
**HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD
MASTER PLAN REVIEW**

Property Address:	North Capitol/Michigan Avenue, NW	X	Agenda
Landmark/District:	McMillan Reservoir		Consent Calendar
		X	Conceptual Review
Meeting Date:	October 31, 2013	X	Alteration
Staff Reviewer:	Steve Callcott	X	New Construction
		X	Demolition

Vision McMillan Partners (VMP) seeks on-going conceptual design review for four development projects at the McMillan Reservoir sand filtration site that were initially presented in June. The proposal also includes substantive revisions to the master plan.

In its previous reviews, the Board has consistently cited the site's edge condition as an important character-defining feature that should be retained and has emphasized that new development should have a strong sense of cohesion and relationship to the character of the landmark. The Board's recommendations in June fell along three general lines:

- 1) The site needs to have a consistent perimeter condition that should include retaining the topographical plinth, recreating the Olmsted walk, and that the new construction should be pulled back accordingly;
- 2) The site's tripartite organization, as defined by the north and south maintenance corridors, should remain the dominant organizing principle, and secondary roads and new construction should reinforce rather than dilute the legibility of that organization;
- 3) To ensure that a strong sense of place be maintained, the new construction should be of a very high quality, unified and cohesive.

The individual projects, from south to north, include: 1) the community center and park designed by Matthew Bell of EE & K/Perkins Eastman and Warren Byrd of Nelson Byrd Woltz landscape architects; 2) 161 rowhouses designed by Jack McLaurin of Lessard Group architects for developer/builder EYA; 3) a mixed-use building with a ground-level grocery store with apartments above designed by MV + A and David Jameson Architects for Jair Lynch Development Partners; and 4) two medical office buildings with ground level retail designed by Shalom Baranes architects for the Trammell Crow Company.¹

Master Plan Revisions

The master plan has been revised in three substantive ways to respond to the Board's comments. A consistent setback has been provided around all sides of the site, allowing the topography to be largely retained and the Olmsted Walk recreated. The middle section of the site, containing

¹ A fifth development site, to the west of the grocery store/apartment building is not being planned for development at this time.

the townhouses and the grocery store/apartment building, has been reorganized to orient the new construction along four narrow north/south roads to provide greater cohesiveness to this zone and to open up views to the maintenance corridors. And finally, all buildings facing on the north maintenance corridor would be required to have a 20' high masonry retail base, a reference to the portal walls that would be removed, and to provide a setback for the upper floors.

Revised Development Proposals

Community center and park

The community center was commended by the HPRB for its design and compatibility previously and has not substantially changed. As before, the two-level 17,500 square foot glass pavilion would access the upper and lower levels of the surrounding park. As recommended, the elevator override that previously penetrated the green roof roof has been eliminated.

Rowhouses

The site plan and architecture of the rowhouses have been entirely redesigned to respond to the Board's suggestions that they needed to be simplified and coalesced into larger, civic-scaled terraces that relate to the scale of the site. Accordingly, each group has been designed so that the individual houses form part of a larger compositional block or terrace. On each terrace, the setback top floors are now integrated into the composition as a secondary geometric element to the underlying block. While still providing variety, they are unified by their use of simple geometries and an edited palette of white and black brick, grey metal panels, rectangular projections, and charcoal-toned and wood detailing.

Grocery store/apartment building

This mixed-use building was previously proposed as a series of X-shaped towers above a reclaimed concrete gabion base. While found to be conceptually strong in its reference to the McMillan site, the project's sharp contrast in materials and geometries were thought to be discordant and distracting. The redesigned building maintains the retail/grocery base, now clad with a canted board-formed concrete wall facing the north maintenance corridor. The apartment tower above is organized in an E-shape opening to North Capitol Street and incorporates a set back from the north maintenance corridor. The white skin of the building would be gridded and banded to visually reference the geometries and material use in the other buildings while symbolically referring to the site's historic water filtration function.

Medical office buildings

As with the grocery store, these buildings have been revised to have a consistent two-story (20 foot) retail plinth clad in board-formed concrete and the upper floors have been set back so as to relieve the impact of the buildings' height on the north maintenance corridor. The shift in the upper floors has resulted in a concurrent reduction in the size of the courtyard garden facing Michigan Avenue. While the buildings still step down in height from west to east, the sloped roofs have been eliminated to simplify their rooflines. The architecture has been developed to relate to the character of the other projects and the site through simple geometries and a palette of concrete, light-toned terra cotta panels, and charcoal and wood-toned detailing. One of the buildings would include a green wall supporting planters for vines, and on the east side, would have a substantial opening and projection to engage the retained cell 14.

Evaluation

Demolition

As has been acknowledged by the Board since its initial review, demolition of the majority of the sand filter beds and the extent of new construction would result in the loss of important engineering, architectural and open space features for which the property is recognized and designated. The extent of removal meets the definition of substantial demolition as defined by the historic preservation regulations and is not consistent with the purposes of the preservation act.² Throughout this review process, the Board's comments have been to improve the preservation scope of work and compatibility of the redevelopment with the landmark in anticipation of the project being forwarded to the Mayor's Agent where the applicants will be making a case that the redevelopment represents a project of special merit.

