
HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION

Landmark/District: Cleveland Park Historic District	☒ Agenda
Address: 3310 Connecticut Avenue, NW	☐ Consent Calendar
Meeting Date: March 24, 2016	☐ Alteration
H.P.A. Number: 16-051	☐ Demolition
Staff Reviewer: Andrew Lewis	☒ Conceptual Design

On December 17, 2015, the District of Columbia Department of Public Libraries (DCPL) and Perkins Eastman Architects presented an initial concept to HPRB for replacement of the existing Cleveland Park Library located at 3310 Connecticut Avenue, NW with a new, two-story building. The applicants have considered the Board's initial comments and are now prepared to present the revised plans for review.

Proposed New Construction

The proposed new building will be constructed within the Cleveland Park Historic District on the site of the existing, non-historic library which will be demolished. The revised plans call for a structure of 24,333 gsf and a program that provides separate library facilities for children and adults, and meeting rooms for the community. The new facility will be oriented towards to the east and the primary entrance will be located in the southeast corner of the site.

Although the new building will provide approximately 7,000 more sf than the current library, the proposed new construction will be roughly comparable to the existing library in terms of overall massing and height.

Evaluation

The most recent designs represent more of a refinement than a completely new direction and many commendable aspects of the earlier concept have been retained to ensure the relationship between the new facility and its architectural context remains strong. For example, the fenestration on the primary elevation still incorporates references to the rhythm and form of the storefronts across the street; the materials palette continues to reflect the area's familiar buff colored brick, limestone and metal; and some elements of the new library echo the horizontality of low-scaled buildings along Connecticut Avenue while the corner entry and large "porch elements" on Newark and Macomb Streets provide some civic character and introduce a verticality reminiscent of taller neighborhood buildings such as the Uptown Theater.

The most noteworthy improvements to the concept relate to the large "house-scaled, porch element" on the northern elevation. This element was arguably the most incompatible aspect of the previous proposal but the recent refinements have successfully incorporated this feature into the overall design and ensured that the desirable view from the large picture window can still be provided. The specific refinements that have rendered this element successful include

eliminating the extensive overhanging roof feature and recessing the plane of glass behind an extended, rounded corner of the primary façade and a newly projecting meeting room which will be clad in the same buff colored brick as the primary elevation. Introducing a heavy horizontal element also softens the verticality of the picture window, relates more directly to roof lines of the residential porches to the west and helps to clarify that the northern elevation is not an entry. The rounded corner of the extended façade, which appears to be inspired by some subtly curved features of the nearby post office and other Art Deco buildings in the area, may or may not be successful, but extending the façade north of the plane of the curtain wall is critically important to deemphasizing the Newark Street “porch element” and successfully integrating this large glazed feature into the overall composition.

The porch element on Macomb Street has also been improved by eliminating the lower section of the prominent surround so that the projecting feature now reads more appropriately as a cantilevered bay rather than a porch. Similarly, the rear addition has benefited from revisions that introduce new windows and recessed panels to break up the monotony of the previously proposed blank wall.

Other refinements include changes in the color, dimensions and scale of the limestone coursing proposed for the taller, central spine of the building. These revisions better relate the limestone to the buff colored brick and result in a more unified overall composition.

Lastly, the entry pavilion has been refined through a change in materials and, possibly, dimensions. The tall panels now incorporated into the southern and eastern elevations help to denote entry by virtue of being the only wooden elements on the exterior but the subdivided single large opening seems to remain somewhat unresolved on both the Connecticut Avenue and Macomb Street elevations.

Recommendation

HPO recommends that the Board:

- Find the overall revised concept compatible with the Cleveland Park Historic District;
- Provide any recommendations for how the concept can be further refined to increase compatibility with the historic district and address unresolved design details; and
- Delegate the remaining design review to HPO.