
800 F STREET, NW (Square 406)
Preliminary and Final Site and Building Plans
800 Block F Street, NW

April 6, 2000

Abstract

The Commission, in its review role described in the Memorandum of Agreement among the General Services Administration, the National Park Service, and the National Capital Planning Commission as the successor agencies to the Pennsylvania Avenue Development Corporation, is reviewing the preliminary and final site and building plans for the private development to occur in and behind the historic buildings in the 800 Block of F Street, NW. The Pennsylvania Avenue Development Plan and the Guidelines for Square 406, which call for the preservation of the historic buildings, govern the properties. The developer will rehabilitate the historic buildings and construct new office space behind them in accordance with the Square Guidelines, which were revised by the Commission at its January 1999 meeting.

When the General Services Administration sold the properties to a private developer, the properties were further protected by a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA), pursuant to Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, and by a Deed of Preservation Easement. Both the interior and exterior of the historic buildings are subject to review in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. The review of the application of the Secretary's Standards rests with the Commission and the D.C. State Historic Preservation Officer. This is the final review stage for this new development; however, as with all former PADC properties, the Executive Director, by Delegated Authority, reviews all building permits for such projects as tenant signage and exterior alterations to buildings (the MOA will provide further protection of the historic buildings in perpetuity). As the property is held in private hands, it is also subject to the normal regulatory review of the District of Columbia government.

Authority

Public Law 104-134, and Section IV of the Memorandum of Agreement among the General Services Administration, the National Park Service, and the National Capital Planning Commission.

Commission Action

The Commission:

- **Commends** the applicant for designing a compatible new building within this significant historic setting, as well as for the continued close coordination with Commission staff.
- **Approves** the preliminary and final site and building plans for the rehabilitation of historic structures in the 800 Block of F Street, NW, and for new construction behind the historic structures in Square 406, as shown on NCPC Map File No. 21.10(38.00)-40768.
- **Understands** that the Commission staff will continue to work with the applicant and other affected parties to ensure compliance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards in the rehabilitation of the historic buildings.

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BACKGROUND AND STAFF EVALUATION

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSAL

A private developer has submitted preliminary and final site and building plans for the rehabilitation of five historic buildings in the 800 block of F Street, NW, and for new construction behind the historic structures and along a portion of the 8th Street frontage.

Site

Square 406 is bounded by 8th, 9th, E, and F Streets, NW. The project site covers the northernmost third of the square, including the 800 block of F Street, and is immediately across F Street from the National Portrait Gallery (Old Patent Office) and across 8th Street from the General Post Office (Tariff Commission Building). The former Riggs Bank building (now a Marriott Courtyard Hotel) and the Masonic Temple sit to the west of the project site across 9th and F Streets, respectively. The five historic buildings in the 800 block of F Street are all significant historic institutional and commercial buildings adding greatly to the architectural and historic character of the Old Downtown. The site also has frontage on 8th Street, NW, a major cross-axis of the L'Enfant Plan with a long-noted and protected reciprocal vista between the Old Patent Office and the National Archives.

The developer's property contains approximately 24,601 square feet. The remaining two-thirds of the square is owned by another private owner and is currently used for surface parking.

The 800 Block of F Street, NW, is individually listed in the D.C. Inventory of Historic Places and in the National Register of Historic Places. The buildings are also included in the Downtown Historic District and the Pennsylvania Avenue National Historic Site. They represent the era--the decades following the Civil War--of richly flamboyant commercial architecture.

Most buildings from this period in downtown Washington have been demolished; our understanding of this era in Washington's history is enriched by the preservation of these buildings. Their proximity to significant federal government buildings illustrates the mixed uses and scales of buildings in nineteenth-century Washington. The Pennsylvania Avenue Development Plan (PADC Plan) and the square guidelines have always called for the historic preservation of these buildings as a high priority. The five historic buildings are, from east to west:

