

Capitol Hill Restoration Society
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November 12, 2014

Ms. Gretchen Pfaehler
Chair, Historic Preservation Review Board
1100 Fourth Street, SW, Suite E650
Washington, DC 20034

Re: 609-611 Maryland Avenue, NE HPA 15-153 (Imani Temple)

The Historic Preservation Committee of the Capitol Hill Restoration Society reviewed the plans for this project and offers the following comments.

The church building at 609 Maryland Avenue, NE was designed in 1891 by the well-known architect Appleton P. Clark, Jr. for the Eastern Presbyterian Church. The two-story church is a Gothic style with a prominent bell tower, a smaller tower, with Potomac bluestone and limestone trim, and multiple stained-glass windows. This church is an impressive building dominating an important intersection. The project appears very promising, and could restore an important building through adaptive use, through careful historic repair and restoration. Any changes must be the least intrusive.

The church was later used by several other congregations, and most recently as Imani Temple. The applicant plans six condominium units in the church, and because the units will be vertical, minimal need to separate the interior into two floors is anticipated. The applicant has engaged an architectural historian to prepare a study of the church to aid in restoration.

The church needs repair and maintenance. The bell-tower is a key element in the building; its vinyl louvers would be replaced with new operable louvers so that the space could be occupied. Specific detail is needed on the exact treatment of the bell-tower and its windows. No new openings would be made in the roof. The exterior HVAC equipment would be removed and mechanical units are planned to be placed on the flat tin roof (and a lumber mockup would be needed to check for visibility). Repairs are needed to the cornice, ramparts, balustrade pickets, and limestone stairs.

The stained glass windows are a character-defining element of this church. HPRB recently considered a similar church to condominium conversion at 819 D Street, NE (HPA 14-180). The same approach is need for this important church. As in that case, the applicant needs to catalog each window (including the windows in the tower) and in large, detailed color images show what changes are proposed, and how each window is proposed to look before and after any suggested changes. The applicant has submitted preliminary information on the proposed treatment for a number of the windows. We urge that any changes in the stained-glass windows be kept to a minimum. The effect of

many of the proposed changes is to skeletonize the design of the windows. We believe that the applicant is replacing too much colored glass with clear glass, and compromising the significance of the windows. The larger windows, type 2, 3, 4, 6, and 7 are a particular concern.

As a general observation, the ribbon glass defines much of the stained glass design in many windows and should be retained in all cases. Our comments on specific window types follow.

Type 1: The proposed treatment looks appropriate.

Type 2: The gold ribbon glass should all be retained.

Type 3: The colored glass in the lower panel should be retained, and not changed to clear glass.

Type 4: The images do not show the entire window (unlike types 2, 3). Much of the colored glass is proposed to be replaced by clear glass, eliminating the blue, rose and much of the yellow glass ribbon, really decimating the original design of the window. The yellow ribbon glass, blue glass within the circle, and pink scalloping in the bottom box should be retained.

Type 2, 3, and 4 are a set of large windows on the C Street side (windows 17, 18, 19).

Type 6: The proposed treatment looks appropriate.

Type 7: Much of the colored glass is proposed to be replaced by clear glass, including the “crosses” in the two circles in the lower panel, obliterating the religious significance of a stained-glass window in a church. The “crosses” in the circles should be retained.

Windows 22, 23, 24

Other windows:

Type 1:

Type 5, Type 8: The ribbon glass in the center, and most of the center medallion would be replaced by clear glass, leaving a skeleton of the original colored glass design.

Type 9: The yellow ribbon glass in the center would be replaced by colored glass.

Type 10: The rose glass and light yellow ribbon glass, plus some opaque glass in the center would be replaced with clear glass.

Type 11: panel of three lance windows. By replacing most of the glass with vision glass, the flowers at the top and bottom of each window are obliterated, and the repeat pattern of the lavender glass from window to window is lost.

Type 12: We have no objection to vision glass for these windows.

Type 13: To retain the maximum amount of original glass, we suggest that the row of four panes on the top and bottom be retained.

An in situ mockup is also needed for a representative stained-glass window showing proposed changes in the glass, and an opportunity for everyone to view the mockup.

The applicant indicated to us on November 3, 2014 that they planned vertical condominium units. The interior plans have the potential to affect the exterior appearance of the church, and the stained-glass windows in particular. Interior plans would also show which windows would be at eye-level on the interior, which would assist in evaluating the proposals for the stained-glass windows. Detailed plans for the interior and a detailed repair plan is needed for each proposed repair are needed.

The rowhouse at 611 Maryland Avenue, NE, built in 1891 by Diller B. Groff, is also included in the project. Additional information is needed on the applicant's plans for this building.

Thank you for considering our views.

Sincerely,

Beth Purcell

Beth Purcell, Chair Historic Preservation Committee