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

Property Address:	465-471 New York Avenue, NW	X	Agenda
Landmark/District:	Mt Vernon Square Historic District		Consent Calendar
		X	Concept Review
Meeting Date:	September 27, 2007	X	Alteration
H.P.A. Number:	07-410	X	New Construction
Staff Reviewer:	Steve Callcott	X	Demolition
		X	Subdivision

The applicants, WDG Architecture for Bozzuto Development, seek conceptual design review for a project involving demolition of a two-story 1870s brick row house, relocation of a 1902 three-story brick row house, and construction of a 13 story apartment building.

Property Description and History

The site is pentagonal in shape, 120' deep, with approximately 90' of frontage on New York Avenue and 45' on L Street. It contains two historic buildings. The imposing three-story stone and brick structure at 465 New York Avenue was constructed in 1902, designed by architect L.F. Stutz, and features classical and Romanesque inspired detailing, with a rusticated stone base, garland and cartouche decorations, and a rounded bay centered on its façade. It was built to serve as the home and office of prominent African-American physician Dr. Thomas Martin (1854-1939); it was later converted to apartments but has been vacant for the past several decades. While deteriorated, with some failure of its internal framing due to water infiltration, the building remains structurally sound. The two-story brick building at 471 New York Avenue was likely constructed in the early 1870s, prior to the issuance of municipal building permits, and once served as Friedman's Candy Store. Modest in architectural pretension, it has wood window sills and lintels, and a bracketed Italianate cornice; the first floor window opening has been substantially altered (it may have had a one-story projecting bay at one time) and the door surround is missing. A structural report prepared by Tadjer-Cohen-Edelson Associates, Structural Engineers, documents extensive bowing, cracking, and structural failure of the exterior brick walls and a substantial hole in the roof that has led to extensive rot of the interior wood framing.

The parcel abuts a row of two-story houses to the west along 5th Street and the site of the second phase of the Yale Laundry/Norwitz project, a new 130' apartment building, to the east. The subject site is within the Downtown Development District with a portion zoned R-5-B and the remainder zoned C-2-C.

Proposal

The project calls for demolishing 471 New York Avenue, based on a lack of structural integrity, and relocating 465 in its entirety to the western edge of the site (facing L Street)

abutting the historic house at the corner of 5th and L streets. 465 would be restored and returned to residential use, with an internal connection to the new apartment building.

The new apartment building is composed of two masses -- a primary 13-story masonry block would front New York Avenue with a tripartite façade organization and three tiers of projecting bays, and an 11-story metal and glass bay element on the west side, recessed from the street and angled to reflect the change in geometry between the avenue and the orthogonal street. The garage entrance would be located in the first floor of the recess.

The building's design and materials are intended to be evocative of the apartment buildings and light-industrial buildings found in the historic district but interpreted in a contemporary manner. The primary building material would be an iron spot brick with textured metal panels used as an accent material; the bays would be metal and glass.

The project is premised on moving the C-2-C zoning line further west, which will require approval by the Zoning Commission. A related "sister" building would be constructed by the same development team on the south side of the avenue, incorporating a three-story warehouse building as its base. The warehouse is not a landmark and the project is not located within an historic district, so is not subject to HPRB review.

Evaluation

The structural engineers' report, confirmed by on-site investigation, makes a compelling case for demolishing 471. The building's exterior masonry walls, inadequate foundation, and interior wood framing are extremely deteriorated and would require reconstruction in its entirety or in substantial part for the building to be put back into use.

Relocating an historic building is not general preservation practice. While it is clearly advantageous for the applicant to be able to relocate 465, in this instance it may provide a superior preservation and urban design solution than would result by retaining the building in place. By relocating the structure adjacent to the row of houses along 5th Street, the building would once again become part of an ensemble of historic structures, while retaining its same basic historic setting fronting on the avenue. It allows for a new building on the site with sufficient street frontage, straightforward massing, and vertical proportions that could be a compatible addition to the historic district. Retaining the building in place would result in it being somewhat fractured from the historic district, with tall new construction likely surrounding and looming behind it.

The Board has approved similar large new construction projects within this block, citing its frontage on New York Avenue as not inappropriate for tall buildings. While only one of these buildings has so far been completed, it illustrates how high quality design can result in a compatible neighbor despite differences in height. While only conceptual, the present proposals' tripartite façade organization, strong vertical proportions, finely-scaled bay and window elements, and rich material palette could similarly result in a compatible neighbor with the much smaller scale historic buildings to the west and north.

Perhaps the least satisfactorily resolved aspect of the design is the top two floors. A more differentiated top, perhaps with an alternative fenestration and elimination of the inset metal panels, should be further studied. The large plate glass windows on the second floor might also be given additional thought; while architecturally they suggest commercial space behind, such large windows for apartments so close to the street directly fronting an avenue might not be practical.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Review Board:

- 1) Determine that the building at 471 New York Avenue, NW no longer contributes to the Mount Vernon Square Historic District due to a lack of structural integrity, therefore allowing it to be demolished;
- 2) Approve the relocation of 465 New York Avenue, NW to the western edge of the site within the context of this project in order to improve its historic setting and facilitate its renovation;
- 3) Approve the subdivision of the lots into a single lot, and approve the general height, massing, and design of the concept for the new construction, with the understanding that the top floors of the building will continue to be restudied.

The HPO recommends that the project return to the Board for additional conceptual or preliminary review when appropriate.