
HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD

STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION

Property Address:	901 L Street, NW	X	Agenda
Landmark/District:	Shaw Historic District		Consent Calendar
		X	Concept Review
Meeting Date:	May 1, 2014	X	Alteration
H.P.A. Number:	14-040		New Construction
Staff Reviewer:	Steve Callcott	X	Demolition
		X	Subdivision

Square 369 Hotel Associates LLC (represented by Robert Knopf of Quadrangle Development), with plans prepared by architect Bob Neal (Cooper Carry), seeks conceptual design review for construction of a 12-story hotel and residential building that would demolish two contributing buildings and incorporate retained portions of seven contributing buildings in the Shaw Historic District. The project would require a rezoning of the site through a planned unit development.

Property History and Description

The project site is located at 9th and L Streets at the southeast corner of the Shaw Historic District across the street from the Washington Convention Center to the east and the soon-to-be completed Marriot Marquee Hotel to the south. There are nine street-fronting buildings:

- *1114 9th Street:* A two-story tan brick commercial building constructed in 1919, designed by architect R.K. Ferguson. The first floor limestone façade was applied in 1938, and originally had small projecting storefronts. The building has been internally combined with a two-story stable facing the alley that likely predates the front building.
- *1112 9th Street:* A two-story red brick commercial building constructed in 1912 to serve as the office for a coal and lumber yard; it was designed by architect Samuel Turner.
- *1110 9th Street:* A two-story red brick building with a low-pitched gable roof and rear ell-wing. It was constructed as a dwelling prior to 1857 and converted to commercial use in 1877 with alterations to the first floor for a projecting storefront.
- *1108 9th Street:* A two-story tan brick building constructed in 1927 for retail with apartments above. It was designed and built by owner/architect W.C. Allard.
- *1106 9th Street:* A three-story beige brick building constructed in 1908 as a marble mantel and tile store with a dwelling above, for owner Edwin Ellett. The building was designed by W.C. Allard.
- *1104 9th Street:* A three-story red brick building constructed *circa* 1850-1855 as a dwelling; the first floor was altered for conversion to commercial use in 1914. The original owner was Zephaniah Jones.
- *911 L Street:* A three-story red brick rowhouse with a raised entrance and English basement that was constructed *circa* 1854-1859. The graduated window proportions on the first two floors (and possibly the detailing around them) date from a façade alteration in 1904. The original owner was Zephaniah Jones, the original owner of 1104 9th Street.
- *913 L Street:* A three-story Romanesque brick and brownstone rowhouse with a raised entrance and English basement, constructed in 1892 and designed by architect Appleton P. Clark.

- *919 L Street*: The Lurgan, a four-story brown brick apartment building with Mission Revival detailing, constructed in 1913 and designed by architect Appleton P. Clark for owners Roger O'Hanlon and James Murray.

The buildings along 9th Street illustrate the evolution of this corridor from residential to primarily neighborhood-serving commercial uses in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. 9th Street was secondary in importance to 7th Street, the city's primary commercial corridor, which is reflected when comparing the relative modesty of these buildings with those in the 1000 block of 7th Street. Nevertheless, the west side of the street retains a strong sense of its early 20th century commercial character, with minimal intrusions and a historical continuity to its streetscape. The three buildings along L Street reflect that street's residential character as it evolved from rowhouses pre-dating the Civil War to a denser neighborhood of apartment buildings in the early 20th century.

All of the subject buildings date from within the period of significance for the Shaw Historic District (1833-1932). While the structures have been neglected and are deteriorated as a result, they retain sufficient integrity to continue to be contributing to the historic district.

Proposal

The project calls for demolition of 911 and 913 L Street, removal of rear portions of the six buildings along 9th Street, and retention of the exterior masonry walls of the Lurgan Apartments. The new construction would include a hotel on the eastern portion of the site with lobbies opening to L Street; while housing two different brands – a Courtyard and a Residence Inn – it would appear as a single building on L Street and behind the 9th Street buildings. An apartment building would be constructed at the west end of the site, with the existing alley west of the Lurgan closed and relocated west of the new apartment building. A curb cut would be provided for parking and loading to the hotel mid-block on 9th Street north of the historic buildings.

Evaluation

The project raises three preservation issues for the Board's consideration: demolition of 911 and 913 L Street, alteration of the remaining seven buildings; and the compatibility of the new construction (technically, an addition to the historic buildings) with the character of the historic district.

Demolition of 911 and 913 L Street

As the primary purpose of the preservation law is "to retain and enhance those properties which contribute to the character of the historic district and to encourage their adaptation for current use," the proposal to demolish these two contributing buildings is not consistent with that purpose or the preservation act.

Alteration of 919 L Street and 1114-1104 9th Street

The concept calls for retention of the exterior masonry walls of the Lurgan with removal and replacement of the wood floor and roof assemblies. The Historic Preservation Regulations, DCMR 10-C, Section 305.1(b), defines demolition as "the removal or destruction of all or a substantial portion of the structural components of the building, such as structural walls, floor assemblies, and roofs."

This is not an unprecedented issue, in which wood frame buildings being connected to new construction requires some level of alteration. However, wholesale removal of the structure of a

wood frame building is not a solution that is consistent with the preservation act, nor is the only method of achieving code compliance. It is recommended that alternative solutions, such as providing fire rating to the existing structure or a fire break between the existing and new construction be explored.

The deteriorated condition of the floor and roof assemblies at 1114-1104 9th Street make their removal and replacement less problematic. A site inspection by the applicants and HPO in 2013 confirmed that there has been some loss of structural integrity within each of the buildings where portions of roofs and/or floors have failed. Portions of several of the buildings were inaccessible due to collapsed floors and roofs.

