Preliminary Consultation
MONTGOMERY COUNTY HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION
STAFF REPORT

Address: 7400 Wisconsin Avenue, Bethesda  Meeting Date: 10/25/2017
Resource: Master Plan Site #35/014-005A  Report Date: 10/18/2017
Bethesda Post Office
Applicant: 7400 Wisconsin LLC  Public Notice: 10/11/2017
(Michael Domeier, Agent)
Review: Preliminary Consultation  Tax Credit: N/A
Case Number: N/A  Staff: Michael Kyne

PROPOSAL: Sign installation

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends that the applicants 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.

BACKGROUND

The applicants previously appeared before the Commission for a preliminary consultation at the August 16, 2017 HPC meeting. At that time, the applicants proposed four different options for sign installation, ranging from one to four 9’ to 19’ tall freestanding figures at the front of the subject property. The Commission did not support any of the proposed options, finding that they all overwhelmed and detracted from the historic building.
PROPOSAL:

- Sign installation at the front and left side of the subject property.

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.

(a) The commission shall instruct the director to deny a permit if it finds, based on the evidence and information presented to or before the commission that the alteration for which the permit is sought would be inappropriate, inconsistent with or detrimental to the preservation, enhancement or ultimate protection of the historic site or historic resource within an historic district, and to the purposes of this chapter.

(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.

(d) In the case of an application for work on an historic resource located within an historic district, the commission shall be lenient in its judgment of plans for structures of little historical or design significance or for plans involving new construction, unless such plans would seriously impair the historic or architectural value of surrounding historic resources or would impair the character of the historic district. (Ord No. 9-4, § 1; Ord No. 11-59)
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:

1. A property shall be used for its historic purpose or be placed in a new use that requires minimal change to the defining characteristics of the building and its site and environment.

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.

3. Each property shall be recognized as a physical record of its time, place, and use. Changes that create a false sense of historical development, such as adding conjectural features or architectural elements from other buildings, shall not be undertaken.

4. Most properties change over time; those changes that have acquired historic significance in their own right shall be retained and preserved.

5. Distinctive features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a historic property shall be preserved.

6. Deteriorated historic features shall be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature shall match the old in design, color, texture, and other visual qualities and, where possible, materials. Replacement of missing features shall be substantiated by documentary, physical, or pictorial evidence.

7. Chemical or physical treatments, such as sandblasting, that cause damage to historic materials shall not be used. The surface cleaning of structures, if appropriate, shall be undertaken using the gentlest means possible.

8. Significant archaeological resources affected by a project shall be protected and preserved. If such resources must be disturbed, mitigation measures shall be undertaken.

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:

The applicants previously appeared before the Commission for a preliminary consultation at the August 16, 2017 HPC meeting. At that time, the applicants proposed four different options for sign installation, ranging from one to four 9’ to 19’ tall freestanding figures at the front of the subject property. The Commission did not support any of the proposed options, finding that they all overwhelmed and detracted
from the historic building.

The applicants have returned with a revised proposal, which includes the following:

- TRUEBODY Sign: One 1'-6" high by 12'-9" wide sign at the front of the building.
- Slogan Sign: One 1'-10" high by 4' wide sign at the front of the building.
- Banner Signs: Three 8'-6" tall by 2'-4" wide banner signs at the front of the building, and four 8'-6" tall by 2'-4" wide banner signs at the left side of the building.

The proposed TRUEBODY and slogan signs will consist of cutout letters that will be mounted directly to the front of the building. These signs take inspiration from a sign installation project at 8412 Georgia Avenue, Silver Spring (Silver Spring Post Office, c. 1937, Master Plan Site #36/11), which was approved by the Commission at the March 25, 2015 HPC meeting (see Circle 12 for a photograph of the completed project). With that project, the Commission required that the signs be mounted into the mortar of the building, allowing for easy repairs if the signs are removed in the future, and the current applicants propose to do the same at the subject property.

The proposed banner signs will be oriented with their faces perpendicular to the building, minimizing their visibility and potential to obscure the historic building when viewing the historic building straight on. Each banner sign will be attached to two brackets (one at the top and one at the bottom) and will be interchangeable. Like the proposed TRUEBODY and slogan signs, the required hardware will be mounted into the mortar of the building.

Staff is generally supportive of the applicants’ revised proposal, finding that it has less potential to detract from or overwhelm the historic building; however, staff asks for the Commission’s guidance regarding the following:

- Is it appropriate to mount signs directly to the historic building, if all hardware is required to be mounted into the mortar? Staff notes that, if allowed, extra care should be taken to ensure that the proposed sign installation will not impact the historic masonry or frieze.
- Is the amount of proposed signage appropriate, or does the cumulative impact of the proposed signage have the potential to detract from the buildings character-defining features?
- To date, no information has been submitted about the proposed sign materials and/or any proposed illumination. Staff asks for the Commission’s guidance regarding appropriate materials and types of illumination at this historic site.

**STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

Staff recommends that the applicant make any revisions based on the Historic Preservation Commission’s recommendations and return for the formal submission of a Historic Area Work Permit Application.
HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION
301/563-3400
APPLICATION FOR
HISTORIC AREA WORK PERMIT

Contact Email: bdetwiler@cobroventures.com  Contact Person: Brian Detwiler
Tax Account No.: 00490661  Daytime Phone No.: 240-481-7640
Name of Property Owner: 7400 Wisconsin LLC  Daytime Phone No.: 202-333-0880
Address: 7101 Bethesda Wisconsin 20814

Contractor:  Sign contractor TBD  Phone No.:
Contractor Registration No.:
Agent for Owner: Cobro Ventures, Inc.  Daytime Phone No.: 240-481-7640

LOCATION OF BUILDING PREMISES
House Number: 7400  Street: Wisconsin
Town/City: Bethesda  Nearest Cross Street: Montgomery Ln.
Lot:  Block: P13  Subdivision: 0023 Edgemoor

PART ONE: TYPE OF PERMIT/ACTIVITY AND USE
1A. CHECK ALL APPLICABLE:
☐ Construct  ☐ Expand  ☐ Alter/Renovate
☐ Add  ☐ Replace  ☐ Remove
☐ Move  ☑ Install  ☐ Wall/Ramp
☐ Solar  ☐ Fireplace  ☐ Woodburning Stove  ☐ Single-Family
☐ Revision  ☐ Repair  ☐ Revocable
☐ Fence/Wall (complete Section 4)  ☑ Other: Commercial signage

1B. Construction cost estimate: $ 10,000

1C. If this is a revision of a previously approved active permit, see Permit #

PART TWO: COMPLETE FOR NEW CONSTRUCTION AND EXISTING 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 FENCES/RETAINING WALL
3A. Height: feet inches
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/assessment

I hereby certify that I have the authority to make the foregoing application, that the application is correct, and that the construction 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.

[Signature]
October 4, 2017

APPLICATION/PERMIT NO.:  Date Filed:  Date Issued:

SEE REVERSE SIDE FOR INSTRUCTIONS
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 currently undergoing a major
      renovation and expansion that has been previously approved and permitted. The entire exterior of the existing
      structure is considered historic, with architecture that is illustrative of the period in which it was built.
   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 commercial signage to accompany the new business (a health club) that will
      occupy the building. All proposed signage will be mounted to the mortar so as to preserve the existing stone. If the signs are removed, the mortar can be easily repaired to restore the original facade.
      Inspiration for the signage comes from the “Unleashed” renovation at another historic post office on Georgia Ave.
      in Silver Spring. Inspiration for the fabric banners comes from historic hotels and museums that are often seen
      in the DC metro area. The intention is that the signage will have minimal impact on the historic views of the building.

2. SITE PLAN
   Site and environmental setting, drawn to scale. You may use your plat. 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, pools, 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, windows and door openings, and other fixed features of both the existing resource(s) and the proposed work.
   b. Elevations (façades), with marked dimensions, clearly indicating proposed work in relation to existing construction and, when appropriate, contact. All materials and fixtures proposed for the exterior must be noted on the elevations drawings. An existing and a proposed elevation drawing of each façade 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. PHOTOGRAPIHS
   a. Clearly labeled photographic prints of each façade 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 end 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 drip line 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/roadway 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.
TRUEBODY SIGN
18" x 12' 9"

GET FIT. STAY FIT.
22" x 48"

*Dimensions are approximate
8412 Georgia Ave, Silver Spring
Silver Spring Post Office
### HAWP APPLICATION: MAILING ADDRESSES FOR NOTIFYING
[Owner, Owner’s Agent, Adjacent and Confronting Property Owners]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Owner’s mailing address</th>
<th>Owner’s Agent’s mailing address</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7400 Wisconsin LLC</td>
<td>Cobro Ventures, Inc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c/o Donohoe Real Estate Services</td>
<td>1000 Wilson Blvd. Suite 1800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7101 Wisconsin Ave, Suite 700</td>
<td>Arlington, VA 22209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bethesda, MD 20814</td>
<td>Attr: Brian Detwiler</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attr: James Falcone</td>
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### Adjacent and confronting Property Owners mailing addresses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paul F. Sullivan</th>
<th>Kamapa LLC</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4709 Montgomery Lane</td>
<td>4711 Montgomery Lane</td>
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<th>American Occupational Therapy Association</th>
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<tr>
<th>Mahjoubi Mahmoud</th>
<th>Pheasandon LLC</th>
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<td>7347 Wisconsin Avenue</td>
<td>7351 Wisconsin Avenue</td>
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<tr>
<th>Montgomery County</th>
<th>GCCFC 2007-GG9 Wisconsin Avenue LLC</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7359 Wisconsin Avenue</td>
<td>1 Bethesda Metro Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bethesda, MD 20814</td>
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</tbody>
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<tr>
<th>Trizechahn Wisconsin Avenue LP</th>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7475 Wisconsin Avenue</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bethesda, MD 20814</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
PREVIOUS PROPOSAL
Sculpture Sign | Building ID
Illuminated / Single Sided