- The LeDroit Building, constructed in 1875 by A.L. Barber and Company, the developers of the LeDroit Park neighborhood. Designed by noted architect James McGill, whose offices were located in the building until 1882, it is the premier extant example in Washington of the commercial office building in the period that pre-dated the use of elevators. Italianate in style, the brick building is enlivened by a notable amount of both wood and cast iron trim. Its prominent arched windows, large even by the standards of the day, allow public views of the interior. The storefronts have been altered many times over the years, although historic photographs as well as extant building fabric should allow for a near replication of the original or early storefront.
- 812 F Street, a three-story row building with a brick façade. Also dating to 1875, it has bracketed window hoods and an ornate cornice, also hallmarks of the Italianate style.
- The Adams Building, at 814-816 F Street, built three years later in 1878 by J. Bradley Adams for his own commercial and residential use. Only two stories in height and also Italianate in style, the building was probably designed by James McGill.
- 818 F Street, built in 1881 by J. Bradley Adams. The three-story building has a cast-iron façade and bracketed cornice, notable because there are so few remaining cast-iron facades downtown. The façade has been covered in intervening years, so it is not readily apparent at present.
- The Warder Building, at 527 9th Street (later called the Atlas Building), the last of the row to be built, in 1892. Designed by architect Nicholas T. Haller, who had his office in the building, it was built by B.H. Warder, a farm-implement manufacturer from Ohio who moved to Washington to speculate in land development. The six-story building is Romanesque Revival in style. Although now painted, which obscures the details of the facade, the building has a pressed red brick facade and an arcaded base and prominent horizontal lines typical of its style. The building has always served as an office building and contains a cage elevator.

Building Program

- The five historic structures will be rehabilitated according to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation as outlined in the Memorandum of Agreement. Building facades will be restored to original condition, replicating windows and other elements where needed, based on documentary evidence. The windows in the Warder/Atlas Building will be

replaced in consideration of its new residential use. Storefronts will be replicated to the extent possible based on historic photographs and remaining historic building fabric.

- Selective demolition will occur on non-original portions of the buildings as allowed by the PADC Plan and the Square 406 Guidelines, including:
 - The lavatory wing at the rear of the LeDroit Building.
 - The narrow rear wing of the Warder/Atlas Building along the project site's southern property line.
- New four- to eight-story construction will fill in the remainder of the site, which is currently vacant. No new construction will occur above the historic buildings, except above the rear eight feet of 814 F Street, NW, where the Square Guidelines allow construction beyond a 40-foot setback line. (The 8-foot segment of the building will be retained below.) Along the 8th Street frontage to the west for a distance of 40 feet, the new construction will not exceed the height of the Tariff Commission Building across the street (approximately 60 feet). Beyond the setback zones, the height of the proposed new construction does not exceed the allowable 90 feet height.
- The loading dock for the project will be located off of 8th Street, within approximately ten feet of the southern property line as required by the PADC Plan, in order to facilitate shared loading activities once the remainder of the square is developed.
- The entrances to the different uses within the building will be primarily through the historic buildings. The residential entrance, as well as the entrance to the office uses, will be from the Warder/Atlas Building on 9th Street, and the storefront doors on 8th, 9th and F Streets will serve the retail space in the building.
- The majority of the first three floors of both the historic and new portions of the building will likely be devoted to a single retail/restaurant tenant who has recently been signed by the developer. The residential uses will be limited to the third through sixth floors of the Warder/Atlas Building, while the office uses will be concentrated in the 4th through 8th floors of the new construction and on the top floor of the LeDroit Building.
- The building uses can be roughly broken down to 57,665 square feet (45 percent) for retail and arts-related retail, 49,450 square feet (38 percent) for office, and 21,540 square feet (17 percent) for residential (10 units). Nearly half of the overall building square footage will be located in the historic buildings (60,527 square feet of the total 128,654 square feet proposed).

Building Design

- The new construction will have a trapezoidal shape derived, in part, from the placement of the historic buildings in the block. Required setbacks also result in a variety of distinct building masses.
- Within the larger overall trapezoidal shape there will be two triangular, curtain wall projections located behind the historic buildings facing F Street. Each metal and glass curtain wall will be seven stories tall. This same curtain-wall design motif will be picked up on other portions of the building, including a projection on 8th Street at the second and third floors, and on the upper two floors of the 8th and 9th Street elevations.
- The brick walls of the new construction will have punched openings and limestone banding derived from the Warder/Atlas Building
- The mechanical penthouse will be clad with a metal frame trellis with horizontal sun screens intended to be an overall design element and will provide some shade to users of the rooftop deck.

