

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD
HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE



Historic Preservation Review Board Meeting

March 26, 2026

The Historic Preservation Review Board met via WebEx at 9:00AM on March 26, 2026 to consider the following. Present at the meeting were Marnique Heath (Chair), Andrew Aurbach, Matthew Bell, Bill Marzella, Lauren McHale, Chris Morrison and Timothy Thomas. Absent: Gabrielle Miller.

DENIAL CALENDAR

CAPITOL HILL HISTORIC DISTRICT

418 4th Street SE, HPA 25-324, revised concept/demolition

The Board voted to recommend denial of the revised proposal as inconsistent with its regulations. Vote: 7-0.

AGENDA

INFORMATIONAL PRESENTATION

Overview of Recently Completed Projects - 2026

LANDMARK DESIGNATION HEARING

Capitol Power Plant Pump House, 1520 1st Street SE, Case 21-05

The Board voted 7-0 to approve the designation and supported the staff's recommendation to work with the applicants to add context about the building typology and history of the Earth Conservation Corps before the nomination is forwarded to the National Register.

CAPITOL HILL HISTORIC DISTRICT

635 North Carolina Avenue SE, HPA 26-81, revised concept/construct new aquatic center

The Board voted to approve the general concept expressing its preference for Option A with the skylights shown in Option B. However, the Board asked the applicant and staff to continue working on resolving the tension between the horizontal and vertical window expressions and investigating whether the landscape plan could aggregate the many small planters into fewer larger planters. Vote: 7-0.

DOWNTOWN HISTORIC DISTRICT

503-517 H Street NW, HPA 26-149, revised concept for hotel tower addition

The Board voted to approve the revised concept to add an additional floor with the proviso that approval of the concept did not constitute endorsement or support for any needed zoning relief. Vote: 6-0 (Heath recused)

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

Property Address:	503-517 H Street, NW	X	Agenda
Landmark/District:	Downtown Historic District		Consent
Meeting Date:	March 26, 2026	X	Concept Review
H.P.A. Number:	26-149	X	Alteration
Staff Reviewer:	Steve Callcott		New Construction
			Demolition

Rift Valley Partners, with plans prepared by Fillat + Architecture Inc., seeks on-going conceptual review for construction of a 10-story addition behind a row of three-story row houses in the Chinatown section of the Downtown Historic District. The project would be for hotel use.

Property Histories and Descriptions

The site includes seven 19th century brick row buildings, all originally constructed as dwellings and later converted to commercial uses. 503-505 H Street is three-story stucco over brick building built in 1884, but was refaced in the mid-20th century to the extent that it has lost integrity. 507 H Street is a three-story Italianate-styled house that dates from 1870. 509 H Street is a three-story house constructed sometime before 1869 and later altered with the addition of a ground-level storefront. The row of bay-fronted Queen Anne houses at 511-517 were built in 1885. The ensemble is reflective of the eclectic residential development of this portion of downtown just prior and after the Civil War and its later conversion to a commercial district. Except for 503-505, all are contributing to the Downtown Historic District.

The Downtown Historic District contains a rich variety of residential, commercial and institutional building types, sizes, and architectural styles from a period of significance that spans more than a century (1830-1940); it also contains a slightly higher percentage of new and non-contributing buildings than many of the city's historic districts. Square 485, in which the buildings are located (bounded by 5th, 6th, H and I Streets), is unusual for being one of the district's most historically intact blocks and its relatively consistent building heights. 22 of the 23 buildings are contributing, with 19 of those being three stories tall (with 1 two-story, 1 four-story and 1 five-story building). The tallest building is the only non-contributing structure, a six-story apartment building at 809 6th Street approved by the Board in 2005 as an infill project on a vacant lot. The block contains several noteworthy structures, including the Thomas U. Walter designed church at 500 I Street (1852, restored in 2009 as a component of a special merit project approved by the Mayor's Agent), the unusual Romanesque-styled apartment building at 510 I Street (1894), and the Mission-revival Gospel Mission at 810 5th Street (1932).

Project Background

The Board has reviewed evolving proposals for this site four times since 2020. In January 2020 (under different prospective ownership), the Board found a proposal for a 110-foot tower behind 507-517 to be incompatible in height with the buildings and the scale of the block. In two reviews in 2023 (under the present ownership), the Board approved a 9-story tower, with the top floor set back. In January 2024, the Board approved a plan that incorporated an additional historic building (503-505) and a concurrent widening of the tower.

Revised Proposal

To maximize the number of hotel rooms, the latest proposal seeks to add one additional floor, which would rise to approximately 106 feet. The primary mass of the building would stay the same, topping out at the 8th story, and the 9th and 10th stories would be set back from the south, east and west sides. Material changes include using fiber-cement panels on the top two floors and rear elevation, previously proposed as brick. Gray brick would continue to be used on the main mass of the south elevation and has been extended further back to clad the entirety of the east and west elevations; wood-like fiber cement panels would be used as accent elements.

As before, the plans call for retaining the main front blocks of the historic buildings, with their rear ell wings removed. Due to its loss of integrity, 505 H Street would be replaced with a compatible new three-story infill building. A preservation plan for the remaining historic buildings has been developed in consultation with HPO as previously requested by the Board.

Evaluation

When reviewing additions, the Board has most frequently cited the principle that an addition should be subordinate to the historic building to which it is being added to ensure that the historic structure remains dominant and not overwhelmed by the new construction. However, in instances where the context supported it, the Board has found additions that are larger than the buildings to which they are attached to be compatible if the addition can convincingly appear as a separate building and when the size of the addition is deemed appropriate for its context.

In 2023, the Board determined a 9-story tower to be compatible for this site given the varied heights of the Downtown Historic District and the thoughtful design moves to lower the cornice line to the 8th story. The design was praised for providing a roughly equal proportional relationship of the primary four floors of the tower to the three and four stories of the historic buildings below, and in setting the 9th floor back to limit its visibility.

The new 10th floor has been designed in consultation with HPO to retain the previous composition and to incorporate setbacks on the south and side elevations. While resulting in more visibility than the previously approved 9 story concept, the top two floors remain secondary to the primary 8 story mass to appear as a penthouse.

Wrapping the darker brick to the full depth of the east and west side elevations is an improvement to the building's proportions. The change in material on the rear elevation would only be seen from long distances and with careful attention to sizing, coursing and detailing, the use of cementitious panels could be compatible with the historic district.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Board find the revised concept to be consistent with the approved concept and compatible with the character of the Downtown Historic District.

Previously approved: 9 stories (86' to cornice; 97' to top floor), Jan 2024



Current proposal: 10 stories (86' to cornice, 106' to top of upper floor), Mar 2026

