

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

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Landmark/District:	<b>First Church of Christ, Scientist</b> <i>(pending landmark)</i>	<b>X</b>	Agenda Consent Calendar
Property Address:	<b>1770 Euclid Street, NW</b>		
Meeting Date:	<b>March 22, 2012</b>	<b>X</b>	Concept Review
H.P.A. Number:	<b>12-209</b>	<b>X</b>	Alteration
Staff Reviewer:	<b>Steve Callcott</b>	<b>X</b>	New Construction

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Adams Morgan Church Hotel, LLC (represented by Brian Friedman of Friedman Capital Advisors) seeks ongoing conceptual review for a project involving rehabilitation and construction of a nine-story addition to the First Church of Christ, Scientist. The Review Board last reviewed the project in 2008; since that time, the development team has hired a new architect, substantively redesigned the project, and filed the project for review by the Zoning Commission as a Planned Unit Development (PUD). The project team will be represented by architect Alistair Gallatly (OPX Global) and preservation consultant Emily Eig (EHT Traceries).

**Property History and Description**

The First Church of Christ, Scientist is located at the corner of Euclid and Champlain Streets, NW just east of 18<sup>th</sup> Street. The front of the church faces Euclid, with frontage on Columbia Road across a small triangular park. Behind the church are a parking lot and a three story office building. The property slopes down approximately 13 feet from north to south. The site is located just outside the east boundary of the Washington Heights Historic District, which includes the properties on both sides of 18<sup>th</sup> Street.

Constructed in 1912, the church is an excellent example of Neoclassical Revival architecture and a significant illustration of the influence of the City Beautiful movement on private construction in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The building was constructed as the permanent home for First Church of Christ, the first Christian Science church in the area, and was designed by the local firm of Marsh and Peter. The building served as the congregation’s church for almost 100 years; the congregation has recently begun meeting at the Christian Science Reading Room at 1782 Columbia Road, NW.

**HPRB Review**

An application nominating the building to the DC Inventory of Historic Sites was submitted by the Adams Morgan Main Street Group (AMMG) in 2008. In consultation with the church and development team, HPO agreed to defer scheduling the designation hearing to allow the development team to study compatible development treatments.

The purpose of concept review is “to allow applicants to benefit from the guidance of the Review Board...in advance of a permit application.”<sup>1</sup> While it is somewhat unusual for the Board to consider a concept application for property that is not yet designated, the

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<sup>1</sup> DCMR 10-C, Section 301.2

regulations do not preclude it, and it can serve the same useful purpose of providing direction to an applicant regardless of a property's designation status.

In its two concept reviews in June and November 2008, the Review Board offered a range of comments to improve the compatibility of the project.<sup>2</sup> Those comments focused on: 1) increasing the distance and visual separation between the church and the addition; 2) ensuring the connection was light-weight in feeling and lower in height than the church's cornice line; 3) redesigning the porte-cochere and vehicular access to the addition to ensure it did not extend over to the side yard of the church; 4) shifting the mass of the addition away from the church to the greatest extent possible (moving it further down Champlain Street and/or concentrated at the rear/west side were specifically suggested); and 5) articulating the building's all-glass elevations so that they didn't appear flat, monolithic and looming behind the church building. It has been based on this guidance that the HPO has worked with the applicants over the past 18 months to ensure that these points of concern have been addressed.

The Board members did not comment on the height of the addition and did not ask for a reduction in height. While not commenting specifically on the economics of the project, several Board members expressed awareness of the significant constraints generally involved in restoring and reusing a church building and the difficulties of accommodating development on this particular site that would make restoration and reuse feasible.

### **Planning Considerations**

Since the Board's last review, the development team has submitted an application for a consolidated Planned Unit Development (PUD) and related map amendment. In addition to the map amendment from R-5-B and Reed-Cooke/C-2-B to C-2-B, five areas of zoning flexibility would be required. In its report to the Zoning Commission, the Office of Planning (OP) stated that while the project is supported by some Comprehensive Plan policies, OP had concerns that aspects of the design, including the height, may not be sufficiently supported by the Plan. OP's report suggested that the design would be more consistent with the Plan if the building were reduced in height, with special consideration given to its relationship to adjacent buildings to the south and west and nearby buildings across Champlain Street and Columbia Road.

At its meeting on November 14, 2011, the Zoning Commission agreed to set the case down for hearing but identified a number of concerns, including the issue of height identified by the Office of Planning. While the applicant has been working to try to address the design issues that were cited as of concern – the overall architectural character, materials, roof treatment, and the quality of drawings have all been modified in the plans submitted to the HPRB from what was submitted to the Commission – the height of the proposed addition has remained essentially unchanged.<sup>3</sup> It is therefore

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<sup>2</sup> HPA #08-319, heard June 26, 2008 and November 20, 2008. Staff reports, transcripts and Board actions are posted on the HPO website.