PREVIOUS COMMISSION ACTION

At its October 1999 meeting, the Commission approved the overall design concept for the new construction, as well as the proposed rehabilitation of the existing historic buildings. The Commission complimented the applicant on the design of the new building, which the Commission felt was both compatible with the historic buildings while being architecturally interesting in its own right. The Commission requested, however, that two areas be studied in greater detail as the design of the building progressed – the design and height of the penthouse trellis feature and the profile of the metal mullions on the curtain wall.

RESPONSE TO COMMISSION ACTION

The applicant has provided detailed drawings of the curtain wall construction and has revised the design of the penthouse trellis. There have been no other significant changes to the use, layout, or design of the building. The applicant has continued to meet with NCPC and DC SHPO staff at the project site on a regular basis to view historic fabric and determine rehabilitation techniques.

The applicant has provided details of the curtain wall materials and profiles. The window mullions will be painted aluminum; however, beyond the plane of the glass there will be a second grid of horizontal aluminum louvers attached to a vertical metal trellis system. This secondary grid gives the curtain wall additional depth. The louvers will project out from the glazing as much as 18". Staff's original concern was that the large expanse of curtain wall on the F Street elevation, which will be highly visible, could appear flat. However, staff is convinced that the additional detailing demonstrates that the curtain-wall will have depth and shadow.

The rooftop embellishment, exempt from the 90-foot height limit, has been redesigned and now is more industrial in style. The applicant has said that the rooftop trellis and sun screens are intended to engage the overall building massing, help mitigate the stepped appearance of the setbacks, and relate the 90-foot building height with the higher height and mass of the future new building that will be built on the southern portion of the square (the maximum building height permitted on this portion of the square is 110 feet, 20 feet higher than the proposed building). Staff agrees that the trellis will help to animate the top of the building and will be functional at the same time. Some of the same materials used on the curtain wall elements have been carried to the penthouse level; for example, the penthouse will have horizontal louvers affixed to a vertical metal trellis. In addition, horizontal aluminum screens will be hung from the trellis to create shade on the roofdeck.

EVALUATION

Staff recommends approval of the preliminary and final site and building plans for the rehabilitation and new construction in and behind the 800 block of F Street, NW. Staff believes that the additional design details provided by the applicant clearly delineate the proposed new construction from the historic buildings. The materials chosen by the applicant are characteristic of new construction and help to establish the building's own architectural character, yet the rhythm of the punched windows in the brick façade relates well to the historic buildings along F Street.

Under the terms of the MOA, the staff will continue to review the rehabilitation of the historic buildings as they continue to develop. Staff appreciates the close coordination that has taken place thus far with the developer regarding the rehabilitation of the historic buildings. Numerous decisions have already been made regarding the retention or loss of interior partitions, building fabric, and elements. Some historic storefront material has been recovered in both the LeDroit and Atlas Buildings and may be used as templates for restoration. Other building fabric, such as a unique tile floor with a floral pattern may be retained in the Atlas Building if it meets American with Disabilities Act requirements. Regardless, NCPC and DC SHPO staff will continue to work closely with the primary retail tenant on the build-out of the new space within the historic structures.

Staff is very pleased that these long-derelict buildings will be rehabilitated and that, within a few years, Washingtonians and visitors alike will be able to enjoy these engagingly exuberant commercial buildings that illustrate a significant era in the development of the city.

COORDINATION

Coordinating Committee

The Coordinating Committee reviewed this item at its meeting on March 15, 2000, and forwarded the proposal to the Commission with the statement that the project has been coordinated with all agencies participating. The participating agencies were NCPC; the District of Columbia Office of Planning; the Department of Housing and Community Development; the

Fire Department; the Department of Public Works; the General Services Administration; the National Park Service; and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority.

CONFORMANCE

Comprehensive Plan

Square 406 is bordered by F, 7th, and 8th Streets, which are designated Special Streets in the Preservation and Historic Features Element of the Comprehensive Plan. The square is also located adjacent to a designated Special Place in this element and historic buildings are located on the property. The proposed design concepts for the development of this property, including the renovation of the historic buildings, are consistent with the applicable policies in the element, which provide for the protection and enhancement of Special Streets and Places and the preservation of historic properties.