Master Plan

While resulting in substantial demolition of the below-grade cells and compromise to the site's open space character, the latest version of the master plan represents a significant improvement over previous versions and now retains the significant above-grade topographical, architectural and engineering features that were identified by the Board as the most important. As before, there would be substantial rehabilitation and meaningful incorporation of the sand bins, regulator houses and sand washers into the park and the retail street along the north maintenance corridor; the service court walls would be largely retained in the south corridor; two of the below-grade cells would be retained, interpreted and reused; a substantial open space would be retained within the 8 acre park at the southern end of the site; and the raised topography at the southern edge of the site (where it is most pronounced) would be retained.

The revised plan substantially improves upon those commitments by retaining a berm and building set back along *all* edges of the site, and would recreate the elevated hawthorn-lined perimeter walkway laid out by Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. While the topography will be slightly and compatibly modified to improve the width of the public sidewalks and sight-lines into the site, the distinctive edge condition of the property will be retained, preserving an important visual characteristic of the McMillan landmark. While the loss of the portal walls along most of the north maintenance corridor is regrettable, the master plan's design requirement for a 20 foot high masonry base on buildings fronting the corridor will evoke this lost element and the setbacks for additional floors above will provide space and relief to ensure the corridor isn't overwhelmed by the new construction.

The revised master plan would retain significant character-defining features of the landmark sufficient to convey its historic character.

Development

Both individually and collectively, the revised concepts are dramatically improved, reflecting the high level of quality, cohesiveness and distinctiveness that have been sought

² DCMR 10-C, Section 305.1 (e) The removal or destruction of a substantial portion that includes character-defining features of the building or structure.

by the Board. Without resorting to replication or literal references, the architecture uses a carefully edited (while still rich and varied) vocabulary of colors, materials, patterns, geometries and forms to unite the proposal's distinctly different building types. The resulting language is specific to and evocative of the landmark, interpreted in a fresh and contemporary manner. For the first time, it looks like a destination you would want to seek out to experience its distinct sense of place; one that includes equally interesting historic and new features balanced and blended compatibly together.

The revised conceptual designs represent an architecturally cohesive, high-quality and site-specific series of projects that relate to the character of the landmark.

Preservation Covenant

In 1987, as a condition of transfer to the District of Columbia from the General Services Administration (GSA) and prior to its local and National Register listing, a preservation covenant was attached to the property. The covenant required that rehabilitation and renovation work be undertaken in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and that the project be reviewed by the Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO). The covenant states that if the SHPO did not "agree with" the plans (legally imprecise language that presumably means that they are found not to meet the Secretary's Standards), the District would request the comments of the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation in accordance with 36 CFR Part 800.

As the project will result in substantial demolition of character-defining features and the redevelopment will compromise the open-space quality of the site, the SHPO concludes that the project does not meet the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings* and advises the District to forward the plans to the Advisory Council for comment.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Board:

- *Find that the proposal will result in substantial demolition, as defined in the preservation regulations, and therefore inconsistent with the purposes of the Historic Landmark and Historic District Protection Act;*
- *Find that the revised master plan has been developed to retain important character-defining features of the site sufficient to convey its historic characteristics. The requirements for buildings on the north maintenance corridor to have a masonry base and setbacks for upper floors should be specifically codified in the master plan and design guidelines to ensure that these will be consistently applied to future projects;*
- *Find the concept designs to represent an architecturally coordinated and cohesive approach that specifically relates to the character of the McMillan site;*
- *Conduct a final design review of the projects if and when approved by the Zoning Commission as a PUD and the Mayor's Agent as a project of special merit.*



**Resolution In Support of the current
Stage One P.U.D. Application HPRB Submission
Subject to certain Specific Conditions and Modifications**

Whereas, the McMillan Park Sand Filtration Site (“the McMillan Site”) is a twenty-five acre green space and decommissioned water treatment plant in the 5C area in northwest Washington, D.C, within the square bounded by 1st Street NW, Michigan Avenue NW, North Capitol Street NW, and Channing Street NW including the communities of Bloomingdale, Stronghold and Park Place;

Whereas, completion of the McMillan Site in 1905 was a Washington public health milestone designed to purify river water supplied to a developing capital;

Whereas, the purification system was a slow sand filter design that became obsolete by the late 20th century and in 1985, a new rapid sand filter plant replaced it across First Street beside the reservoir;

Whereas, the complex is an engineering wonder that served its original purpose until 1986 and in 1986, the Corps of Engineers declared the property surplus and asked the General Services Administration to dispose of it;

Whereas, The GSA iterated its position that open space was not the highest and best use of the property, and insisted on selling the property for mixed commercial development;

Whereas The District of Columbia Government purchased the site from the federal government in 1987 for \$9.3M, in order to facilitate development and since that time, the property has been vacant and has deteriorated severely due to lack of maintenance;

