HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD
STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION

Property Address:	**500-600 blocks of U Street, NW**	X	Agenda
Landmark/District:	**LeDroit Park Historic District**		Consent Calendar
		X	Concept Review
Meeting Date:	**November 19, 1998**		Alteration/Addition
H.P.A. Number:	**98-366**	X	New Construction
Staff Reviewer:	**Steve Callcott**		Demolition
			Subdivision

The applicant, Sorg and Associates Architects for Howard University, returns to the HPRB for further conceptual review of a new construction and restoration project in LeDroit Park. The project, presented to the Board in June, called for the restoration of 26 rowhouses, construction of 14 houses, and demolition of 2 houses. The Board approved the restoration work, delegating final approval to staff, and suggested various refinements for the design of the new construction. The demolitions were denied, with direction given that the facades of these deteriorated structures be retained. Finally, the Board also directed the applicants to work with the staff to develop a program of archeological excavation on the vacant sites.

Since the June meeting, the architects have been working to revise their plans accordingly. The facades of the two houses proposed for demolition -- 621 and 619 U Street -- will now be stabilized and restored, with new construction built behind them. The new construction plans have also been revised. Five different rowhouse types were developed for the U Street lots, with the idea that each of them would be used several times, as is typical of this and other LeDroit Park blocks. While the architects consciously designed the houses to be recognizable as new construction, the Board expressed concerns about the amount of glazing proposed in several of the units, as well as the aggressive choice and use of colors. The architects have worked with the staff to reduce the amount of glazing and revise the colors in response to these concerns. Most helpful in this process was the development of full streetscape panoramas showing the new construction in context with the historic buildings around them. While additional design development and materials selection remains to be done, the staff is pleased with the revisions so far and believes the basic issues have been resolved.

Minor revisions have also been necessary to the design of the duplex cottage proposed for the large vacant lot at Oakdale and 5th streets. This element of the new construction is intended to evoke the earlier McGill-designed cottages found in the historic district rather than its rowhouses. The building will now house three units, however, the basic design -- a multi-gabled cottage with porches -- remains the same. As is typical of new construction in historic districts, on-site parking is required for these units. As no alley exists in this block, as it does on U Street, two curb cuts would be required with parking pads created on the sides of this prominent corner house. This is the only aspect of the design which is problematic. LeDroit Park was created in the 1870s as an early suburb in which the green spaces surrounding the houses were an important element in creating the park-like feeling of the neighborhood. Originally, yards had no fences between them, and the entire neighborhood was intended to be seen as a continuous garden. While this character has been somewhat compromised over the years, curb cuts and automobile

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parking within public view are quite uncharacteristic. Such intrusions into the neighborhood's green spaces are not consistent with the character of the LeDroit Park Historic District.

The staff recommends that the Review Board:

1) approve the revised conceptual designs for the rowhouse and cottage new construction, and delegate final approval of materials selection and design development details to the staff;

2) deny the curb cuts for the cottage at Oakdale and 5th Street, and direct the applicant to seek relief from the on-site parking requirements from the Board of Zoning Adjustment; and

3) direct Howard University to work with the staff to develop and implement an archeological program for the vacant lots prior to final approval by HPD for the new construction.