

Preliminary Consultation
MONTGOMERY COUNTY HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION
STAFF REPORT

Address:	7400 Wisconsin Avenue, Bethesda	Meeting Date:	5/9/2018
Resource:	Master Plan Site #35/014-005A Bethesda Post Office	Report Date:	5/2/2018
Applicant:	7400 Wisconsin LLC	Public Notice:	4/25/2018
Review:	Preliminary Consultation	Tax Credit:	No
Case Number:	N/A	Staff:	Michael Kyne
PROPOSAL:	Retroactive site wall alterations and other site alterations		

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends that the applicant make any revisions based on the HPC’s recommendations and return for a HAWP application.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

SIGNIFICANCE: Individually Designated Master Plan Site (35/014-005A)
STYLE: Classical Revival
DATE: Circa 1938

Excerpt from *Places from the Past*:

The Bethesda Post Office is one of three county post offices built under the Works Progress Administration. The program sought to create buildings that fit in with a community’s architecture. The Bethesda Post Office is built of native Stoneyhurst stone found on other structures in the Bethesda Commercial District. The Classical Revival building, featuring a hipped roof, distinctive cupola and segmentally-arched windows, was designed by Karl O. Sonnemann (1900-1967). Sonnemann was architect for the Federal Works Agency and its successor, the General Services Administration, from 1925 until his retirement in 1964. The builders were the Sofarelli Brothers of Jamaica, New York. An interior mural by Robert Gates depicts rural Montgomery County. The WPA commissioned Gates to paint murals for several of its projects in this era. Gates became one of Washington’s most respected and influential artists.



7400 Wisconsin Avenue, Bethesda (Subject Property Circled in Red)

BACKGROUND:

The applicants previously appeared before the Commission with a proposal for a rear addition and other alterations. The proposal was heard as a preliminary consultation at the December 3, 2014 HPC meeting, and the HAWP application was approved at the January 14, 2015 HPC meeting. The applicants appeared before the Commission again at the February 21, 2018 HPC meeting with a retroactive HAWP application for revisions to their January 14, 2015 approval. Specifically, the retroactive application was for the construction of a 7'-6" tall concrete site wall and horizontal slat fence/gate at the rear of the historic building and the construction of an 8' tall chain link fence with artificial plant screening on the roof of the previously approved rear addition. The applicants chose to continue their case at the February 21, 2018 meeting and the HPC did not reach a formal decision.

PROPOSAL:

- Retroactive construction of a 6' tall concrete site wall at the rear and Montgomery Lane side of the existing rear parking lot (reducing the wall from its current height of 7'-6").
- Retroactive construction of a 6' tall horizontal slat fence/gate, connecting the rear left corner of the historic building to the concrete site wall (reducing the fence from its current height of 7'-6").
- Retroactive construction of a garden plaza including hardscape alterations at the rear of the historic building in the former parking lot location.
- Retroactive construction of an 8' tall chain link fence with artificial plant screening on the roof of the previously approved rear addition.

APPLICABLE GUIDELINES:

In accordance with section 1.5 of the *Historic Preservation Commission Rules, Guidelines, and Procedures (Regulation No. 27-97) (Regulations)*, the Commission in developing its decision when reviewing a Historic Area Work Permit Application for an undertaking at a resource in the Chevy Chase Village Historic District uses section 24A-8 of the Montgomery County Code (“Chapter 24A”), the *Secretary of the Interior’s Standards and Guidelines for Rehabilitation (Standards)*, and pertinent guidance in applicable master plans – *Chevy Chase Village Historic District Design Guidelines*. [Note: where guidance in an applicable master plan is inconsistent with the *Standards*, the master plan guidance shall take precedence (§ 1.5(b) of the *Regulations*).] The pertinent information in these documents, incorporated in their entirety by reference herein, is outlined below.

Sec. 24A-8. Same-Criteria for issuance.

- (b) The commission shall instruct the director to issue a permit, or issue a permit subject to such conditions as are found to be necessary to insure conformity with the purposes and requirements of this chapter, if it finds that:
 - (1) The proposal will not substantially alter the exterior features of an historic site or historic resource within an historic district; or
 - (2) The proposal is compatible in character and nature with the historical, archeological, architectural or cultural features of the historic site or the historic district in which an historic resource is located and would not be detrimental thereto or to the achievement of the purposes of this chapter; or
 - (3) The proposal would enhance or aid in the protection, preservation and public or private utilization of the historic site or historic resource located within an historic district in a manner compatible with the historical, archeological, architectural or cultural value of the historic site or historic district in which an historic resource is located; or
 - (4) The proposal is necessary in order that unsafe conditions or health hazards be remedied; or
 - (5) The proposal is necessary in order that the owner of the subject property not be deprived of reasonable use of the property or suffer undue hardship; [emphasis added] or
 - (6) In balancing the interests of the public in preserving the historic site or historic resource located within an historic district, with the interests of the public from the use and benefit of the alternative proposal, the general public welfare is better served by granting the permit.
- (c) It is not the intent of this chapter to limit new construction, alteration or repairs to any 1 period or architectural style.

Secretary of Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation

The Secretary of the Interior defines rehabilitation as “the act or process of making possible a compatible use for a property through repair, alterations, and additions while preserving those portions or features, which convey its historical, cultural, or architectural values.” Standards 2, 5, and 6 most directly apply to the application before the commission:

- 2. The historic character of a property shall be retained and preserved. The removal of historic materials or alteration of features and spaces that characterize a property shall be avoided.
- 9. New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction shall not destroy historic materials that characterize the property. The new work shall be differentiated from the old and shall be compatible with the massing, size, scale, and architectural features to protect the historic integrity of the property and its environment.

10. New additions and adjacent or related new construction shall be undertaken in such a manner that if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment would be unimpaired.

STAFF DISCUSSION:

As noted in the excerpt from *Places from the Past*, the subject property is one of three county post offices built under the Works Progress Administration. The building, which dates to circa 1938, is designed in the Classical Revival style, with many of its character-defining and distinctive features visible from the public right-of-way of Wisconsin Avenue (front) and Montgomery Lane (left side and rear).

The applicants previously appeared before the Commission with a proposal for a rear addition and other alterations. The proposal was heard as a preliminary consultation at the December 3, 2014 HPC meeting, and the HAWP application was approved at the January 14, 2015 HPC meeting. The approval included repaving the existing rear parking lot and replacing the metal pipe fencing at the rear and Montgomery Lane side of the parking lot with cable rail fencing. Evergreen planters were also proposed to line the perimeter of the site.