Opt. B1

Additional Sculptures
Scale: Not to Scale

Building Front, Elevation
Scale: Not to Scale
THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

- - - - - - - - - - - - - - X

PRELIMINARY CONSULTATION - :
7400 Wisconsin Avenue :
- - - - - - - - - - - - - - :

PRELIMINARY CONSULTATION - :
25911 Frederick Road :
- - - - - - - - - - - - - - X

A meeting in the above-entitled matter was held on
August 16, 2017, commencing at 7:35 p.m., in the MRO
Auditorium at 8787 Georgia Avenue, Silver Spring, Maryland
20910, before:

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Bill Kirwan, Chair
Sandra Heiler
Marsha Barnes
Kenneth Firestone
Richard Arkin
Eliza Voigt
Robert Sutton
ALSO PRESENT:
Phillip Estes
Michael Kyne
Dan Bruechert

APPEARANCES

STATEMENT OF:                      PAGE
Elon Cohen                             14
William Drury                          16
Mike Domeier                           18
Humayun Malik                         44
Sandra Youla                           63
Sterling King, Jr.                    85

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. HISTORIC AREA WORK PERMITS         PAGE
   Case A                                5
   Case B                                5
   Case C                                5
   Case F                                5
   Case G                                5
   Case H                                5
   Case I                                5
   Case J                                5
   Case M                                5
   Case N                                5
   Case Q                                5
   Case R                                5
   Case S                                5
II. PRELIMINARY CONSULTATIONS
   Case A  7
   Case B  34

III. TAX CREDIT APPLICATIONS 2016 Group V  63

IV. BRIEFING: SRA 17-01 & Bill 23-17 Burial Sites  63

V. MINUTES  107

VI. OTHER BUSINESS
   A. Commission Items  107
   B. Staff Items  107
VOTE.

MR. KIRWAN: The motion passes unanimously. Those historic area work permits have been approved this evening. We want to thank the applicants who worked with Staff very diligently to make those easily approvable by the Commission tonight. We're going to move on to the next item on our agenda, which are the preliminary consultations. And, we'll start off with case II.A at 7400 Wisconsin Avenue in Bethesda.

MR. COHEN: Is this our spot?

MR. KIRWAN: Yeah, we have a Staff Report we're going to start off with.

MR. KYNE: And again, thank you, Mr. Chairman. And we do have a Staff Report for this project. Again, 7400 Wisconsin Avenue, Bethesda. This is a Master Plan Site known as the Bethesda Post Office. It dates to circa 1938 in its classic revival style. The proposal tonight is for a sign installation at the front of the property. And I have some photographs here so I can walk you around. These are from today.

And you can't see most of the facade right now because of the fencing. But I did try to peek behind. And please pay particular attention to the height of the windows in regard to a later comment. And this is on the left side and moving around to the previously proposed rear addition
that dates to 2015. And we do have the plans in front of us here, and we can come back to these if we need to. And the applicable guidelines in this case are the Secretary of Interior Standards for Rehabilitation.

And, on to Staff discussion. This echoes much of what you saw in the Staff Report. 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 classic revival style with many of its character defining distinctive features visible from the public right-of-way, particularly the front, as we saw in the photographs.

The subject property is located in an urban environment with a small setback and minimal distance between the building and Wisconsin Avenue. And, on to the applicants proposal. Again, to install signage at the front of the property. And they have provided four options. Option A, which is one 11-foot-high 11-foot-high by 6.75 feet wide aluminum sign with illuminated letters for business advertisement; Option A1 is one 19 foot high, the width was not provided, aluminum sign with illuminated letters for business advertisement; Option B, four 9 foot high by 5.5 feet wide aluminum signs, one with illuminated letters for business advertisement, and the others with similar figure
designs. And then Option B1, four tall, 11-foot-high by 6.75 feet wide aluminum signs, one with illuminated letters, and the others with similar designs.

And, Staff does express concerns with the size of the proposed signage. The proposed signs are rather large and will be intervening modern features between the right-of-way and the primary facade of the subject property. And, given the limited amount of space between the building and the public right-of-way, Staff has concerns that the proposed large signs will result in visual crowding that will severely detract from the building's character-defining feature and not allow the building to be experienced from the right-of-way.

Staff suggests that alternatives such as moderately sized monument signs be explored. And Staff also expresses concerns regarding the proposed number of signs for Options B and B1, with multiple large signs between the public right-of-way and the primary facade, much of the historic building will be obscured from view when traveling on Wisconsin Avenue.

Staff suggests that the applicant explores alternatives such as placing the signs at a secondary elevation, such as on the left side, or near the addition at the rear where they will be viewed more appropriately as public art, and will not detract from the property. And, I
seek the Commission's guidance regarding the following four items. Are any of the four signs appropriately sized? Are the proposed sign locations appropriate? Is the proposed sign design and material appropriate? And, are there any alternatives that may be more compatible with the subject property?