Whereas, Public access to the site has been restricted since World War II when the Army erected a fence to guard against sabotage of the city’s water supply;

Whereas, in 1991, the D.C. Historic preservation Review Board designated McMillan Park a Historic landmark and nominated the site for the National Register of Historic Places thereby laying the foundation for ensuring that a substantial contiguous portion of the site would forever be dedicated to recreation and open space, and requiring an adaptive reuse of the historical elements of the site, both above and below ground;

Whereas, on March 29, 1999, ANC 5C voted unanimously in its Committee of the Whole meeting to support the historic preservation and limited development of the site;

Commissioners

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**ANC5C meets on 3rd
Tuesday of the month.**

Next Meeting:
June 19, 2012
7:00 PM
Location TBD

Whereas, several proposals for development of the site have been considered since the early 2000s and Citizen groups have voice objections to development, calling for maximum green space with appropriate repurposing, including different groups lobbying for uses such as a museum, a school, a library, a park, and a even a national memorial for dogs that died in war.

Whereas, the Comprehensive Plan of 2006 identifies the site for potential “mixed use” allowing for Medium to Moderate Density Residential and Commercial uses and require that reuse plans for the site dedicate a contiguous portion of the site for recreation and open space and requires the District to explore the adaptive reuse of some of the underground “cells” as part of the historic record of the site with consideration given to monuments, memorials and museums as part of the site.

Whereas, the District of Columbia, represented by the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development (DMPED), has appropriated in excess of \$50M towards the development of the site, of which approximately \$34M has been allocated for the development of recreation and open space; and through approved procurement procedures, has selected Vision McMillan Partners (VMP) to develop plans to develop the site;

Whereas, on February 24, 2012, the City, through its Consultant, VMP put forth a Preservation Plan that advances several key design principles derived from the inherent physical and historical characteristics of the site consistent with the historical designation and significance of the site calling for connectivity of the site and the City via a system of walkable streets and blocks; preservation, reuse and enhancement of the unique historical elements of the site; development of architectural language, heights and massing to relate to adjacent areas, design of a recreation center, swimming pool and open space via a central park that offers a variety of experiences and incorporate existing site features; and use of sustainable design principles to inform building, site and landscape design; and significantly preserves a substantial amount of all of the historical above and below grade elements of the site, including the North and South Service Court Subsurface Filter Beds, re-creation of the Olmsted Walk, and relocation and restoration of the McMillan Fountain;

Whereas, through continued public input, review and consideration of the plan presented by faculty and students at Catholic University, and informal comments of the Historical Preservation Review Board (HPRB), the City, through its Consultant, VMP has revised it landscape plan reflecting multiple inputs to include more preservation of the historic topography and the plain at the 170 feet elevation both along North Capital Street and across the Central Park including an expanded recreation center/swimming pool; Preservation of a part of a 3rd filter bed as a “cell with the lid off” incorporating a water feature with the exposed columns; increased continuity including north south connection through the middle of the site and the eastern edge via continuation of the Olmstead walk, a new “Half Street Gardens” leading from the retail core into the park with approximately 1.2 acres more of open space throughout the plan further supporting historical preservation; improved view into the site – widening Channing Gardens and Olmstead walk on the southern end of the site; reduced the number of townhomes south of the south service court; increased the size of the central park to create more “vastness” and restored ruins of a 3rd cell to be incorporated into the Central Park;

Whereas, the City, through its Consultant, VMP has committed to develop comprehensive Transit Demand Management and a comprehensive Storm Water Management Plan including installation of an underground storage tanks capable of holding 350,000 gallons of storm water runoff and compliance with the EPA definition of 100% storm water retention, and agreement to work with the Bloomingdale Community to address flooding issues; and

Whereas, the 5C community, via surveys and in extensive meetings during the last four (4) years, signals its agreement with a balanced approach toward development of the site;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, on this 17th Day of September 2012, that Advisory Neighborhood Commission 5C, at a duly noticed Emergency/Special Meeting, voted to indicate its general support for development at the site while reserving its right to continue its review of the master plan and recommend/support changing development and preservation strategies, and ongoing discussions to develop an appropriate Amenities Benefits Package reflective of the mitigating reuse impacts highlighting the communities involvement in reuse planning reflective of the historical significance of the site,

ANC 5C is comprised of 12 Commissioners and therefore seven (7) Commissioners constitutes a quorum. On September 17, 2012, at a duly noticed public - Emergency Meeting of ANC 5C, eleven (11) Commissioners attended the meeting. At the time of voting on this Resolution there were eleven (11) Commissioners present and voting. The ANC, by voice vote, voted in the majority to approve this Resolution. (The unofficial vote tally was 8-3-0) We therefore certify the information contained in this letter to be true and correct.

APPROVED: *This 17th Day of September 2012*

RONNIE L. EDWARDS, Chairman
Advisory Neighborhood Commission 5C

CHARITA BRENT, Recording Secretary
Advisory Neighborhood Commission 5C