The applicants instead constructed a concrete site wall where the cable rail fencing was previously proposed. The concrete site wall is approximately 7'-6" tall and is on top of an existing retaining wall, which is approximately 4' tall. The overall perceived height of the wall from Montgomery Lane is nearly 12'. A horizontal slat fence/gate of equal height to the concrete site wall has also been constructed, connecting the rear left corner of the historic building to the concrete site wall. The previously approved evergreen planters have been installed at the Montgomery Lane side of the parking lot in front of the site wall.

The use of the former parking lot space has also changed since the January 2015 approval, going from a parking lot to an enclosed garden plaza/exercise space. Staff finds that an appropriately designed enclosed garden plaza/exercise space that allows the character-defining features of the historic building to be experienced is appropriate in this location, and the applicants should not be required to retain the rear parking lot. While the former parking lot space has likely always been open, staff does not find that the parking lot contributes to the character of the resource. In this case, the windows on the rear of the historic building are staff's chief concern, as they do characterize the building. Alternative uses and features that are compatible with the historic building and preserve the visibility of the windows are appropriate in this location.

Other constructed features that were not part of the January 14, 2015 approval include a garden plaza (consisting of concrete paving, an at-grade labyrinth, and landscaping) in the location of the rear parking lot and an 8' tall chain link fence with artificial plant screening on the roof of the previously approved rear addition.

The Commission's unadopted policy for fences and site walls at historic sites and within historic districts is as follows: fences and site walls forward of the rear plane of a historic structure must not exceed 4' in height and must have an open appearance (i.e. fences should have a picket or similar design, and site walls should be low in height and step to follow the site's topography) to preserve visibility of the property from the public right-of-way; and fences and site walls behind the rear plane of a historic structure must not exceed 6'-6" in height. It is staff's understanding that these limitations are consistent with the height requirements for site walls and fences at all locations within Montgomery County, as established by county code.

Typically, the Commission approves fences and site walls with a solid appearance behind the rear plane of a historic structure, although special consideration is given for properties on corner lots, where such a feature would obscure character-defining features of the historic site or otherwise detract from the surrounding streetscape.

Although the chain link fence with artificial plant screening on the roof of the rear addition is not consistent with the Commission's policy – and staff is concerned that the fence was constructed without a HAWP – it will not detract from character-defining features of the historic site, due to its location on the roof of a rear addition. Likewise, the garden patio will not detract from the resource, as this is an at-grade feature in the former location of a paved parking lot.

Staff finds that the concrete site wall and horizontal slat fence/gate, as currently constructed, are incompatible features that detract from the resource. These features at least partially obscure the rear elevation of the historic building and prevent its character-defining features from being experienced from Montgomery Lane. The applicants are proposing to reduce the height of the site wall and fence to 6', which is consistent with the Commission's height requirements for fences and site walls behind the rear plane of a historic building; however, as noted above, the special consideration should be given for this corner lot property, as a solid 6' tall site wall has the potential to obscure character-defining features on the rear of the historic building.

Staff also notes that, when viewing the subject property from Montgomery Lane, the overall perceived height of the site wall (the proposed 6' tall site wall on top of the existing 4' tall retaining wall) will be 10'. To be consistent with the Commission's height requirements for site walls and fences, the proposed site wall could be no higher than 2'. While this would result in a site wall that is perceived to be 6' tall from the public right-of-way on Montgomery Lane, it will not provide the desired privacy for the enclosed garden plaza/exercise space. As noted above, the objective in this case is to preserve the visibility of rear windows and the rear elevation of the historic building from the public right-of-way of Montgomery Lane. Staff finds that a compatibly designed site wall that preserves the visibility of the windows from the public right-of-way is appropriate at this site, even if the perceived height of the site wall exceeds 6'.

At staff's request, the applicants have provided photo simulations, showing how the historic building and lowered site wall/fence will be perceived from different angles on Montgomery Lane. Photos of the existing conditions from the same angles have also been provided for comparison. While the proposed 6' tall site wall and fence will be just below the rear window sills, portions (if not most) of the rear windows will still be obscured when viewing the building from certain angles on Montgomery Lane. This is due to the site wall's location on top of a 4' retaining wall and the downward slope of Montgomery Lane.

Staff recommends further mitigation, which might include reducing the height of the concrete site wall and horizontal slat fence/gate to 4', as previously approved for the cable rail fencing. The applicants have expressed concerns about the security of a wall less than 6' tall. However, alternatives, such as a 2' tall cable rail fence on top of a 4' tall concrete site wall and existing 4' tall concrete retaining wall, may address these security concerns while preserving the visibility of the character-defining features (i.e., windows) at the rear of the historic building.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

- Staff recommends that the height of the concrete site wall and horizontal slat fence/gate be further reduced to be no higher than 4' on top of the existing 4' tall concrete retaining wall. An additional 2' of semi-transparent screening (i.e., cable or metal rail fencing) on top of the concrete site wall

is appropriate to a total height of 6' (with a total perceived height of approximately 10'), keeping the total height of the enclosure below the rear window sills.

- Staff recommends that the Commission support the retroactive garden plaza proposal.
- Staff recommends that the Commission support the retroactive rooftop fence with artificial plant screening proposal.
- Staff recommends that the applicant make any revisions based on the HPC's recommendations and return for a HAWP application.



DPS - #4

HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION
301/563-3400

APPLICATION FOR HISTORIC AREA WORK PERMIT

Contact Email: bdetwiler@cobroventures.com Contact Person: Brian Detwiler
 Daytime Phone No.: 240-481-7640
 Tax Account No.: 00490661
 Name of Property Owner: 7400 Wisconsin LLC Daytime Phone No.: 202-333-0880
 Address: 7101 Bethesda Wisconsin 20814
Street Number City State Zip Code
 Contractor: Scott-Long Construction Phone No.: 703-802-7500
 Contractor Registration No.: _____
 Agent for Owner: Cobro Ventures, Inc. Daytime Phone No.: 240-481-7640

LOCATION OF BUILDING/PERMITS

House Number: 7400 Street: Wisconsin
 Town/City: Bethesda Nearest Cross Street: Montgomery Ln
 Lot: _____ Block: P13 Subdivision: 0023 Edgemoor
 Liber: _____ Folio: _____ Parcel: N458

PART ONE: TYPE OF PERMIT ACTION AND USE

1A. CHECK ALL APPLICABLE: CHECK ALL APPLICABLE:
 Construct Extend Alter/Renovate A/C Slab Room Addition Porch Deck Shed
 Move Install Whack/Raze Solar Fireplace Woodburning Stove Single Family
 Revision Repair Revocable Fence/Wall (complete Section 4) Other: _____

1B. Construction cost estimate: \$ 6 million

1C. If this is a revision of a previously approved active permit, see Permit # 707863 (alter) 708131 (add)

PART TWO: COMPLETE FOR NEW CONSTRUCTION AND EXTEND/ADDITIONS

2A. Type of sewage disposal: 01 WSSC 02 Septic 03 Other: _____
 2B. Type of water supply: 01 WSSC 02 Well 03 Other: _____

PART THREE: COMPLETE ONLY FOR FENCE/RETAINING WALL

3A. Height _____ feet _____ inches Height and location varies.
See attachments for details.
 3B. Indicate whether the fence or retaining wall is to be constructed on one of the following locations:
 On party line/property line Entirely on land of owner On public right of way/roadway

I hereby certify that I have the authority to make the foregoing application, that the application is correct, and that the contractor will comply with plans approved by all agencies listed and I hereby acknowledge and accept this to be a condition for the issuance of this permit.