And, I did want to add one note here at the end. That, at the December 3, 2014 preliminary consultation for the rear addition, which we mentioned earlier, there was much discussion and concern about the appropriateness of the previously proposed and approved monument sign at the front of the building, although that sign was much more modest in scale and design. And, in fact, that sign was lower than the bottom of the windows that we saw on the facade. And I'm just guessing, that looks like it may be no more than two and a half feet, and that's being generous. So, just keep that in mind that the Commission was concerned about the sign at that time, and these are much larger, and have much more potential to detract. So, with that, I can take any questions you have for me, and I'll turn it over to the Commission.

MR. KIRWAN: Okay, great. I think, Michael, I've got the approved HAWP in front of me, and the sign that we did approve originally was actually more like 3 foot 4, in height, maybe even taller than that. Maybe close to 5 feet
in height at its tallest point. But I think the, my memory
of that deliberation was that we worked very hard with that
applicant to get the signs as low as possible, and we were
concerned about blocking views and windows, and the original
doors and things like that.

MR. KYNE: And, that is correct. In reading the
transcript there was, again, much discussion about the
signage, and the proposal at that time was for a moderately
scaled monument sign that was to be mostly disguised in the
landscaping that was proposed at the front. And, I believe
that the material was supposed to be clear, so that it
provided visibility of the facade even where it would
obscure. So, yes, I'm just asking you keep that in mind.

MR. KIRWAN: That's right. Okay. Thank you. Any
questions for Staff? Yes, Commissioner Arkin?

MR. ARKIN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Two
questions. Do we have any color rendition of what's
proposed?

MR. KYNE: I do not have a color rendition in the
presentation in front of you, and I cannot recall if the
applicants did submit a color version of this. But, I'm
fairly certain that they did, and it's just an oversight on
my part for not including it. Sorry about that.

MR. ARKIN: The second question --

MR. COHEN: We have some materials here. Sorry for
interrupting. But, I wanted to say that due to a little miscommunication on our own side, I really apologize for this, but we, we prematurely gave you some signs to consider. They're essentially in the same --

MR. KIRWAN: I'm going to stop you for a second, because we're not ready for testimony from the applicant.

MR. COHEN: Oh, sorry.

MR. KIRWAN: So we'll get to that.

MR. COHEN: Sorry, sorry. I was going to say we had a packet of information in case you wanted to look at it. Sorry.

MR. KIRWAN: Okay, thank you. Go ahead, Commissioner Arkin.

MR. ARKIN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The second question is, is there a county sign ordinance or are there standards or guidelines for the Bethesda district, or anything, any other standards that we should consider in deciding on this?

MR. KYNE: There are certainly county sign ordinances. I'm not terribly familiar, so I can't recite them to you. And with the other legislation you mentioned, I'm not familiar at all. So, I can't really answer your question but, my recollection of the county sign ordinance is that there is allowed one sign, one business advertisement sign per entrance, but that may just be for signs that are
actually attached to the building. If anyone on the
Commission knows better, then I would ask them to chime in,
but that seems to be my recollection.

MR. KIRWAN: I presume the applicant's done some
research into that, so we'll ask the applicant the question.

MR. ARKIN: Thank you very much.

MR. FIRESTONE: Michael, did you have any
illustrations of what we originally approved, the signage?

MR. KYNE: Unfortunately, I do not, and that wasn't
included in the Staff Report, and again, that was probably an
oversight on my part for not including it in this
presentation tonight. The request to see that information
came in from the Chairman, and came after the Staff Report
was received by the Chairman, so again, it wasn't included in
the Staff Report. The project originally wasn't mine, so I
have to admit that I do not recall that discussion until I
went back and looked. But again, unfortunately, I do not
have it here tonight.

MR. KIRWAN: Just for the record, I'm passing
around my Ipad which has the illustration in the original
HAWP application that we approved showing the sign on the
front facade. And I'm sorry I don't have lock rotation
activated on there. I see everybody struggling with the
spinning. Any other questions for Staff? All right, very
good. We turn to you for your testimony tonight. We can
give you seven minutes for your testimony. We'd appreciate
it if you stick to that, and before any of you speak, just
state your name for the record.

MR. COHEN: Sure. My name is Elon Cohen, I'm the
CEO of True Body Fitness, which is the business that is
moving into the facility. The old post office building. So,
you probably recall seeing us a long time ago before we began
the construction, and it's been a long arduous process.
We're glad it's finally coming together, in part due to the
special nature of the building, which we've been very careful
about. And, so we're now at the point where we're looking at
signage before we open our doors to business.

So we came up with a new concept, it's true,
compared to what we, you know, had preliminarily talked about
a long time ago, before we really put a tremendous amount --
I mean, the initial proposal was more about the modifications
to the building or the adjunct space, which was the large
glass tower and the loading dock of the post office that was
being completely redone. And so, now we hadn't put
tremendous amount of thought into signage at the time. Since
then, we've had a chance to look at that some more. We came
up with a new concept. Actually, with your permission, can
we give you some color renditions? And there's actually a
slight change to what we have submitted. So, I really do
apologize for that. That was prematurely submitted, I think.
MR. KIRWAN: We can pass it down the dais. We can do our best to review it, but we probably can't do it justice in such short amount of review time.

