

U.S. COMMISSION OF FINE ARTS

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22 October 2015

Dear Mr. Lesser:

In its meeting of 15 October, the Commission of Fine Arts reviewed a revised concept design for the renovation of and addition to the former Riggs Bank Building at 1503 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, for use as the Museum of the American Educator (case number SL 15-174). The Commission approved this revised concept design with the condition that it not include a railing or barrier for the roof area overlooking Pennsylvania Avenue.

The Commission members expressed appreciation for the responsiveness to their comments in the review of May 2015, including the revisions to retain architectural detail at the new secondary entrance on Pennsylvania Avenue. They also supported the reduced massing and increased setbacks of the rooftop addition made in response to the advice of the D.C. Historic Preservation Review Board. However, they again expressed concern that any safety railing or protective barrier for the roof area along Pennsylvania Avenue may have a visual impact greater than the addition itself. Noting the sensitive location of this building overlooking the White House grounds and the inaugural parade route, they directed that this design be referred to the U.S. Secret Service to determine whether a protective anti-ballistic barrier would be required; any barrier—even if only for maintenance access—is specifically not included in this approval and must be resubmitted for review.

The Commission looks forward to the resolution of this important element of the design. As always, the staff is available to assist you.

Sincerely,



Thomas E. Luebke, FAIA
Secretary

Lawrence Lesser
Senior Vice President
Milken Family Foundation
1250 Fourth Street
Santa Monica, CA 90401-1353

cc: Shalom Baranes, Shalom Baranes Associates
David Maloney, D.C. Historic Preservation Office
Joseph Dipietro, U.S. Secret Service

Board of Zoning Adjustment
District of Columbia
CASE NO.19229
EXHIBIT NO.25C

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

Landmark/District:	Riggs National Bank	☒ Agenda
Address:	1503 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW	☐ Consent Calendar
Meeting Date:	September 24, 2015	☐ Demolition
H.P.A. Number:	15-374	☒ Alteration
Date Received:	4/28/15	☐ Subdivision
Staff Reviewer:	David Maloney	☒ Conceptual Design

The Milken Family Foundation and Shalom Baranes Associates, Architects, return to the Board for continued review of the design concept for an addition to the former Riggs National Bank building on Pennsylvania Avenue, NW. The building is a historic landmark in the DC Inventory of Historic Sites, and a contributing structure in two historic districts.

Project Concept

The Foundation proposes to occupy the building for offices, conference facilities, and a Museum of the American Educator. Public exhibit space would occupy the banking hall. Exterior alterations include an accessible entrance, relocation of visible rooftop mechanical equipment, expansion of the existing 5th floor, and construction of a new 6th floor.

As discussed at the Board's review on June 25, the proposed renovations and roof additions are configured so as to allow for the reintroduction of natural lighting into the banking hall through the original ceiling opening. This will help restore the architectural character of the historic landmark, but it also results in an addition pushed forward on the roof and made more visible than would otherwise be acceptable on a building of this significance and character.

Evaluation of Revisions

The architects have revised the concept in response to the Board's June comments. The central pavilion at the front of the top floor addition is now removed and the height is lowered. The result is a simplified form for the addition, which now has a continuous lower projection running straight along the entire width of the original 1899 building. This more neutral treatment and lowered height help to reduce the visual impact of the addition on the historic façade.

While the revisions in concept are responsive to the Board's comments, a more complete development and refinement of the details for the new façade and accessible entrance will be needed for a final preservation clearance.

Recommendations

The Historic Preservation Office recommends that the Board endorse the project concept as a reasonable balance between restoration and the adaptation needed to bring about that benefit. In order to secure the restored character of the central banking hall as a permanent benefit, HPO also recommends that the Board encourage the applicant to proceed with the documentation needed to expand protection of the landmark to include the banking hall.