Brian Detwiler
Signature of owner or authorized agent

January 22, 2018
Date

Approved: _____ For Chairperson, Historic Preservation Commission
 Disapproved: _____ Signature: _____ Date: _____
 Application/Permit No.: _____ Date Filed: _____ Date Issued: _____

Edt 6/21/99

SEE REVERSE SIDE FOR INSTRUCTIONS

825810

6
7

**THE FOLLOWING ITEMS MUST BE COMPLETED AND THE
REQUIRED DOCUMENTS MUST ACCOMPANY THIS APPLICATION.**

1. WRITTEN DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT

a. Description of existing structure(s) and environmental setting, including their historical features and significance:

The existing structure is the Old Post Office in downtown Bethesda, which is undergoing a major renovation and expansion that has been previously approved and permitted. The main portion of the property (the old post office) is considered historic, while the portion of the property that was formerly a parking lot for USPS was deemed to have no historic value.

b. General description of project and its effect on the historic resource(s), the environmental setting, and, where applicable, the historic district:

The subject of this application is a retroactive approval of several exterior changes that had not been previously presented to the Commission. The attached drawings reflect construction in "as built" form. Two changes of interest include (1) raising the original concrete retaining wall along Montgomery Ln and (2) adding an artificial plant fence screen on the roof of the new addition. The retaining wall that surrounds the old parking lot was raised in varying heights ranging from 4' to 7' to add privacy to an outdoor workout space. It does not hinder historic views of the building from the south or east (most significant). The artificial plant fence screen creates a rooftop oasis, and would not appear to have any impact on the original historic structure.

2. SITE PLAN

Site and environmental setting, drawn to scale. You may use your plot. Your site plan must include:

- a. the scale, north arrow, and date;
- b. dimensions of all existing and proposed structures; and
- c. site features such as walkways, driveways, fences, ponds, streams, trash dumpsters, mechanical equipment, and landscaping.

3. PLANS AND ELEVATIONS

You must submit 2 copies of plans and elevations in a format no larger than 11" x 17". Plans on 8 1/2" x 11" paper are preferred.

- a. Schematic construction plans, with marked dimensions, indicating location, size and general type of walls, window and door openings, and other fixed features of both the existing resource(s) and the proposed work.
- b. Elevations (facades), with marked dimensions; clearly indicating proposed work in relation to existing construction and, when appropriate, context. All materials and features proposed for the exterior must be noted on the elevations drawings. An existing and a proposed elevation drawing of each facade affected by the proposed work is required.

4. MATERIALS SPECIFICATIONS

General description of materials and manufactured items proposed for incorporation in the work of the project. This information may be included on your design drawings.

5. PHOTOGRAPHS

- a. Clearly labeled photographic prints of each facade of existing resource, including details of the affected portions. All labels should be placed on the front of photographs.
- b. Clearly label photographic prints of the resource as viewed from the public right-of-way and of the adjoining properties. All labels should be placed on the front of photographs.

6. TREE SURVEY

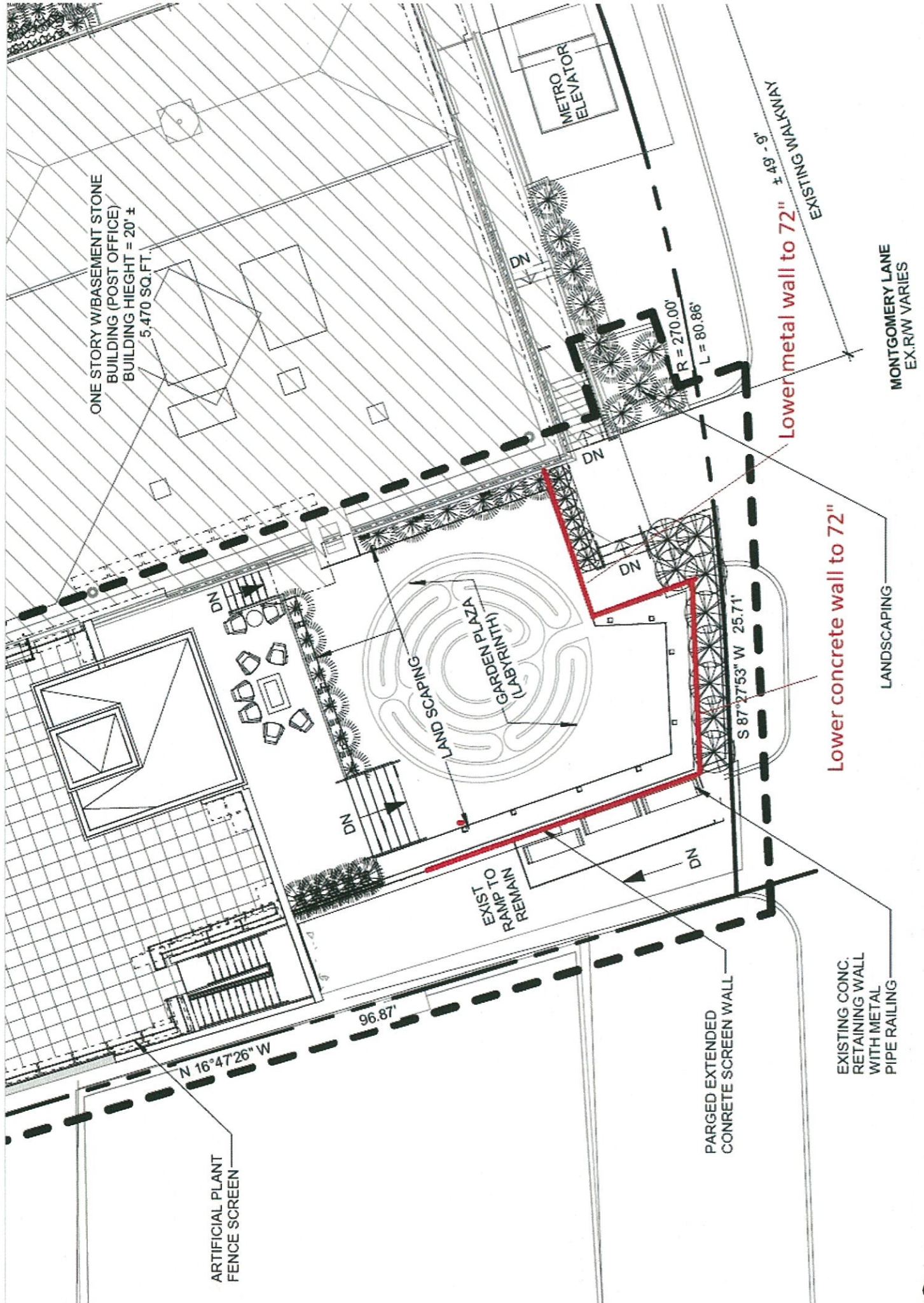
If you are proposing construction adjacent to or within the dripline of any tree 6" or larger in diameter (at approximately 4 feet above the ground), you must file an accurate tree survey identifying the size, location, and species of each tree of at least that dimension.