<sup>3</sup> The height has been reduced modestly from 92' to 90' since submitted to the Zoning Commission, eliminated the need for a height variance. The revised plans have not yet been submitted to the Zoning Commission.

entirely possible that a reduction in height or other redesign may be required as a result of the Zoning Commission's review. However, before undertaking the far lengthier process of a PUD hearing, the applicants are seeking to ensure that the concerns raised by the HPRB have been successfully addressed and that the Board remains comfortable with the overall approach. The Office of Planning has made clear to the applicants that the standard of review applied by HPRB – general compatibility with the proposed landmark – is more limited and potentially less stringent than the broader planning and zoning standards that must be applied by the Zoning Commission, and that satisfying the Board's preservation concerns in no way supersedes or satisfies the requirements of the zoning review process.

### **Revised Proposal**

The proposal has been revised to address the concerns expressed by the HPRB in 2008 and more recently to some of the comments made by the Zoning Commission at the setdown meeting. Most dramatically, the all-glass design for the hotel proposed in 2008 has been abandoned in favor of a masonry building with multi-light steel windows; the design has gone through several iterations and has also been revised since submission to the Zoning Commission to lighten up the coloration of the masonry. The mass of the building has been modulated on the south side of the Champlain Street elevation to step down to six stories adjacent to the smaller neighboring buildings, and the weight shifted to the west (rear) of the site. The penthouse has also been reduced in size, simplified in form and shifted to the west (rear) wing of the building, now oriented north-south rather than running east-west where it was visible over the roof of the church and added apparent height to the hotel tower.<sup>4</sup>

Also in response to the Board's concerns, the depth of the hyphen connection between the hotel and the church has been increased, lowered in height to two stories (a small third floor connection is set further back), and made more transparent; the rear wall of the church would be largely retained within and visible from the exterior through the hyphen. Stair access towers that abutted the church and extended above its cornice have also been eliminated and subsumed within the hotel addition. Vehicular access and parking have been eliminated from the side yard of the church and are contained within a redesigned porte-cochere that is lower in height and less dominant on the Champlain Street elevation.

### **Evaluation**

The revised design is responsive to the Board's direction and a significant improvement over the 2008 proposal. The connection with the church is smaller, lighter and more transparent, and the distance between the addition and church sufficiently large that they read as separate structures. While the Board's design guidelines typically encourage that additions to historic buildings be subordinate in size and height, the Board has often made exceptions to this principle when the addition is convincingly designed to appear as a separate building. Inherent in this approach is the premise that a larger building can coexist compatibly with the church, that the surrounding urban context can support a

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<sup>4</sup> The changes in brick color and the penthouse plan are not reflected in the submission materials sent to the Board but will be presented at the March 22 meeting.

taller structure, and there be sufficient separation between the historic building and the addition/new building. The change from an all-glass façade to a masonry vocabulary provides the design with a sense of scale, texture and color that is more characteristic of the neighborhood. The fenestration, in which the windows are now grouped, inset within their openings and detailed with muntins, provides more articulated elevations that also improves the variety, shadow and depth, and scale of the elevations. For the purposes of compatibility with the proposed landmark, the revised design approach is improved in reading as distinct from the church, with a greater setback, and better related in scale, materials, articulation and color to the surrounding context than previously presented.

The other changes also improve the project's compatibility. The elimination of the vehicular encroachment on the church site and the redesigned porte-cochere will provide a more compatible setting for the church and a better pedestrian experience on Champlain Street. The stepped massing and composition of the Champlain elevation helps visually break down the size of the addition and provides a transition to the smaller adjacent buildings. Finally, relocating the penthouse to the north-south rear wing of the building removes significant weight from the composition, reducing its apparent height the equivalent of a floor as seen behind the church from Columbia Road.

The staff recommends that the Board find the revised concept to be compatible with the proposed landmark and consistent with the purpose of the preservation act, for the reasons described above. Any substantial changes should return to the Board for further review.

The staff also acknowledges the high degree of community involvement in this project as reflected in the attached comments, and the additional review process required at the Zoning Commission to consider impacts on the surrounding neighborhood. The staff's comments should not be construed as constituting a recommendation of approval for any necessary zoning relief, nor should the Board's comments and findings be construed as an evaluation under the separate jurisdiction and standards of the Zoning Commission.