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

Landmark/District: **American Federation of Labor** (x) Agenda
(New Convention Center Hotel)
Address: **901 Massachusetts Avenue NW** () Consent Calendar
Meeting Date: **July 24, 2008** (x) Alteration
H.P.A. Number: **08-281** (x) New Construction
Date Received: **4/24/08** (x) Subdivision
Staff Reviewer: **David Maloney** (x) Conceptual Design

Marriott International, Inc. requests review of the concept design for the proposed Washington Marriott Marquis, the convention center hotel to be built on land owned by the Washington Convention Center Authority and the District of Columbia. The hotel will be attached to the American Federation of Labor building situated at the corner of 9th Street and Massachusetts Avenue, NW. This structure is a National Historic Landmark, and is also listed in the D.C. Inventory of Historic Sites and the National Register of Historic Places.

As a District government undertaking, the project is also subject to the new provision in Section 9b of the preservation law (D.C. Official Code §6-1108.02). This section requires the responsible District agency to take into account the effect of the undertaking on any property listed in or eligible for listing in the D.C. Inventory, and to consult with and afford the SHPO a reasonable opportunity to comment. The SHPO considers the HRPB review of the project, and the advice given to the SHPO, to constitute part of the consultation process through which the Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development and Washington Convention Center Authority fulfill their responsibilities under this provision.

The Board heard an informational presentation on this project at its June 26th meeting, and provided some initial reactions. The convention center hotel will consist of about 765,000 square feet of gross floor area and 1,125 to 1,150 hotel rooms, with about 340 parking spaces. The building will incorporate the landmark AFL building as a stand-alone “boutique hotel” connected to the main hotel at selected levels, yet retaining its physical independence. The hotel will occupy the remainder of the block except for the Pepco substation at the corner of 10th and L Streets. It will rise to 130 feet in height, with penthouses and the atrium roof rising above that level as allowed by D.C. zoning regulations. Architects for the project are the Cooper Carry – TVS Collaborative.

American Federation of Labor

The American Federation of Labor building was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1974. The building was constructed for the AFL in 1916 and served as its headquarters until 1956. In the words of AFL founder Samuel Gompers, the imposing seven-story building served to symbolize the Federation's growth from "a weakling into the strongest, best organized labor movement of all the world." President Woodrow Wilson delivered the chief address at the dedication. The building symbolized the achievements of Gompers and the AFL, as well as the labor movement in general, and was sometimes referred to as the national “labor temple.”

The AFL building retains a high degree of integrity, although the interiors have been modernized, the original windows have been replaced, and the spandrels painted an unflattering bright white.

Other Affected Properties

From the standpoint of reviewing the District undertaking, other affected historic properties include the Shaw Historic District immediately to the north and northwest, the Central Public Library in Mount Vernon Square, the Mount Vernon Square United Methodist Church and Tudor Hall apartments on the opposite side of Massachusetts Avenue, and elements of the Plan of the City of Washington (the L'Enfant Plan). These elements include Massachusetts Avenue and the grid streets, Mount Vernon Square, and the twin federal reservations (Reservations 68 and 69) at Massachusetts Avenue between 10th and 12th Streets. Reservation 69 has been designated as Samuel Gompers Memorial Park and includes the 1933 monument to Gompers that was recently listed as a historic landmark in the D.C. Inventory.

Proposed Project

The Marriott Marquis is being constructed in partnership with the District of Columbia and will become the flagship hotel for the Washington Convention Center. The building will incorporate the landmark AFL building as a stand-alone element connected to the hotel at selected levels, yet retaining its physical independence. The hotel will occupy the remainder of the block except for the Pepco substation at the corner of 10th and L Streets. It is proposed as a Planned Unit Development requiring review by the Zoning Commission.

Evaluation and Recommendations

As discussed at the June HPRB meeting, the Marriott Marquis is a key development project supporting the Washington Convention Center and offering substantial benefits to the city's economic development. The building will fill a major gap along Massachusetts Avenue, one of the city's prime historic boulevards, and provide the opportunity for a first-class restoration of a National Historic Landmark.

Along with these opportunities, however, are significant design challenges. The building will be by far one of the largest along Massachusetts Avenue, and its apparent size will be exaggerated by an oddly shaped lot, which creates a long prow at the western end extending the avenue frontage. The height of the building also exceeds that of the adjacent convention center, which is both symbolically and functionally the dominant civic building with pride of place on the 8th Street axis. While the hotel is clearly an adjunct to the convention center, every effort should be made to temper its massive scale and integrate it seamlessly as part of the city fabric around the focal public structure.

From the standpoint of adverse effects on surrounding historic resources, the primary concerns are visual effects from the size and scale of the new building, which tends to overshadow and reduce the prominence of the smaller and more delicate historic structures.

Since the Board's informational presentation in June, the architects have made significant positive revisions in response to the Board's comments. The plans are still at the concept stage, but are further developed. Several of the cornices and building elements have been lowered to emphasize the 90-foot cornice typical along Massachusetts Avenue, and to relate to the scale of

the AFL building. The atrium roof has been lowered, the penthouse configuration refined, and façade proportions adjusted.

The staff encourages the project team to continue in this direction as the treatment of key elements like the atrium roof and penthouses continue to be studied. Some further adjustments could include: 1) pulling back the outer bays of the colonnaded upper cornice on Massachusetts Avenue in order to emphasize a vertical centrality around the main entrance, 2) limiting the width of the entrance canopies along Massachusetts Avenue for similar reasons (preferably to 3 bays), and 3) continuing to study and develop the appearance of the hotel as seen from the parks to the west.

The treatment of the public space along Massachusetts Avenue continues to be a concern. Numerous policies in the Comprehensive Plan promote the preservation of the design character and open green quality of the public space along the city's L'Enfant Plan streets, including *Policy HP-2.5.4: Landscaped Yards in Public Space*, which reads:

Preserve the continuous and open green quality of landscaped front and side yards in public space. Take special care at historic landmarks and in historic districts to protect this public environment from intrusions, whether from excess paving, vehicular access and parking, high walls and fencing, or undue disruption of the natural contours or bermed terraces.

The extent of paving for vehicular entry, drop-off, and garage access in this plan greatly exceeds the norm for other hotels and buildings along L'Enfant Plan streets. The extended driveway and curved garage ramp is particularly anomalous along a major boulevard. While some greater flexibility may be appropriate given the size and nature of this hotel and the constraints of the site, the project team should continue to seek ways to minimize the amount and visual effect of paving in consultation with all of the relevant review agencies.

The staff recommends that the Board support the proposed project concept and urge the project team to continue refinement of the plans in consultation with the SHPO staff, Board, and other review agencies.

The staff further recommends that the project team continue to develop the preservation treatments of the AFL building consistent with the the preservation stewardship responsibilities of the D.C. government and the purposes of the preservation law which include “to encourage the restoration of historic landmarks.”