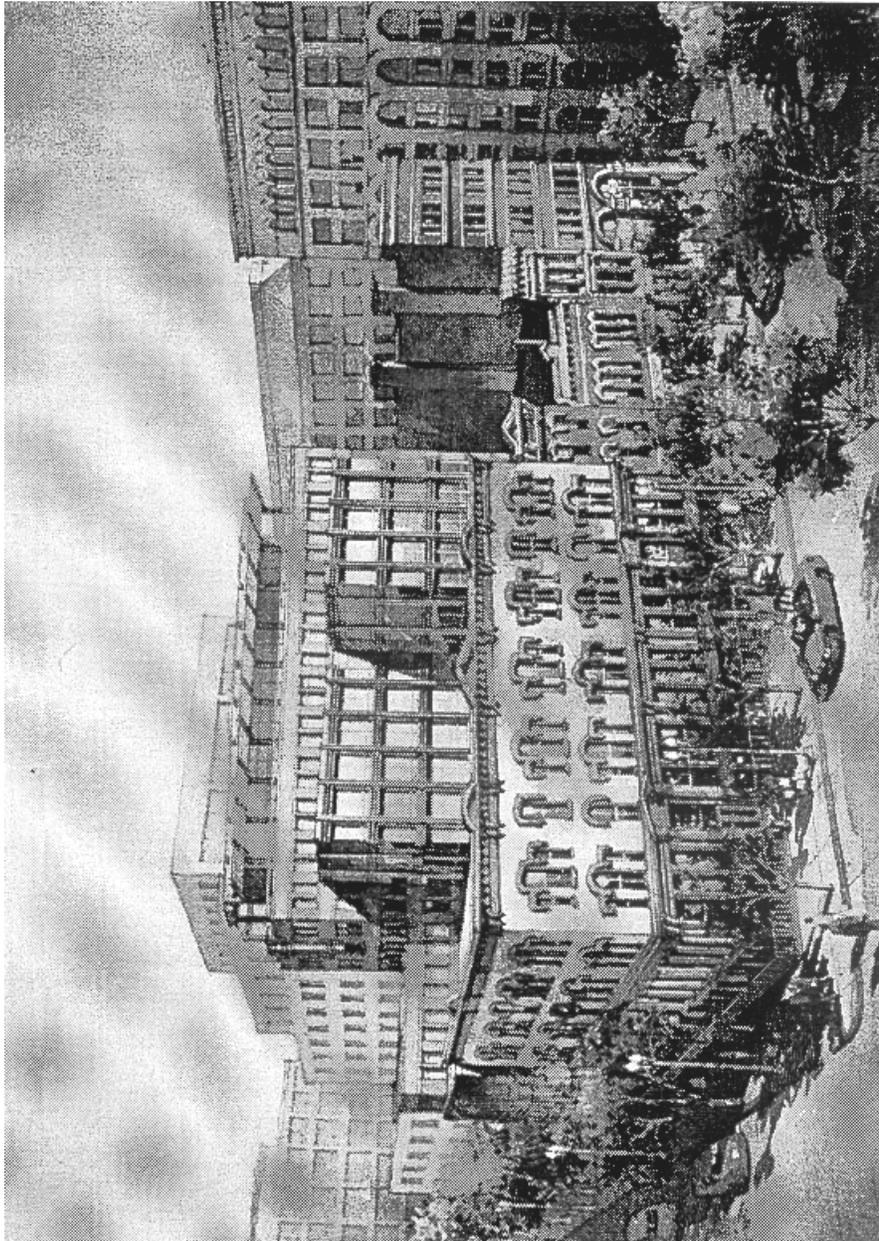
National Environmental Policy Act

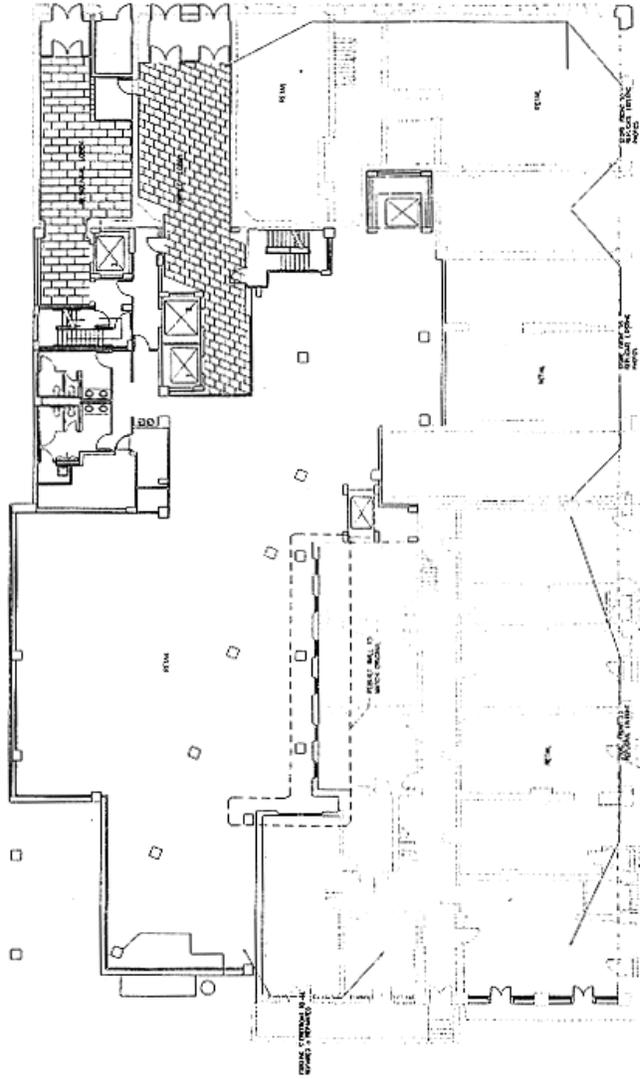
GSA has determined that the project qualifies as a categorical exclusion under its National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) compliance procedures at GSA Order PBS 1095.4C and the GSA NEPA Compliance Guide.

National Historic Preservation Act

GSA concluded its responsibilities under Section 106 by selling the historic properties to a private developer with a Deed of Preservation Easement, as well as by negotiating a Memorandum of Agreement stipulating that the property would be rehabilitated according to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation.

