HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD
STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION

Landmark/District:	**Woodley Park Historic District**	( ) Agenda
Address:	**2655 Connecticut Avenue, NW**	(x) Consent
Meeting Date:	**June 24, 2004**	( ) New construction
Case Number:	**04-186**	(x) Addition
Date Received:	**February 26, 2004**	(x) Alteration
Staff Reviewer:	**Tim Dennée**	(x) Revised Concept

The applicant, Chatelain Architects, agent for owner Conrest Associates Limited Partnership, requests the Board's conceptual review of a proposal to add three stories to the top of a one-story, limestone-fronted, 1934 commercial building. The applicant would also agree to rebuild the storefront according to the original construction drawings.

The Board reviewed this case in May, and several different positions were expressed, including satisfaction with both the expression of the façade of the addition and its proposed setback and dissatisfaction with either or both.

The applicant has retained essentially the same design but agreed to set back the addition ten to twelve feet from the from the front property line—which can be done without losing any of the enclosed area. Ultimately, the largely glassy addition may be the way to best create a nice, light, "background" addition atop this one-story building. While taking seriously the comments about its night-time appearance as a "light box," the fact that the interior space on the front will be a library rather than a commercial space coupled with the fact that the whole will be further recessed between two substantial buildings should be sufficient to keep the new construction from standing out among the other Connecticut Avenue buildings. The proposed setback is admittedly a rough compromise—roughly half the depth last suggested by staff, and approximately what was suggested last month by Mr. Sonderman. The piers framing the glazed portion of the façade have been shown as clad in metal instead of limestone so as to lessen the tendency of the eye to simply run up from the storefront piers to the piers above. The surfaces of the adjacent building walls would be repaired.

An aspect of the plans not discussed much previously is the proposed reworking of the area in public space in front of Stanford's present building, at 2661 Connecticut. While this is something that will have to be achieved with a separate permit for that property, and while it is something that staff can review, it is worth presenting the issue for discussion on a concept level at this time. ADA access is an important issue and will require a ramp. In addition, Stanford wished to provide an area which would contain both planting areas and seating. It is very important to keep the area in front of both 2655

BOARD OF ZONING ADJUSTMENT
District of Columbia
CASE NO. 17237
EXHIBIT NO. 11

Board of Zoning Adjustment
District of Columbia
CASE NO. 17237
EXHIBIT NO. 11

and 2661 as open as possible, with unimpeded passage to maintain the connection between the two buildings and the connection with the whole commercial area to the south. While ramps can be an unfortunate visual intrusion, the proposed ramp would take advantage of a drop in grade from north to south and would be surrounded by an appropriate metal rail. Unlike as first shown last month, the present scheme makes the benches available to passersby, with the planting mainly behind them—instead of elevating the entire area immediately in front of the building and bounding it with planters and steps.

The staff recommends that the Board approve a revised concept for the addition as proposed, with a delegation of final permit approval to staff. The staff further recommends that the Board delegate approval of public space improvements to the staff.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD
STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION

Landmark/District:	**Woodley Park Historic District**	(x) Agenda
Address:	**2655 Connecticut Avenue, NW**	( ) Consent
Meeting Date:	**May 27, 2004**	( ) New construction
Case Number:	**04-186**	(x) Addition
Date Received:	**February 26, 2004**	(x) Alteration
Staff Reviewer:	**Tim Dennée**	(x) Concept

The applicant, Chatelain Architects, agent for owner Conrest Associates Limited Partnership, requests the Board's conceptual review of a proposal to add three stories to the top of a one-story, limestone-fronted, 1934 commercial building. The applicant would also agree to rebuild the storefront according to the original construction drawings.

The Stanford University in Washington program occupies the former hotel/apartment building next door at the corner of Woodley Road (2661 Connecticut) and wishes to purchase, expand into (and onto), and connect with the subject property principally to provide more administrative space, living space, and library space. For programmatic and zoning reasons, a very important consideration is that the addition connect to the present Stanford University building next door (see plan drawings in packet).