The proposed removal of rear wings at 1112 9th (building 2 in the applicant's submission) and 1104 (building 6) is generally respectful to the existing structures, resulting in the retention of the main blocks and rear walls of those buildings and later or insignificant elements removed. The point at which 1114 (building 1) is retained appears to fall at the location where the street-fronting building adjoins the stable behind. While no interior wall exists between the two and the demolition of the stable is regrettable, the point at which removal is proposed at least falls in a logical location with regard for the property's development.

The point at which the rear portions of 1110 (building 3) and 1108 (building 4) are proposed for removal is more difficult to evaluate, as the existing plans don't seem to reflect the conditions shown in the photographs. For instance, the rear ell-wing on 1110 is substantially deeper than the 10' depth shown and the drawings for 1108 don't illustrate the building's U-shaped plan. Based on the photographs of these two buildings, and the extent of removal of 1106 where half of the original mass of the building would be demolished, it appears that the extent of removal constitutes demolition as defined in DCMR 10-C, Section 305.1(d): "The removal or destruction of all or substantially all of an entire wing or appendage of the building, such as a rear ell, unless the wing lacks physical or historic integrity, or is not a character-defining feature." The plans should be clarified for these structures and their treatment should continue to be evaluated with the goal of limiting the extent of demolition.

A scope of rehabilitation work and storefront reconstruction should also be developed in consultation with HPO. Plans should be based on the archival material that has already been assembled.

Addition/New Construction

There is ample precedence in many of the city's historic districts for large new buildings being compatibly inserted into a context of smaller scaled structures. Among a multitude of design considerations, the successful integration of larger new construction and smaller historic buildings requires careful attention to how the height and mass are modulated, how fenestration is oriented and organized, and what and how materials are used.

The proposal includes many aspects that represent a good start to achieving compatibility. The use of earth-toned masonry, vertically-oriented punched windows, and a strongly defined top to the residential building relate to characteristics of surrounding apartment houses. On the hotel building, the six-story masonry façade element on the L Street elevation establishes a base that helps relate it to the height of the Lurgan. Recent redesign of the 9th Street elevation, with a differentiated top floor and more vertically-oriented windows, has improved its design.

However, additional refinement is needed to achieve compatibility with the historic district. The long, tall unbroken wall surface behind the 9th Street buildings, without a change in plane, mass, height, or pattern of fenestration exacerbates the disparity of size between the small historic buildings and the new construction. Even with recent efforts to provide greater verticality to the 9th Street windows, the elevations continue to have a horizontality emphasis that is at odds with the strong verticality of buildings in the district. While the materials of the hotel are not specified, the cool silver and gray illustrated in the rendering is foreign to the warm masonry earth tones that characterize the historic district. A palette of materials that more closely relates to the historic district could help mitigate the size and impact of the addition on its context.

As the project continues to be developed, the following should be considered as to how they could improve the compatibility of the design:

- Differentiate the top one or two floors to help lower the apparent height of the buildings. The most recent design has made a step in this direction, with a slight setback at the corner tower of the new construction and along the 9th Street elevation. This should continue to be developed.
- Use intermediate height elements that can serve to visually bridge between the smaller and larger buildings and break up large wall expanses. The use of the six-story masonry façade element proposed for the L Street elevation of the hotel is a step in this direction, and should be further developed.
- Provide a stronger vertical emphasis to the elevations.
- Consider how projections, bays of windows and/or the organization of fenestration could help reduce the scale of the building and provide rhythm to the larger elevations.
- Use materials and colors that relate to the historic district.
- More closely relate the design of the three-story infill element on 9th Street to the scale and rhythm of fenestration found in this row of historic buildings.
- Reduce the height of and/or recess the glass infill along the Lurgan's west elevation.

Recommendations

The HPO recommends that the Review Board make the following findings:

- *Demolition of 911 and 913 L Street is inconsistent with the purposes of the preservation act and should be forwarded to the Mayor's Agent upon receipt of a demolition permit;*
- *The removal of floor and roof assemblies at 919 L Street constitutes demolition as defined in the preservation regulations and is inconsistent with the purposes of the act. The Board recommends that the applicants evaluate alternative ways to achieve code compliance that retain these structural features in whole or significant part;*
- *Due to a loss of structural integrity, the removal and replacement of floor and roof assemblies at 1114-1104 9th Street is consistent with the act, as it is necessary to adapt them for current use;*
- *The rear wings at 1112 and 1104 9th Street are insignificant and do not contribute to these buildings' character. Additional clarification as to the existing and proposed conditions at 1110, 1108, and 1106 should be provided before making a determination as to whether the proposed treatments constitute an alteration or demolition;*
- *A scope of rehabilitation for the retained historic buildings should be developed;*
- *The new construction should continue to be developed and refined as recommended above, in order for it to be found compatible with the character of the historic district;*
- *The project should return to the Board for further review when ready.*



The horizontal emphasis of the new construction behind Red Lion Row is discordant with the vertical orientation of the historic buildings. Without any variety in plane, mass, height or fenestration, the new construction fails to establish a compatible relationship.



Square 457 illustrates how modest changes in height and plane, groupings of vertically-oriented windows, an articulated roofline, and a common scale and palette of materials can successfully relate a large building to a context of smaller historic buildings.



Square 450 illustrates how compatibility can be achieved using a contemporary vocabulary through the use of a strong vertical orientation to the fenestration, variations in height and mass, and masonry that relates to the material and colors of the surrounding historic buildings.