7. ADDRESSES OF ADJACENT AND CONFRONTING PROPERTY OWNERS

For ALL projects, provide an accurate list of adjacent and confronting property owners (not tenants), including names, addresses, and zip codes. This list should include the owners of all lots or parcels which adjoin the parcel in question, as well as the owner(s) of lot(s) or parcel(s) which lie directly across the street/highway from the parcel in question.

PLEASE PRINT (IN BLUE OR BLACK INK) OR TYPE THIS INFORMATION ON THE FOLLOWING PAGE.
PLEASE STAY WITHIN THE GUIDES OF THE TEMPLATE, AS THIS WILL BE PHOTOCOPIED DIRECTLY ONTO MAILING LABELS.

~~8~~
8



ONE STORY W/BASEMENT STONE
BUILDING (POST OFFICE)
BUILDING HEIGHT = 20' ±
5,470 SQ. FT.

METRO
ELEVATOR

EXISTING WALKWAY
± 4.9' - 9'

MONTGOMERY LANE
EX. R/W VARIES

R = 270.00'
L = 80.86'

Lower metal wall to 72"

LANDSCAPING
LAZYRITH (1)

Lower concrete wall to 72"

LANDSCAPING

EXIST TO
RAMP
REMAIN

S 87°27'53" W 25.71'