MR. COHEN: Understood. Yeah. So, it's a little different, but it does have some similarities to what you already looked at with the large figures. They're smaller now, I think. But our concept here was to do something where we could -- of course, you know, from a commercial perspective, we would like people to know what we are doing in the space and what kind of business it is. And, of course, we understand there's also other considerations with the historic nature of the building. We tried to strike a balance.

Our goal was to maybe, sort of split the sign, if you will, into, actually have a smaller sign and actually create a street art project that would be something that would, we thought was very much in fitting with some of the other things we see in Bethesda, where there's a lot of art. There are a lot of colorful signs. We also drew some inspiration from these, you've probably seem them, these large B type, letter B signs that are all around Bethesda. Tried to use a similar kind of structure in terms of the width of the metal band that's being used for the figures.

So, we wanted to make a street art project. We thought that the juxtaposition of something modern with the
historic building was the right way to do that. We wanted something see through so that the figures are very see through so we can still see the building. They're set off, and they're offset from the building as far as we can. And the only thing that's, we think, so we're trying actually to not occlude any of the building by making the structures as thin and see through as possible and make it an art project.

We are concerned that, you know, from the commercial perspective also that, the very low sign with cars parked -- oftentimes there are cars that are stationary in front of the building, you generally will never see the sign. We think that it would sort of not be that viable from the perspective of actually letting the world know that we have a business there, and what we are doing there. So, we tried to strike that balance. And, I think I would probably defer to our architect to speak more to the concept in more detail.

MR. DRURY: Yeah, thank you. I'm William Drury, as the architect on the building renovation.

MR. KIRWAN: Did you state your name for the record?

MR. DRURY: William Drury.

MR. KIRWAN: Okay.

MR. DRURY: I think one of the things that, as we've been out there for the past year and a half building, was the energy level on the street, the intersection, and
looking at the signage that we had earlier. It felt like
well maybe we could bring some, play off of the energy that
is on the street, and introduce the streetscape, the street
art type of an approach that would possibly then work with
that. As I say, that intersection, the amount of traffic
that's occurring there and you have the elevator coming down
from the Metro at that same location.

So, as Elon said, you know, we were looking at
these as a rather porous signage piece of art that would
allow us to see the building itself through the signage, and
expect to see lots of people on the street near the entrances
to the building both coming and going from the Metro elevator
and in that general area.

MR. KIRWAN: Okay. Does that conclude your
testimony?

MR. DRURY: Yes.

MR. KIRWAN: Okay, thank you. Do we have questions
for the - yes, Commissioner Arkin?

MR. ARKin: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to
pose my initial question to you in saying that, could you
describe what sign ordinances, or standards, or public arts
ordinances or standards would apply to this project?

MR. COHEN: I actually am not, I think we have our
signage expert here with us. Would you be able to speak to
that?
MR. KIRWAN: I'm sorry, you're going to have to come up to the dais and state your name for the record before you can provide testimony.

MR. DOMEIER: Hi, I'm Mike Domeier. The lettering portion of what you're looking at, and the things that were proposed earlier are within the ordinance that's allowed for that building. It doesn't, if you added up all of the space for the sculptural items, it would be beyond, you know, what would be allowable. But, in many municipalities the signage is kind of measured off by itself, a box put around the signage itself. So, the signage itself is within that ordinance, the square footage allowance.

MR. ARKIN: Well, my question related to what applies in this county and in this district. What are the requirements concerning logos or other?

MR. DOMEIER: There's no restriction on that. However, with the historic nature of the property, and being in a historic district, there's a different purview. Sometimes the county's rules don't apply within a historic district. But typically, under the typical ordinance for the county, it's well within what you're allowed to do.

MR. ARKIN: Thank you.

MR. KIRWAN: Just to clarify, this is not a historic district. This is a Master Plan Resource.

MR. DOMEIER: Okay.
MR. ARKIN: And, in the illustrations that you sent around, the True Body type, how is -- what are the measurements of that, and how is it constructed? Is it, how is it lit?

MR. DOMEIER: I can tell you the construction details, measurements I don't know. Some of those designs were kind of brought to bear in the ninth hour after we had already submitted. So, I don't have a lot of information on that. How it's built is, the lettering will be internally illuminated with LED's. The faces would be an acrylic, and then the side would be a fabricated aluminum structure.

MR. ARKIN: And there would be no panel or outline around it of any kind?

MR. DOMEIER: No.

MR. ARKIN: Thank you. The associated question was, are there rules or standards, or guidelines regarding public art, or semi-public art that would apply?

MR. DOMEIER: I can't answer that question. I don't know.

MR. ARKIN: Thank you.

MR. KIRWAN: Commissioner Heiler?

MS. HEILER: Yes. Is the doorway in the center of the building on Wisconsin Avenue there the primary entrance into your business? And, what about the -- are there other entrances, for example, the doorway that's to the far right
or door on the side of the building, are they also entrances
into your business?

MR. DRURY: These are the two -- this is the
primary entrance in the center. And, it is the ADA exit on
the right side of the building with the ramp there.

MS. HEILER: Thank you.

