



HISTORICAL AFFAIRS AND LANDMARK REVIEW BOARD
ARLINGTON COUNTY, VIRGINIA

CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS STAFF REPORT

TO: Historical Affairs and Landmark Review Board (HALRB)
FROM: Lorin Farris, Historic Preservation Planner
DATE: July 13, 2023
SUBJECT: CoA 22-22, 2801 Columbia Pike, Columbia Pike Form Based Code Project

Background Information

In March 2002, the County Board adopted the *Columbia Pike Initiative - A Revitalization Plan*. A major recommendation of the plan was to develop a new review process to evaluate redevelopment proposals in the corridor. In February 2003, the County Board adopted the Form Based Code (FBC), which made commercial development sites within the “Columbia Pike Special Revitalization District” designated on the General Land Use Plan, eligible for development according to the FBC. This policy document is usually referred to as the Commercial Form Based Code (C-FBC). The C-FBC identifies either historic structures or historic facades for preservation. The Elkins Building, located at 2801 Columbia Pike at the corner of Columbia Pike and South Walter Reed Drive, is identified as a historic facade for preservation which would allow new construction to occur behind the facade. There is no specific direction on how the historic facade approach is applied in the C-FBC and it is left to the discretion of the HALRB. The Elkins Building, which was constructed circa 1950, is ranked in the Top-third Important category (the second highest ranking) in the Historic Resources Inventory (HRI) and is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.

The Design Review Committee (DRC) met with the applicants previously in April and May 2022 to discuss their proposal. The applicants presented their preliminary designs during the May 18, 2022, virtual HALRB public hearing. The proposal showed the two-story historic facade preserved in-situ with a 4-foot setback between the historic façade and the new construction. The HALRB also heard how the County’s Transportation Planning Division in the Department of Environmental Services (DES) had been working with the applicants and that they requested the historic facade of the Elkins Building be moved back to accommodate enough space along Columbia Pike for a much-needed transit shelter. After the HALRB provided general comments about the project design, the commission specifically requested the applicants provide renderings of the proposed transit shelter along Columbia Pike. The HALRB also indicated that preservation should be prioritized, suggesting that the historic facade of the Elkins Building should be preserved in-situ.

The applicants returned to the December 7, 2022, hybrid DRC meeting and to the December 21, 2022, hybrid HALRB hearing, showing the historic facade moved to accommodate a new transit shelter and changes to the design of the new construction. The HALRB requested that the applicants utilize the Streamline Moderne style of the Elkins Building and its horizontality to influence the design of the new construction. The HALRB also suggested that instead of moving the historic facade to accommodate a

new transit shelter, the applicants should utilize one of the existing ground-floor retail alcoves on the Elkins Building and convert that for use as a transit shelter.

Current Proposal

The applicants now propose to retain the two-story historic facade in-situ and provide a 4-foot setback from the new construction of floors three through seven. For the transit shelter, the applicants propose to alter an existing retail alcove by removing a single-door entry and storefront window and installing impact resistant panels to mimic the existing storefront glazing. This will create a wider recessed area and allow for two 6-foot by 2.6-foot benches and a handicapped accessible space. The applicants likewise modified their design of the new construction behind the historic facade for floors three through seven with closer inspiration from the Streamline Moderne style, similar to the Elkins Building.

DRC Review

The DRC considered the modified application at its July 5, 2023, hybrid meeting. The applicants provided an overview of their project and how its design has evolved over the past year. Mr. Dudka stated he felt the design was more in keeping with the Streamline Moderne style of the Elkins Building. He suggested considering a lighter band at the top of the building. Expanding on Mr. Dudka's suggestion, Mr. Wenchel proposed that the lighter gray color on floors three through seven be extended towards the top of the building with a thin line near the roof coping. He also felt that the windows at the central, curved section of the building worked better with the design than what was proposed in December 2022. Mr. Davis suggested that the centered three windows at the curved section of the building be side-by-side windows. Mr. Dudka agreed with this approach. The Historic Preservation Program (HPP) staff asked for feedback on the black horizontal railing proposed above the parapet of the Elkins Building. The DRC felt the railing design was appropriate. Mr. Wenchel emphasized how much the design had improved and felt it was the best facade preservation redevelopment project along Columbia Pike. The DRC placed the application on the Discussion Agenda for the July 19, 2023, hybrid HALRB public hearing.

Recommendation

The HPP staff recommends approval of the subject application. The proposal to retain the two-story historic facade of the Elkins Building in-situ with a 4-foot setback for the new construction provides an appropriate distinction from the historic architecture and the new construction. It also continues the feeling of the two-story building from the street level and supports the pedestrian experience from an urban design perspective. Accommodating a new transit shelter in an existing retail alcove of the Elkins Building is a creative solution to meet the needs of transit riders without having to move the historic facade. The design of the new construction for floors three through seven complements the Streamline Moderne style of the Elkins Building through its material choices, subtle architectural details in the balcony design and window fenestration pattern/frequency, and overall horizontality using different materials and colors. The added horizontal band near the roof coping reinforces the shape of the Elkins Building's roof.

This proposal conforms with Standards #2, #5, and #9 specified in *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation*:

Standard #2: The historic character of a property will be retained and preserved. The removal of distinctive materials or alteration of features, spaces and spatial relationships that characterize a property will be avoided.



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

Standard #9: New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction will not destroy historic materials, features, and spatial relationships that characterize the property. The new work will be differentiated from the old and will be compatible with the historic materials, features, size, scale and proportion, and massing to protect the integrity of the property and its environment.