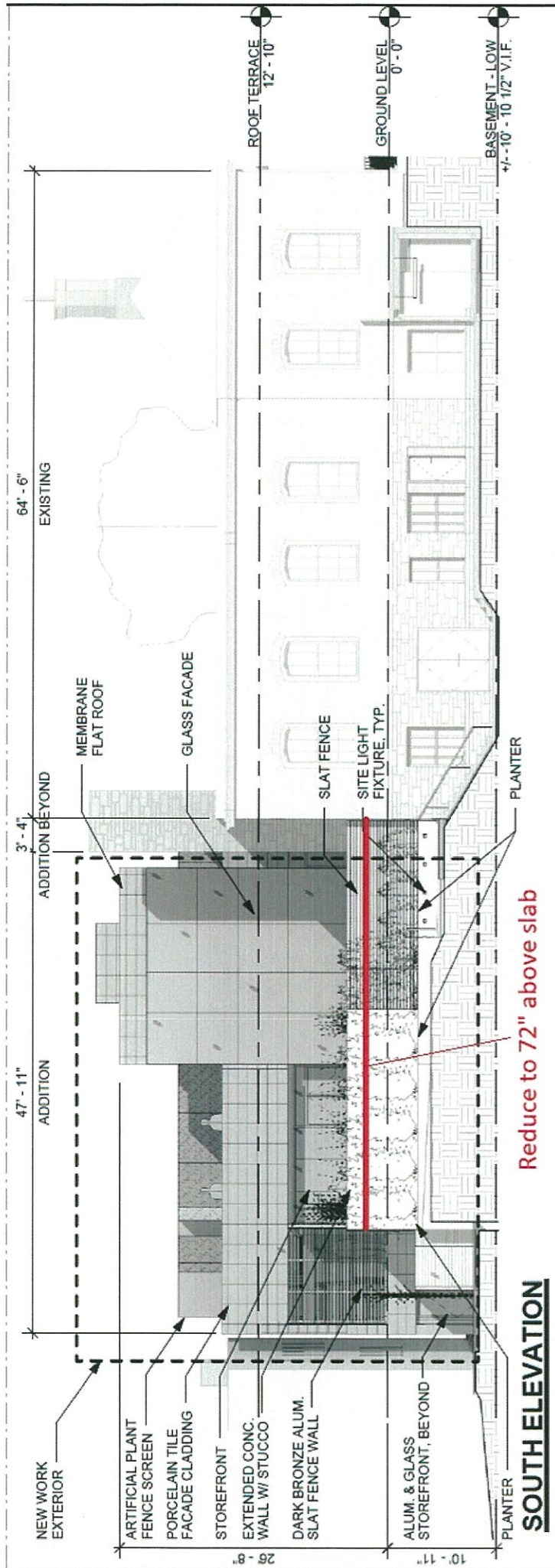
EXISTING CONC.
RETAINING WALL
WITH METAL
PIPE RAILING

PARGED EXTENDED
CONCRETE SCREEN WALL

ARTIFICIAL PLANT
FENCE SCREEN

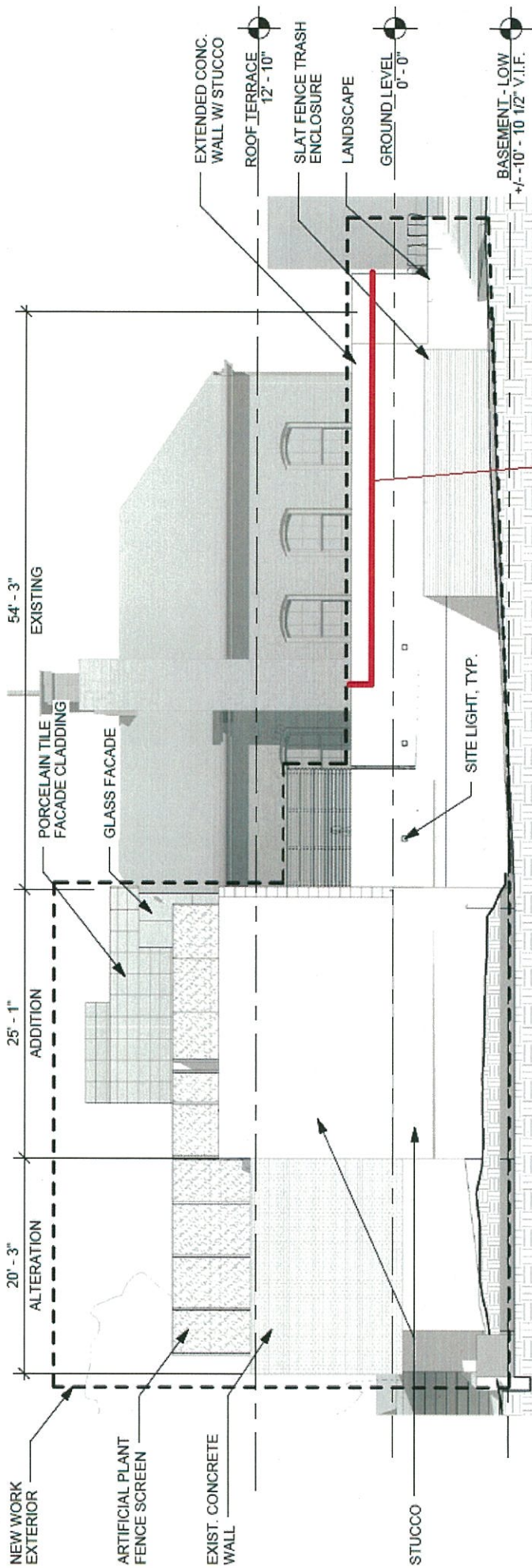
N 16°47'26" W

96.87'



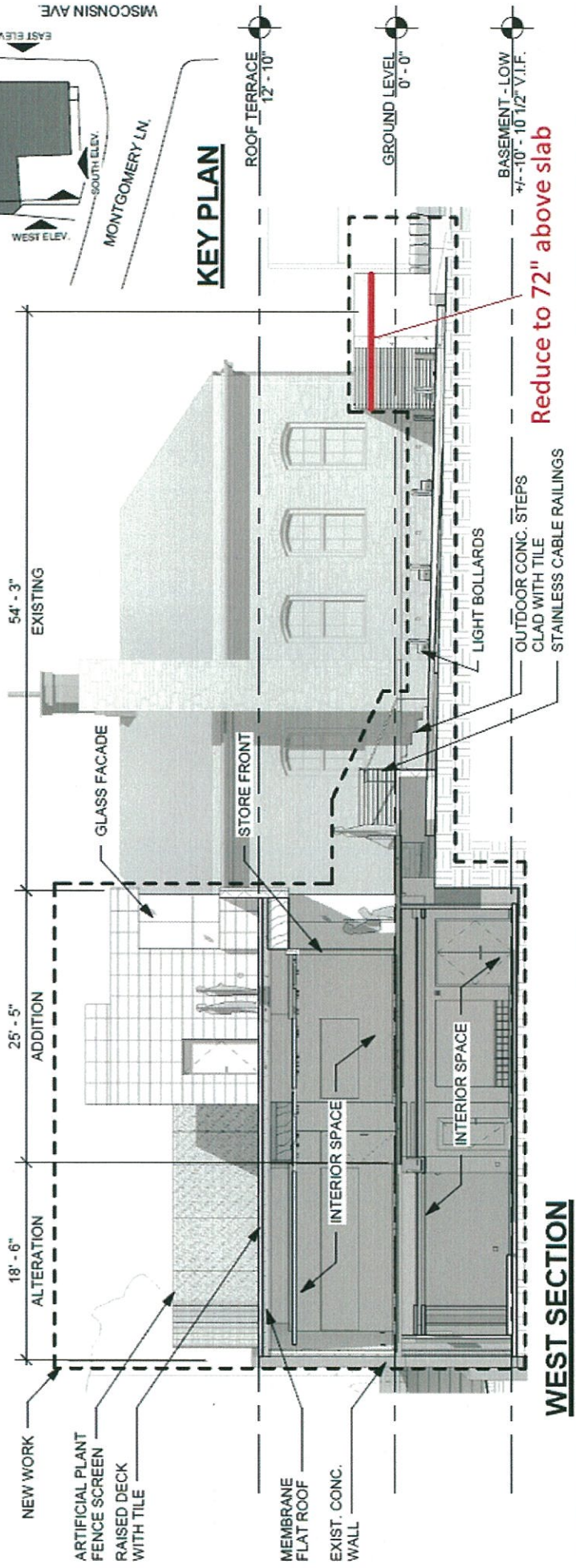
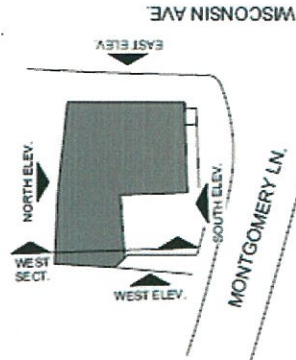
Reduce to 72" above slab