MR. KIRWAN: Commissioner Firestone?

MR. FIRESTONE: When you were coming up with this
signage idea, were you mainly thinking the audience for these
signs being cars driving by on Wisconsin Avenue or
pedestrians walking directly in front of the building?

MR. COHEN: I think it's really both. I don't
think we have a bias toward one or the other.

MR. FIRESTONE: Because I just get the feeling that
the signage might be overwhelming and not really something
that a pedestrian right there in front could appreciate. I
don't know if they could see your signage on top of the
building, and I think these other things might be just a
little overwhelming to a pedestrian walking by, because to me
they definitely overwhelm the building.

MR. COHEN: Okay.

MR. KIRWAN: Commissioner Voigt?

MS. VOIGT: Yes. I just have a question about what
the sign is on. So it looks like -- is it attached to the
building?
"MR. COHEN: No. It's freestanding.

MS. VOIGT: So it's freestanding on these four --

MR. COHEN: Oh, you're talking about the lettering?

MS. VOIGT: Yes. It looks like --

MR. COHEN: So there are posts. There are posts, and we believe, not necessarily the case that we would need the center post. Right here you'll see four posts, so structurally we may be able to just do it with the two posts on the left and right.

MS. VOIGT: Great. So, none of this signage is touching the building?

MR. COHEN: Nothing touches the building. That was the goal.

MS. VOIGT: And, did you, as Commissioner Firestone, did you consider anything that's kind of more perpendicular so if you're walking along Wisconsin Avenue?

MR. COHEN: Yeah. I think as Commissioner Firestone mentioned, we wanted to do something that would be visible from the sidewalk, also the sidewalk across the street, and also for the cars as well. There's obviously a lot of car traffic. So, just in general, we felt that something that was just perpendicular would be, you know, less visible in general, might be easily overlooked. So, we thought that that wasn't really, from our perspective, doing the job. But at the same time, we wanted to do something
that was, again, not going to, we thought, not overwhelm the
building because we thought it was a little bit more see
through, and also, and more treated like sculpture.

MR. KIRWAN: Any other questions?

MS. BARNES: First of all, thank you for bringing
these, because they're quite helpful. I thought I noticed in
some of the photographs presented by the Staff that you're
using blue trim, or is that my imagination?

MR. COHEN: On the building?

MS. BARNES: Maybe it's just the coloring.

MR. COHEN: It might be the coloring, because we're
not using the blue --

MR. DRURY: Blue trim where?

MR. COHEN: On the building itself.

MR. DRURY: Oh. No.

MS. BARNES: Okay. I think it was perhaps the
lighting. I think it was one of those that just came around.
So, you have this proposal for these four kinetic figures in
front of the building, and we have very close to this
building a statute grouping that's been there for a long
time. And, my concern with the four on the front, while I
think they're rather fun, is that it does sort of overwhelm
and clutter the front of the building. One question that I
have, and I've noticed as you've been working, you see the
building lit up from the inside. Is there any possibility
that adjacent to the front door on the inside you might see
these figures as you drove by seeming to be working out or
something?

MR. COHEN: On the inside? We hadn't considered
that. We can think about that.

MS. BARNES: But I would ask that you consider
that. Also, as was noted in the Staff Report, there's a very
small area between the building and the public right-of-way,
and I would, were I in your shoes, also be concerned about
potential for problems when you have snow removal and other
things. But for me, the big concern is, if you put this big
sign of words above the door, and then you have the kinetic
figures, you rather overpower the building. So, my question
might be, could you do a kinetic figure as you're coming down
the side street leading you in to the entrance where you put
your addition?

MR. COHEN: Thank you for the suggestion. May I
ask a question as well? Is that okay, if I ask the community
a question?

MR. KIRWAN: Not right now, no.

MR. COHEN: Sorry?

MR. KIRWAN: No.

MR. COHEN: No? Okay.

MR. KIRWAN: No. You're responding to question
right now. We're asking you the questions right now. We can
give you an opportunity to ask us questions.

    MR. COHEN: Sure, okay. Appreciate it.

    MR. SUTTON: I personally think the building is the work of art. And I think anything that is put in front or on top of the building detracts from that, from the art of the building itself. I was not part of the Commission when the project came here before, so I'm not familiar with what was proposed before. But, I really think this is just way overwhelming. I think it really detracts from the building, and personally, I live in Bethesda, I enjoyed going by the building. I used to enjoy going to the post office there. Can't do that anymore. But, I really think this whole thing is way overwhelming, and just, I wasn't aware that there had been a sign approved earlier. But looking at the pictures of that, I think that's the way that this should go. I think it should be something not overwhelming to the site of the building, and I just think this whole -- I mean, I think it's lovely.

    MR. KIRWAN: Commissioner, I apologize for interrupting, but I think you're getting into deliberations expressing you're view point.

    MR. SUTTON: No, I'm not. I am not getting into deliberations. I'm just saying that I think it's overwhelming, and that's my recommendation.

    MR. KIRWAN: Do you have any questions for the
applicant? Any other questions for the applicant?