The review of the project's conformance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation rests with the Commission and the DC SHPO. Staffs from both agencies have been meeting regularly with the developer's team and anticipate ongoing consultation throughout the development of the project.

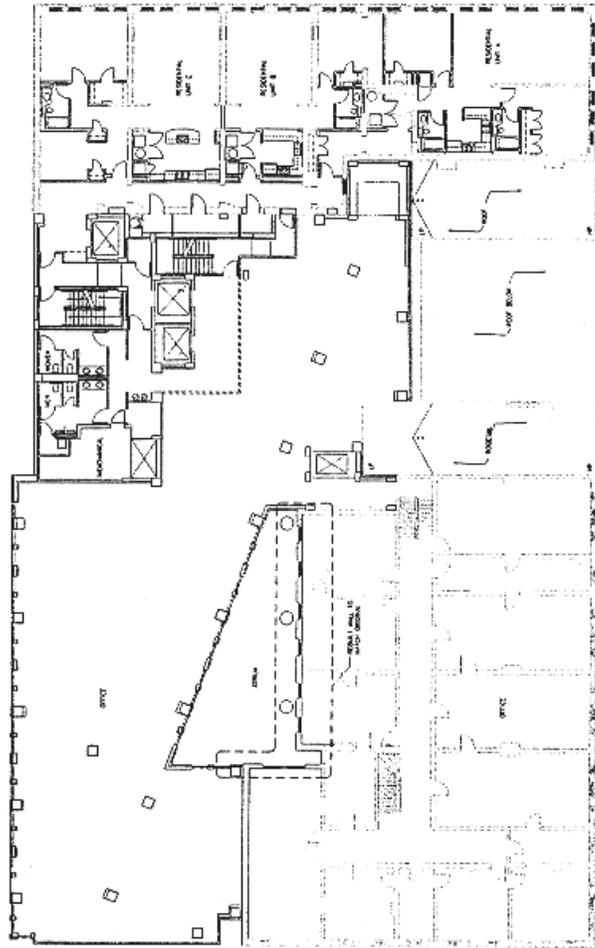




800 F Street N.W.
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FIRST FLOOR PLAN

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800 F Street N.W.
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FOURTH FLOOR PLAN

SHALDM BARNES ASSOCIATES
APRIL 5, 2009