SOUTH ELEVATION



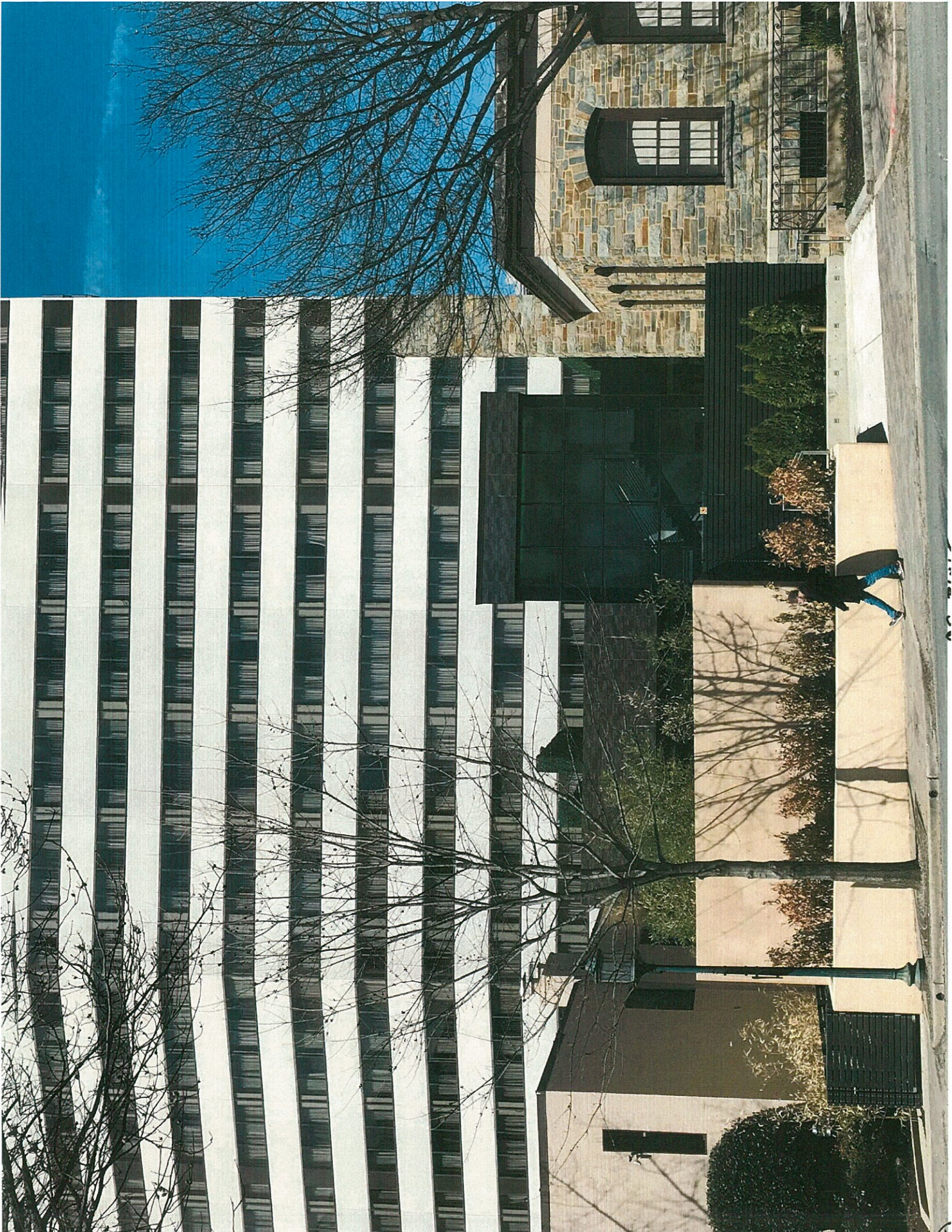
Lower to 72" above slab

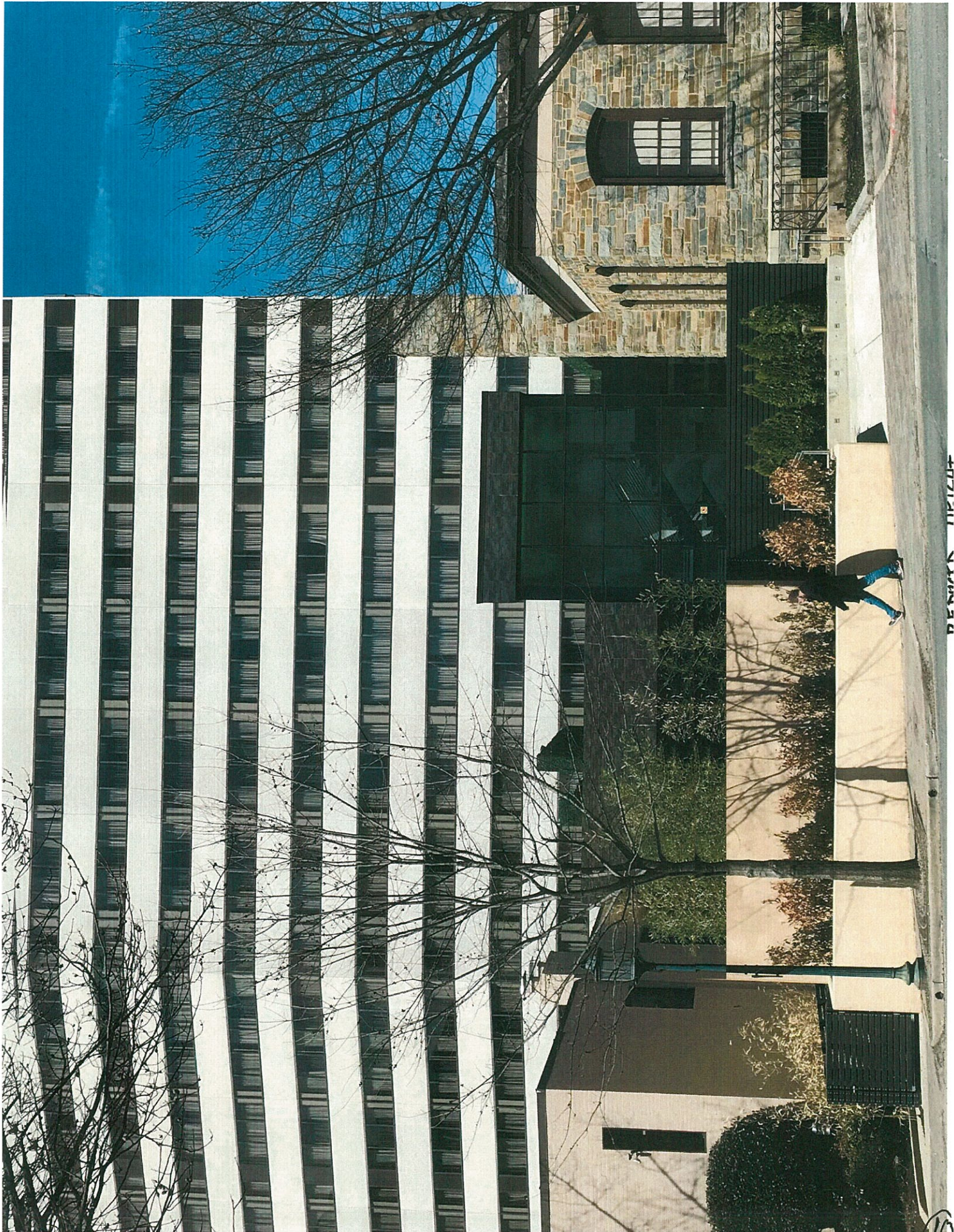
WEST ELEVATION











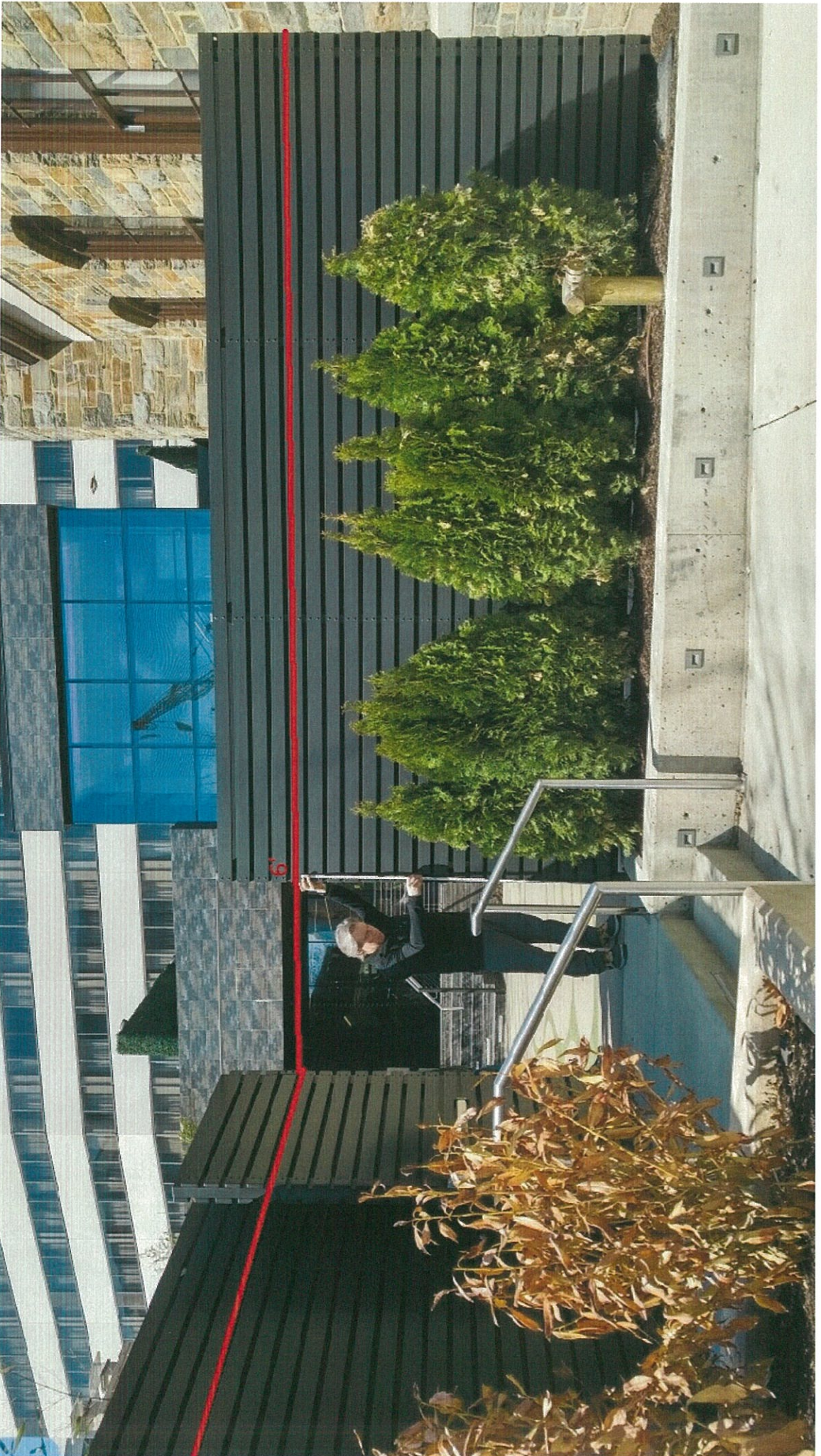
DE RUYCK TIRIZZI



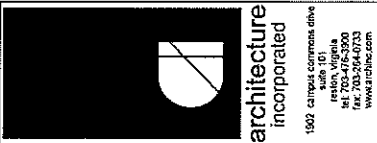