The *District of Columbia Historic Preservation Guidelines* state that any "rooftop addition should be located so it is not visible to pedestrians," and the Board has traditionally applied to such additions and rooftop decks this principle of invisibility. There have been numerous exceptions, however, and their success (before the Board and as actualized) usually depends heavily on very creative and skillful architectural approaches. The original height and architectural treatment of the upper termination of a building are obviously character-defining features, and it is always the best preservation practice to add no visible addition to a contributing building. Nonetheless, the Board has been more likely to approve visible rooftop additions when dealing with flat-roofed commercial properties and when there have been substantial setbacks provided. The former condition pertains in this case, although the height of the building renders a rooftop addition more problematic, again, in the extent of likely visibility and in the proportion of the new construction to the existing.

Indeed, leaving aside momentarily the narrower issue of the preservation of the original height and sense of the building, it is very difficult to add a new mass to the top of this building that is sufficiently compatible with the existing building and that renders the whole well proportioned. While it is only one-story tall, it is also a tall one story, making it proportionally too tall a base for a one-, two, or three-story addition with minimal

setback. The base is also a very good example of a commercial building of its era, a bold limestone front with some architectural pretension. In preparation for the presentation of this concept to the Board, the discussion between the applicant, staff and the community mainly concerned the appropriate setback and vocabulary for an addition, if it were possible.

The issue of the setback is a tricky one. If a rooftop addition is to be visible, then the best preservation approach is usually to push it so far rearward (assuming sufficient lot depth) that it looks like another building behind. Such an approach may not be possible in this case, unless the linkage between the two buildings was made at the rear of the one already owned by Stanford. Shifting the mass rearward so much would likely cause zoning difficulties, however, because of a required rear setback. Initially, it seemed that it is better to have a minimal front setback—enough to get behind the existing parapet and leave some space around it—because having an addition floating in a middle ground between the front and what might be perceived as behind the building may be seen as an odd response to an otherwise solid streetscape. Ultimately, however, the interest of preserving the character of the one-story historic building is paramount, and the difficulty of creating a compatible façade above it is obvious. After much consideration, it seems that the safest and most preservation-oriented approach to a visible rooftop addition in this situation is, finally, to set it back substantially.

Given the desire to connect the addition with the front portion of the building next door, the obvious compromise would be to set the addition's façade back to the last point where circulation would be possible between the new addition and the front of the present Stanford building. This would appear to be roughly where the floor plans depict the front (westernmost) partition enclosing the stairs—roughly a 28-foot setback, or slightly deeper than the building is wide. It would seem that the applicant could shift the mass of the building rearward enough to achieve this without running into zoning problems (and retain a rear rooftop deck), but the plans within both the subject building and the building next door would have to be significantly reworked.

This approach has a couple of design benefits. First, it creates some light, air and views from the second floor in front, and perhaps an opportunity for another rooftop terrace where now the second-story windows look into the back of the existing parapet. Pushing back certainly would make the addition less obvious and would mitigate the addition's height relative to the building immediately to the south.[1] Finally, setting the new mass set back actually relieves the design challenge of compatibility somewhat; the farther apart the two facades, the lesser degree of conscious or unconscious visual comparison.[2]

---

[1] While the drawings show that the height of the addition would mediate between that of the two flanking buildings, perhaps that should not be the role of the new construction. Rather, it would *appear* more recessive if it were literally so. As seen straight on, the addition would look lower because of diminishing perspective. And the building to the south would screen it from oblique views from the south and southwest, preserving the gap and variation in height and generally preserving the illusion of the one-story building.

[2] While a substantial structure and a non-combustible material are necessary at the common property lines, the piers that frame the addition should be as minimal as possible to avoid the sense that they are a visual

The idea of restoring the storefront is a terrific idea and one that should be supported, but is also an issue that is secondary to the larger preservation issue.

The staff recommends that the Board approve a revised concept with at least a 25-foot setback.

---

continuation of the piers of the store below. By setting back, this becomes less of an issue, as do variations in the glass façade for the provision of operable windows and doors.