HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD
STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION

Landmark/District:	**Woodley Park Historic District**	(**x**) Agenda ( ) Consent
Address:	**2608-2612 Connecticut Avenue, NW**	
Meeting Date:	**December 17, 2009**	( ) Subdivision
Case Number:	**09-241**	(**x**) Addition (**x**) New Construction
Staff Reviewer:	**Tim Dennée**	(**x**) Revised concept

Background
The applicants, owners Sharam and Maria Taginya (with the assistance of Studio 27 Architecture), return to the Board for additional conceptual review of a proposal to construct on an existing parking lot a five-story residential building with ground-floor parking. The structure would face 24th Street but would technically be an addition to the one-story, historic commercial buildings on Connecticut Avenue. The new building would stand about 49 feet tall from the proposed grade at its 24th Street front, plus an elevator override penthouse. There will also be some refurbishment of the storefronts, a project that will presumably take place soon but separately, and be reviewed at the staff level.

Most of the top floor would be set back about thirteen feet from the main wall plane, with the stair core set back only about eight feet.

In July, the Board unanimously approved the proposal in concept, i.e., its height, general massing and general materials, with the conditions that the project return with additional development of the plans to address the issues such as better depiction of the streetscape in the vicinity of the project; provision of a scope of rehabilitation of the commercial buildings; the lowering of the top floor's parapet; the cladding of the sides of the building and most walls of the top floor in brick; additional study of the grade or slope in front of the building, and the making of various revisions to the previously shown bays.

Revisions
Most of the above issues have been addressed in one way or another, eliminating several issues and improving the facade. The setback of the top floor is greater than before, but the elevator pop-up and some rooftop equipment and screening are new. The 24th Street bays have been eliminated, with only the shallow projections of the balconies remaining. Only one projecting bay remains on the Connecticut elevation, but both east and west elevations are simpler and flatter than before (although the top floor is set back farther from the west). This is appropriate, as the other buildings on 24th Street are pretty flat and modest.
The present set of drawings also better illustrates the relationship of this building to the neighboring structures.

The drawings also illustrate the complicated geometry of the shallowly inward-sloping front "yard." The yard slopes toward the building because the plans intend to align the new structure with the floors on Connecticut and to keep the whole under the zoning height limit. Changes in slope within the yard suggest that the module of the paving should be small, to more easily smooth over the juncture of different slopes. The planter has been expanded, and resident mailboxes removed.

Evaluation

A few issues remain. While it stands to reason that there will have to be new rooftop mechanical equipment (because of the 100 percent lot coverage proposed), such equipment was not depicted in the July set of drawings. The present set shows units and visual screening atop both the new structure and as relocated on the existing one-story commercial buildings. The mechanical equipment and screening on the new building may be shown sited as well as it might be, and the height of the building may sufficiently cut off prominent views from most places. As the one-story commercial buildings are quite low, however, that equipment would likely be visible (as suggested by the perspective drawing on page 10, for instance). This may be a case in which the screening is more problematic than the objects it screens, because the volume of the area enclosed by the screening is much greater and less set back than the units themselves.[1] In fact, freeing the commercial ventilation and air-conditioning equipment from such an enclosure may permit more flexibility in the location of each piece to may them less prominent.

The balustrade at the fourth-floor roof may be improved by equalizing the widths of the paneled masonry piers that divide the sections of rail and baluster. These piers are aligned with and weighted relative to the solid sections of wall below. It would be possible to maintain this relationship and still have some consistency between piers by making some subtle shifts in the locations of the window openings—shifts of a few inches northward from the south corner, as the floor plan is not rigidly tied to the exact window spacing. In general, the building has benefited from a general paring down and even moving in a more contemporary direction. The rusticated base and the balcony and roof balustrades are the only historicist elements. In general, these are sufficiently compatible with the rest of the design, but the building might benefit from lightening the second-story balconies.

The most important unresolved issue is that of the primary wall material. Although there will be a considerable use of cast stone to simulate limestone in the building's base, cornice and balustrades, and the face of the set-back top floor would be of stucco, the façade's primary material is brick. The drawings indicate that the side and rear walls would now be "brick block," i.e., concrete masonry units pressed with scores to mimic the look of brick joints. These will be tinted to be similar to the face brick of the façade. Although an attempt to match the texture and module of the face brick is appreciated, brick block is inferior in appearance. First, even if there is an attempt at a color match by tinting the concrete, it will not truly match the face brick. Even more important is the fact that, while scored to read as a smaller brick-sized module, the block still reads as block, i.e., one can perceive particularly the eight-inch vertical joints where the blocks meet in each course and notice how these align with those of the blocks every other row above and below. In short, that material betrays itself as concrete block. If there were not so much exterior wall to be exposed to view, it would not be much of an issue, but so far, the Board

[1] The enclosure atop the commercial buildings is as tall as the tallest unit within, and because there needs to be at least a foot or clearance around the equipment, the enclosure projects forward of the units. It also envelops an additional, considerable amount of open area between the pieces of equipment.

has only approved brick block in very limited areas of the rear of small buildings. As mentioned above, the Board has previously recommended approval of the concept with the condition that the walls generally be of brick, as are the neighboring properties' side, rear, and often front walls. Using a real face brick would obviate the need for a contrasting brick reveal within the side walls.

The staff recommends that the Board approve the proposal in concept, with the conditions that the sides and rear be faced with brick to match the façade, rather than with brick block, and that there be more study and revision of the balustrades and rooftop equipment as discussed above.