architecture
incorporated

1902 CATHERINE COTTRELL DRIVE
SUITE 101
RESTON, VIRGINIA
20191-4400
TEL: 703-241-0700
WWW.AICORP.COM

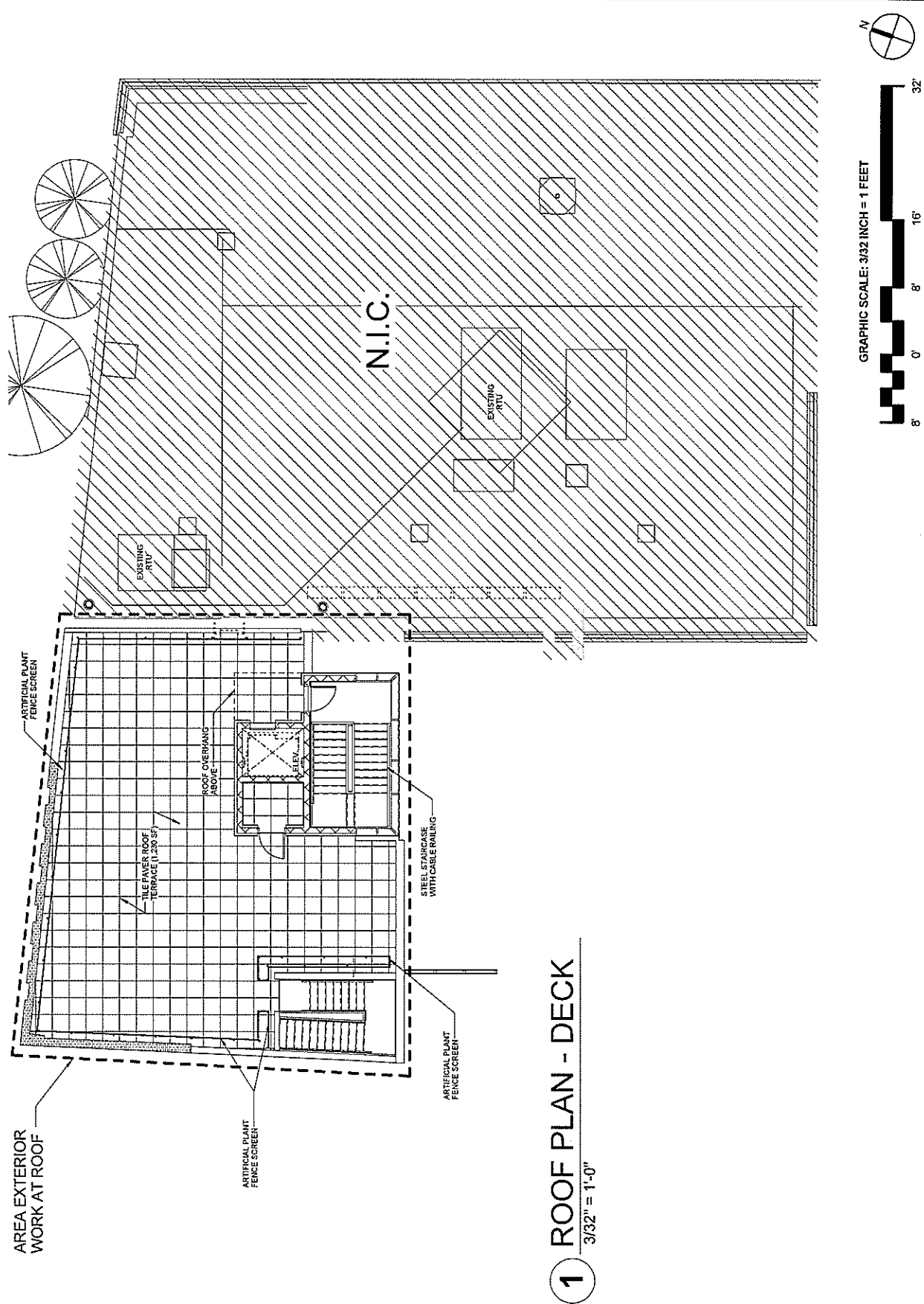
HWPA Documents for:
**RENOVATION & ADDITION
BRIDGES FITNESS & YOGA**
BETHESDA, MD 20814