MR. SUTTON: No.

MR. KIRWAN: Okay, thank you. Commissioner Arkin?

MR. ARKIN: Mr. Cohen, I believe it was you who testified earlier that you were concerned about parking interfering with visibility. But in the picture that's on the screen, in the renditions you showed us there are no cars shown. There appear to be no parking meters, no signs. Is parking permitted in front of the building?

MR. COHEN: No, I think I misspoke. Parking, it's really more just there are a lot of cars that are always positioned there.

MR. ARKIN: You're talking about the traffic moving?

MR. COHEN: Yeah. There's almost always cars in front of the building.

MR. KIRWAN: When the light is red there'd be cars there. But when the light's green, there wouldn't.

MR. COHEN: Right, they stack.

MR. ARKIN: Thank you.

MR. KIRWAN: Any other questions for the applicant? All right. If you did have a question for us?

MR. COHEN: Yeah. So, in terms of the general reaction -- first of all, I appreciate all your comments and your ideas -- just to give us some direction, because it
seems like --

MR. KIRWAN: Well, we're going to do that in a second. That's what our deliberations are about. We're going to go down the dais and give you our thoughts on the matter.

MR. COHEN: Okay. My question was really more about --

MR. KIRWAN: And we'll sum it up at the end.

MR. COHEN: Okay. Can I still ask the question, is that okay?

MR. KIRWAN: Yes.

MR. COHEN: So it's really more about sort of separating the sign that's on top? Right, because part of the discussion was about the sculptures in front, and part of it was about the sign on top. Can we get a little bit more of your, maybe we'll get it during the deliberations about the sign on top?

MR. KIRWAN: I think you will. I think you'll hear a lot on these signs.

MR. COHEN: Okay.

MR. KIRWAN: All right, well that concludes things. Let's do move into deliberations. I think it's important in a preliminary consultation for the applicants to hear from all of us. So I would appreciate everybody speaking up on this matter so they can best gauge how to move forward, and
Staff can best advise them on next steps. I'll just kick things off.

I think there's, and again, I do appreciate the color renderings, they definitely help. The black and white images almost made the figures blend in with the building which, fortunately, I could read through that, but I think that could be deceiving to others. But, you know, I can appreciate the interest in this sidewalk art concept. My, as some of the Commissioners have already hinted at, my opinion is that kind of stuff should occur down near the more modern addition that's being done. I mean, I think that's the appropriate place for that kind of street art.

I think what's been proposed, I think, actually with these figures it changes the scale of the building. It's confusing to understand what the human scale is, and what this building is designed to reflect because of the tall transoms and the height of these figures on the front facade. I also think, you know, despite the attempts to pull if off of the facade, I think it obstructs too much of the historic resource. I think this primary facade is the most important facade of this resource on Wisconsin Avenue. And all this obstruction by these figures, I think, is detrimental to the preservation and interpretation of this resource.

I also think the scale of the figures in both the quantity, the amount of signage that you're proposing for
this front facade is overwhelming to me. I mean, I think it's just way too much. I particularly don't like the True Body Gift That Stay Fit banner on top of the doors. I think your previous what was submitted did not include that in the application, and I think that's definitely the wrong direction to go in on this building. I think something much closer to, at least on this front facade, something much closer to what was proposed before, one single sign that makes a very simple understated statement.

And, if you want to explore a street art concept idea like what you have on Montgomery Lane, but I would again, argue it should be slid down closer to the addition and off of this resource. I think that's the place to do this, whether it's perpendicular to the building, or parallel to the building, that's for you to sort out and figure out what you can do in public space and what's on your property.

So again, I don't see really anything on here. I think you kind of have to go back to the beginning, and go back to the previously approved HAWP, and come back, work with Staff, and come back to us with a very different proposal than what I think what exhibits here. We can go in either direction.

MS. HEILER: Yes, I would like to agree with Commissioner Sutton that the building itself is the work of art. And that I think putting the figures in front of it
detract from that. And, as Commissioner Barnes had noted, this statute next to this, the Madonna of the Trail is the statute that's been there a long time, and this creates clutter. I think that the lettering that, although it doesn't touch the building and is above this, it is so large, it's very distracting, and really detracts from the building itself. The True Body.

I can imagine the signage that you have on the Montgomery Lane as the Chairman has suggested, keeping that and moving it closer to the new addition, I would even simplify that. This is a lot of figures. It's a very, you know, on Montgomery Lane it has far less impact on the historic building, but it has some. And so, keeping that kind of thing somewhat simplified and moved to Montgomery Lane with a much simpler structure of the sign in front of it I think is the only way that this can possibly get approval. This is an important building. It's good that you preserved it. We'd like to continue to preserve it and the look of it.

MR. FIRESTONE: I'm going to concur with what the previous Commissioners have said about this. To me this is a very dignified and very significant building in downtown Bethesda. It's been there since before World War II, obviously. That's also coupled with the Madonna of the Trail statute, just up the street from here. And, I feel that the signage and so-called street art just totally overwhelms the
building. It detracts from it and diminishes its dignity. It's just overwhelming. It's just too much. I think the original signage that was proposed when you got approval for this originally through all these modifications was great. I'm was very much in favor of that signage. If this had come in when we had the original proposal, the original application, I would have voted to deny it. This is just to me not acceptable considering the significance and dignity of the building. It shouldn't be overwhelmed by this.

