**2101 14th Street, NW**	**X**	Agenda
Landmark/District:	**U Street Historic District**		Consent Calendar
		X	Concept Review
Meeting Date:	**June 26, 2003**	**X**	Alteration
H.P.A. Number:	**03-288**	**X**	New Construction
Staff Reviewer:	**Steve Callcott**		Demolition
			Subdivision

The applicant, SK& I Architects for PN Hoffman, seeks on-going conceptual design review for construction of two apartment buildings on vacant land on 14th Street between V and W Streets, and renovation and roof top additions to a former laundry complex located along a mid-block alley. The project would be proposed as a planned unit development, offering a significant affordable housing component, and has been developed and refined over the past several months in consultation with the HPO and Office of Planning.

When the project was presented in April, the Board expressed support for the overall concept, accepting the additional floors on the inner-block industrial buildings, but directing the applicants to study reducing the height and providing more variety at the roof line of the buildings on 14th Street, and looking at alternative treatments for the connecting link bridge element between the two 14th Street buildings. The Board asked that elevations be provided for the blocks to the north and south along 14th Street so that the building could be better understood within that context, and that more detailed sightline studies be developed to ensure that the additional floors on the industrial buildings would not be prominently visible from or loom over the row houses on V Street.

Revisions to concept

The 14th Street elevation has been substantially revised in response to the Board's concerns. Rather than treating the link as a bridge between two separate buildings, a third building has been developed around the bridge. A tower element on the north side and a lowered height over the bridge give the new building variety in height and roof line. The width of the two flanking buildings has been reduced and the bays narrowed to create a more vertical emphasis to each.

While the applicants have worked to address the concerns regarding height, the applicants have represented that the economics of the project and the extent of affordable housing proposed as part of the PUD precludes elimination of entire floors as was suggested by the Board. However, the applicants have worked to address the Board's concerns regarding the height by setting the top two floors of the buildings further back from the lower floors between 12-15 feet in order to minimize the visibility of these top two floors

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as seen from the street. On the more traditional building to the north, an open pergola is provided at the eighth floor, both to help screen the top two floors and to provide visual interest at the roof line. More substantial set backs for the upper floors are proposed on the V and W Streets elevations, where the street-fronting mass of each building steps down to meet the smaller-scaled row houses on these streets.

Revised perspective drawings and street elevation drawings of the surrounding blocks have been prepared to show the project in relation to the surrounding historic district, and engineer-certified sight line studies have been prepared to show the visibility of the additional floors on the mid-block industrial buildings from V Street.

Evaluation

The proposed changes enhance the initial concept, improving the proportions, roof lines and visual interest of the buildings. Breaking down the 14th Street frontage into three buildings and narrowing the proportions of the projecting bays creates a rhythm that better relates to the small-scaled buildings in the historic district. The greater setbacks for the upper floors soften the buildings' height and are generally successful in de-emphasizing the top floors. The establishment of a stronger horizontal line of interest at approximately the 70-75 foot height level -- the tops of the projecting bays on the contemporary building, the top of the bridge element on the center building, and the pergola level on the more traditional building – helps in lowering the apparent height of the project.

The site line studies, revised perspective views and street elevations showing the surrounding blocks are helpful in evaluating the project's impact. The V Street sight line studies illustrate that the additional floors atop the mid-block industrial buildings would not be prominently visible, if visible at all, and certainly not loom over the small-scale houses on this block. More accurately than a model -- in terms of showing how the project would be perceived at eye level -- the perspective views illustrate how the 110 foot width of 14th Street provides ample distance between the proposed project and the smaller-scaled historic buildings across the street. The street elevation drawings show how other tall buildings – the Reeves Center, the Ellington, and the Metropolis projects – are reshaping this portion of the historic district into a more densely developed area.

Historically, major arterial streets such as 14th Street were where large scale buildings were developed, often immediately adjacent to smaller scale residential and commercial buildings. Today, this is an important characteristic of many of the city's historic districts. Sixteenth Street from the White House to Meridian Hill, and Connecticut Avenue (from Dupont Circle through Kalorama Triangle, Sheridan Kalorama, Woodley Park and Cleveland Park) -- two of the most urbanistically successful streets in the city -- illustrate how small and large buildings, when well designed, can respectfully coexist. While 90 foot buildings are less common in the 14th and U Street historic districts, they were and are still part of the character of 14th Street. In addition to the tall modern buildings present or under construction, 70-90 foot historic apartment buildings such as the Portner Flats (demolished) at 15th and U Streets, the Olympia at 14th and Euclid,

Clifton Terrace at 14th and Clifton, and Trinity Towers at 14th and Columbia, were built in response to the opening of the street car line along 14th Street.

Given that the site is vacant along its 14th Street frontage, that it steps down in height on V and W Streets where it abuts smaller scaled historic buildings, that it is sufficiently removed from the district's most significant cultural landmarks (such as the Lincoln Theater and True Reformers Building) so as to not detract, compete, or be seen from these important buildings, and with the proposed changes that de-emphasize the top floors of the project, the staff believes the proposed height and revised concept for this particular location within the historic district are justifiable and consistent with the character of the U Street Historic District.

The staff recommends that the Review Board approve the revised concept design as consistent with the purposes of the preservation law.