PROJECT: 041831
REVISED:

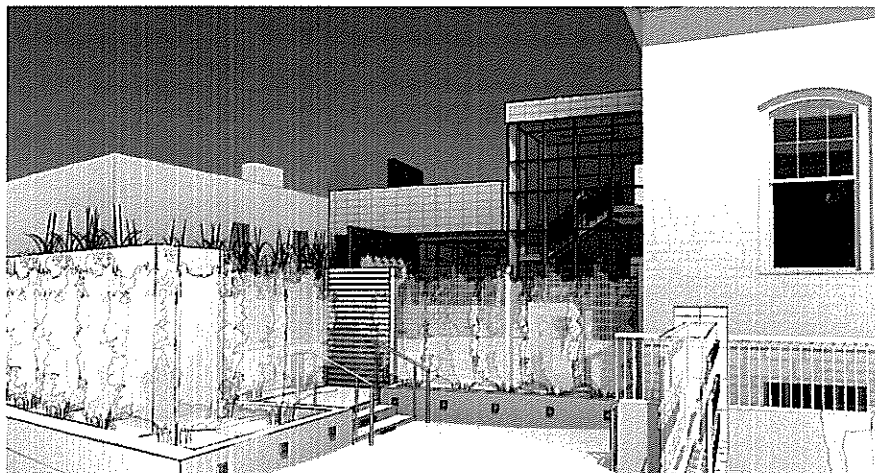
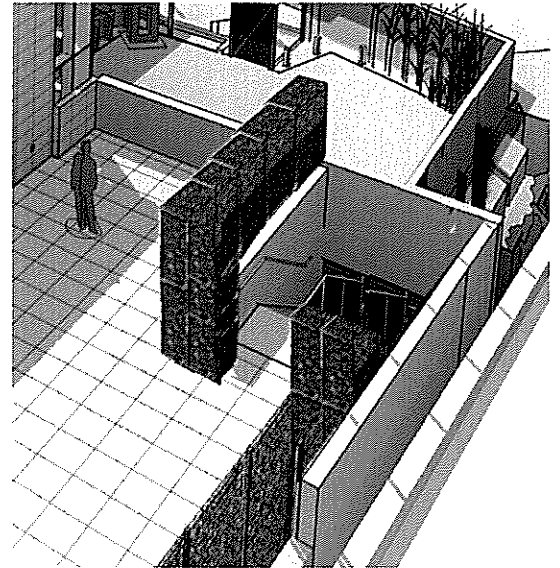
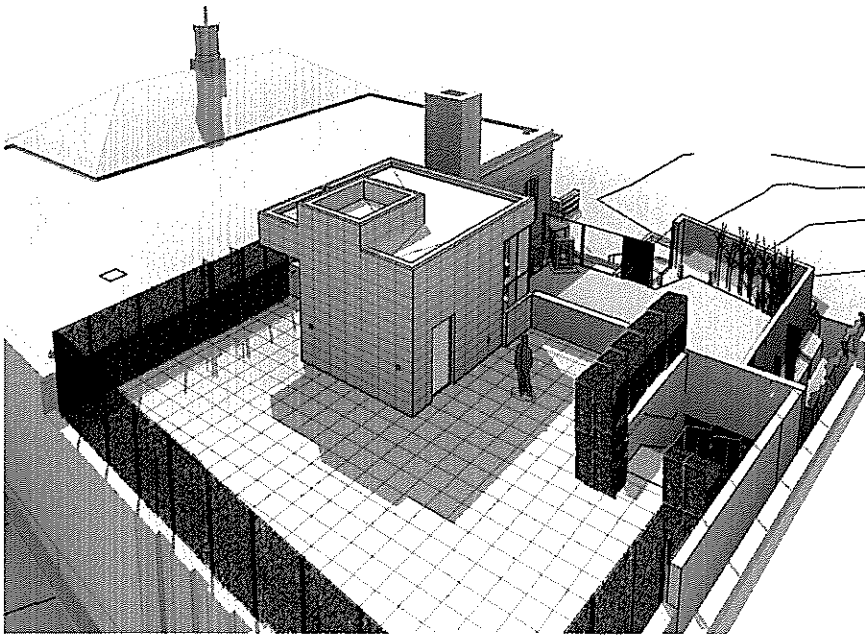
ROOF PLANS

Scale: 3/32" = 1'-0"
Checked By: CHW/ML
Date: 11/07/14

A3
Plan Sheet



1 ROOF PLAN - DECK
3/32" = 1'-0"



Fence is 8' tall, with galvanized chain link mesh, bolted to roof

Green screen is on inside of mesh and made from NATRAHEDGE® BOXWOOD Artificial Boxwood Mat Panels
see: <http://www.fencescreen.com/NatraHedge/Artificial-Boxwood-Mat.aspx>









architecture
incorporated

1907 carroll commons drive
salem, virginia
VA 22546-5902
tel: 703-465-9902
fax: 703-465-9903
www.archinc.com

HWPA Documents for:
BRIDGES FITNESS & YOGA
BETHESDA, MD 20814

Project: 11161.01
Revision:

ARCHITECTURAL
SITE PLAN

Scale: 1" = 20'-0"
Drawn By: [Name]
Checked By: [Name]
Date: 01/17/18

Sheet
AS1
From Sheet

