Preliminary Consultation

MONTGOMERY COUNTY HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

STAFF REPORT

Address: 7400 Wisconsin Avenue, Bethesda
Meeting Date: 6/27/2018

Resource: Master Plan Site #35/014-005A
Report Date: 6/20/2018

Applicant: 7400 Wisconsin LLC
Public Notice: 6/13/2018

Review: Preliminary Consultation

Case Number: N/A

Staff: Michael Kyne

PROPOSAL: Retroactive site wall alterations and other site alterations

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 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. The applicants chose to continue their case at the February 21, 2018 meeting and the HPC did not reach a formal decision. The applicants returned to the Commission again at the May 9, 2018 HPC meeting for a preliminary consultation with a retroactive proposal for a concrete site wall and horizontal slat fence/gate at the rear of the historic building, conversion of the rear parking lot to a garden plaza, and the construction of a chain link fence with artificial plant screening on the roof of the previously approved rear addition.

The applicants returned to the Commission at the May 9, 2018 HPC meeting for a preliminary consultation with a retroactive proposal for a 6’ tall concrete site wall and horizontal slat fence/gate at the rear of the historic building, conversion of the rear parking lot to a garden plaza, and the construction of an 8’ tall chain link fence with artificial plant screening on the roof of the previously approved rear addition.

Staff recommended the following at the May 9, 2018 preliminary consultation:

- 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 would be
appropriate for 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 supported the proposed conversion of the rear parking lot to garden plaza.
• Staff supported the proposed rooftop fence with artificial plant screening.

Several Commissioners agreed with staff’s recommendations, but the majority found that the height of the concrete site wall and horizontal slat fence/gate should be further reduced, or that the applicants should adhere to the original approval for a transparent cable railing and planters at the perimeter of the rear parking lot. The majority also recommended that additional screening be added to the outside of the 8’ tall chain link fence with artificial plant screening on the roof of the previously approved rear addition, or that the applicants adhere to the original approval for a wood slate fence with planters at the perimeter on the roof of the previously approved rear addition.

CURRENT PROPOSAL:

• Retroactive construction of a concrete site wall at the rear and Montgomery Lane side of the existing rear parking lot.
• Retroactive construction of a horizontal slat fence/gate, connecting the rear left corner of the historic building to the concrete site wall.
• Retroactive conversion of the rear parking lot to a garden plaza.

Retroactive construction of a 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 an Individual Master Plan Historic Site uses section 24A-8 of the Montgomery County Code (“Chapter 24A”), the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards and Guidelines for Rehabilitation (Standards). [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:

The applicants have returned with a revised proposal, responding to the previous recommendations. Specifically, the applicants are proposing to adhere to staff’s recommendations from the May 9, 2018 preliminary consultation, with the following specifications:

• Retroactive construction of a 4’ 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”), with optional additional 2’ of semi-transparent barrier (cable rail or glass/acrylic) on top, for a total wall height of 6’.

• Retroactive construction of a 4’ 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, with the addition of exterior green mesh screening on the north elevation of the fence.

While staff acknowledges that the majority of Commissioners did not support staff’s recommendations at the May 9, 2018 preliminary consultation, staff fully supports the applicants’ proposal, finding that it successfully mitigates the impact of the concrete site wall and slat fence/gate on the historic building. Reducing the height of the existing concrete site wall and slat fence/gate from 7’-6” to 4’ will allow the windows and other character-defining features on the rear elevation of the historic building to be experienced from most vantage points on Montgomery Lane. As proposed, staff finds that the concrete site wall and slat fence/gate will not alter or remove character-defining features of the subject property, in accordance with Standards #2 and #9. Because the proposed concrete site wall and slat fence/gate will not directly impact the historic building, staff finds that they can be removed in the future without impairing the integrity of the historic building, in accordance with Standard #10.

Staff supports the proposal to install exterior green mesh screening on the north elevation of the rooftop fence on the previously approved rear addition; however, staff recommends that the mesh be added to all four elevations of the fence to ensure compatibility.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

- Staff recommends that the Commission support the construction of a 4’ tall concrete site wall and horizontal slat fence/gate, with an optional 2’ of additional screening (cable rail or glass/acrylic) on top.

- Staff recommends that the Commission support the conversion of the rear parking lot to a garden plaza.

- Staff recommends that the Commission support the construction of an 8’ tall chain link fence with artificial plant screening on the roof of the previously approved rear addition, with the condition that exterior green mesh screening be added to all elevations.

- Staff recommends that the applicants make any revisions based on the HPC’s recommendations and return for a HAWP application, with all final specifications and drawings included.
APPLICATION FOR
HISTORIC AREA WORK PERMIT

Contract Email: bdetwiler@cobroventures.com
Contact Person: Brian Detwiler
Daytime Phone: 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

Contractor: Scott-Long Construction
Phone No.: 703-802-7500

Agent for Owner: Cobro Ventures, Inc.
Daytime Phone No.: 240-481-7640

LOCATION OF HISTORIC AREA
House Number: 7400
State: Wisconsin

Street Name: Bethesda
Subdivision: 0023 Edgemoor
Lot: P13
Parcel: N458

PART ONE: TYPE OF PERMIT REQUESTED:

1A. CHECK ALL APPLICABLE:
- [ ] New Construction
- [ ] Alter/Remove
- [ ] AC/Gas
- [ ] Room Addition
- [ ] Porch
- [ ] Deck
- [ ] Shed
- [ ] Above Grade
- [ ] Below Grade
- [ ] Foundation
- [ ] Single Family
- [ ] Multi Family
- [ ] Other:
- [ ] Construction cost estimate: $6 million
- [ ] If this is a request for a previously approved active permit, see Permit # 707863 (alter) 708131 (add)

PART TWO: COMPLETE FOR NEW CONSTRUCTION AND EXTERIOR ALTERATIONS:

2A. Type of sewage disposal:
- [ ] Septic
- [ ] WWTP
- [ ] Other:

2B. Type of water supply:
- [ ] Gravity
- [ ] Well
- [ ] Other:

PART THREE: COMPLETE FOR TRANSITION WALL

3A. Height ______ feet ______ inches

3B. Indicate whether the fence or retaining wall is to be constructed on one of the following locations:
- [ ] On property line/property line
- [ ] Entirely on land of owner
- [ ] On public right of way/abutment

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

[Signature]
[Name]
[Date]
February 22, 2018

HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION
301/563-3400

SEE REVERSE SIDE FOR INSTRUCTIONS
Reduce to 48" above slab with option to add 2' of transparent barrier (cable rail or glass / acrylic)
Lower to 48" above slab with option to add 2' of transparent barrier (cable rail or glass / acrylic)
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Options:
- Black Binding & Brass Grommets every 24" & on Corners

FenceScreen.com offers custom sizes and your choice of color, length and width to match your project. All knit mesh fences are cut 4" less than the actual fence height to ensure a proper slope, and wind free fit.

Knitted Polypropylene - Actual height = 5'-4" actual height for privacy fence screen material.

We also offer various custom sizes so you can choose the exact height and length. Any height and lengths available upon request, please contact our customer service department at 1-888-313-6313.