And as far as what regulations apply on the signage, I don't think what the county says you can and cannot do really applies. It's what we say at this point.

MS. BARNES: I have some sympathy with your desire to more prominently advertise the function of the building. We had insisted that the United States Post Office, which is etched in the stone above the main entrance stay, and I can understand that you want to show off its new purpose, although maybe you'll still get some guys who wonder in thinking they can buy postage stamps.

But, the proposal before us in this nice color print that you've brought is really not acceptable. It just clutters up the building. I would be supportive of using one, possibly two of the figures on the side going down Montgomery Lane. I would encourage you to also consider whether the people who are in charge of arts in the public
district would consider using one of these figures near, somewhere out on the sidewalk as a way of helping you with that announcement of your business. But I think we would like to see the more discreet sign on Wisconsin Avenue.

MR. ARKIN: What you presented here really has three parts, or I should say four parts. There's the text, True Body, the name of your company. Then there is essentially what looks to be a motto. It's not a sign saying True Body Fitness Center or something of that sort which would be identified. And that's on a structure which actually, tremendously interferes with the lines of the building.

The building is a neo-classical building, and the lines of the building and the shapes of the massing of the building, the shapes of the building are extremely important. And, I think that structure interferes with it too. Then you have what appear to be four separate pieces of public art, separate but related pieces of public art. And the signage for example, a structure B with a star where the art shine, which I believe is a sign that's erected several places by the Bethesda Urban District, which is in essence a municipality or has many of the functions of a municipality. That's in the public way, I'm not sure that it's a good analogy.

I think it's important, it's very important for you
to have a sign that's visible that identifies what you do so
people can find you and be attracted to you. I like the idea
of urban art. There may be some standards. You might want
to check further with the county, and the with the Bethesda
Urban District about how art pieces of sculpture can and
should be used within the Urban District. Typically, sign
restrictions, sign requirements, sign guidelines are in
addition to zoning requirements and are in addition to
historic preservation requirements. They have a growing pile
of things to comply with rather than things to substitute.

I am fully in agreement with what's been said
before. I think every aspect of the sign, except for the
motto, "Get Fit Stay Fit" is too big. It really overwhelsms
the scale of the building. This would, actually, the text is
so large, and figures are so large, that it would overwhelm
just about anything than a large multi-story building. And I
think you need to look at it from another way. I like the
creativity, and I think the figures are a good start and
might be used in some way. Or one of them could be used as a
logo in addition to the True Body Fitness Center kind of
thing, identifying it. I think you want to avoid casting a
shadow over the Bethesda Post Office signage, because that is
an architectural feature, as well as being an identifying
feature.

You have a very difficult problem here. In working
this into -- working your signage into a historic building. However, you've done such a great job on adaptively reusing the historic building, adding to it in a way that complements the building, and yet contrasts with it in some ways. But, I think you can do much better than this, and I hope you do. Thank you.

MR. KIRWAN: Commissioner Voigt?

MS. VOIGT: Yeah, I'm not going to pile on, but just a couple of comments. I think that you obviously love historic buildings and you want to put your yoga studio in one of the most iconic buildings in Bethesda, so you have an opportunity as a Bethesda resident, I am going to True Body, oh, where is that? The Post Office. Everybody knows where this is. I think you can really lighten up the signage. Everybody would know where you are. You have a real opportunity here to just highlight that building. Like the square Apple Store, everybody knows the Apple Store because it's a block. Do you know what I mean? The building itself will speak for it. I think, as everyone said, on the side street you could do some of your animated figures. But, I would work with what you're already working with, which is this great building. And we will all know it's there.

MR. COHEN: Okay.

MR. SUTTON: I was trying to get to a question, instead I'll make a comment, which is, the original design
that was approved was a smaller sign, and I just would like to, like you to think that maybe you could so something with that size that would incorporate what you want to incorporate into a smaller area. Just a thought.

MR. COHEN: Understood.

MR. KIRWAN: Well, I think you heard from, pretty consistently from all of us. I think it's more or less back to the drawing board with the Wisconsin Avenue facade. And then, I think we're willing to entertain, you know, some sort of street art design on the Montgomery Avenue side. But I think that'll need some care and attention as well, because we do have the side elevation of our historic resource to be considerate of.

I would, you know, Staff is an excellent resource as far as knowing, you know, the best practices with historic preservation, and they also are a great resource know, you know, the kinds of things that we tend to approve and be sensitive to. So, I would definitely continue working with them, and I think they can be a great help in getting you to the finish line quicker.

MR. COHEN: Thanks for your time.

MR. KIRWAN: Okay. Thank you. The next item on our agenda is Preliminary Case II.B at 25911 Frederick Road in Hyattstown. Do we have a Staff Report?

MR. BRUECHERT: Yes, we do. Give me one second,