

DUPONT CURRENT

CELEBRATION



Board presses for cuts to 14th Street projects

By **ELIZABETH WIENER**
Current Staff Writer

Despite a show of community support for an ambitious residential and retail project at 14th and T streets, the D.C. Historic Preservation Review Board last week ruled that the new construction planned by developer Malik Ellis and prominent local architect Suman Sorg must be substantially scaled back.

The board told Sorg and Ellis they must set back modern upper-floor additions so that they do not

overwhelm three dilapidated but historic buildings at the base. Their plan would place luxury condominiums atop a 1919 automobile showroom, a 1922 addition to the showroom, and a 19th century structure that may have been the city's first department store that catered to African-Americans.

The impact of the cutbacks was not immediately clear. One of Sorg's assistants said the project had already been scaled back substantially following consultation with the board's staff and community

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groups.

Even amid the dazzling array of new development north of Logan Circle, the so-called Rapture Lofts project stands out, for both its size and its complexity. It is a joint project by Ellis, a local developer, the West Group and the Church of the Rapture, which until recently held services in the former auto showroom but now plans to move to Prince George's County in Maryland.

The church, which occupied the old auto showroom for three decades, has been hindered by a lack of parking in the busy neighborhood.

"We're landlocked, and we want to grow. So we have to go," said the Rev. Charlton Woodyard. And the congregation, most of whose members live outside the District, needs to reap some profit from the development "so we can move out and leave a legacy," Woodyard told the board.

Meanwhile, neighborhood residents have "suffered from the current [church] use," which brings traffic and parking problems into the area on Sundays, said architectural historian Emily Eig, who is advising the developers. The new condos will have underground parking for every unit, a boon to the neighborhood, she said.

By incorporating the three historic buildings and additions on roofs and rears, Rapture Lofts would result in more than 40 new condominium units, with 7,000 square feet of retail space on the ground floor and a 45-car parking garage below grade.

Plans for the additions have been modified over time. But the plan presented to the board last Thursday showed two new floors atop the original auto showroom, one new floor above the four-story 1922 building and a new six-story addition behind the narrow Victorian-era Ware building. The historic structures would be restored, and the new construction would be in a modern, somewhat-industrial, metal-and-glass International Style.

The Dupont Circle advisory neighborhood commission voted 7-0 to support the plan, with one abstention. The Logan Circle Community Association reported a favorable reaction as well.

But preservation planner Steve Callcott, who reviewed the project for the city, said he was concerned about the large additions on what are already some of the largest buildings in the U Street historic district.

The three-story auto showroom, with its large size and industrial character, "could take a roof addition," he said. "But the Victorian-era Ware's department store probably doesn't support an addition on top."

Despite many improvements in

the design, Callcott said he was still concerned about the extent of the new construction and its "visual weight."

"All the new construction would be very visible from the south," Callcott told the board. And the rear of the showroom abuts a continuous row of two-story buildings on T Street. "There is no context to hide" the added height, he said.

Sorg protested that she had done "exactly what you're asking. We put most of the mass and height over the auto showroom. We worked very hard to reduce the overall height," even incorporating a mechanical penthouse into the seventh floor to keep the roofline down.

A parade of supporters asked the board to approve the plan.

Activist Eugene Dewitt Kinlow said restoration of the historic buildings is important to the African-American community. "This team has it right," he said.

"This is a diverse neighborhood, and there are many precedents for



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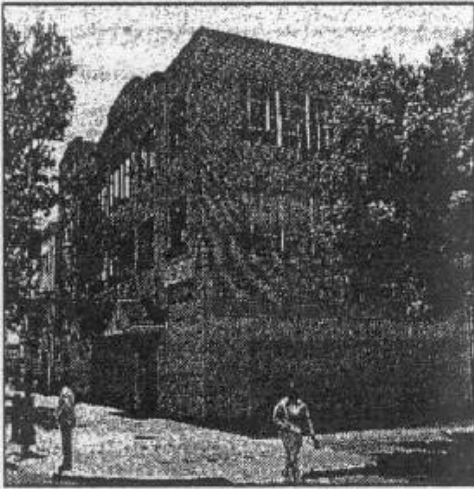
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Bill Petros/The Current

Developers hope to turn the former church into condo units.

new additions," said a neighborhood resident. She said she was excited about "this delightful, dynamic addition" to what she called "the liveliest block" on 14th Street.

Another neighbor said she was glad the building would include parking for all its residents.

Eric Cole said he owns a home-furnishing store directly across 14th

Street from the new project. "It's going to be staring me in the face, and I'm absolutely thrilled," he said. "I would like it to be taller."

But preservation board members, after an hourlong debate, said they were still concerned about the project's impact on the historic buildings they are mandated to protect.

"The development team did a tremendous job with the community," said board member Kathy Henderson, noting the "effusive praise. But it's still a bit too massive, too overwhelming," she said.

Ultimately, the board asked Sorg and Ellis to remove the addition over the Ware building and to consider greater setbacks on other planned additions. The vote was 7-2, with members Jim Kane and Jacque Patterson dissenting.

Chair Tersh Boasberg characterized the board's decision as forcing "slight reductions. You get the great bulk of what you wanted. We're looking forward to a great project,"

he said.

The board, Boasberg noted, has considered about 20 projects on 14th Street over the past few years, each slightly different. This one, he said, was "pushing the envelope."

Also at Thursday's meeting, the board gave tentative approval for a new seven-story condominium, this one with 29 or 30 units and ground-floor retail, on the site of an old gas station at the northeast corner of 14th and Corcoran streets.

Despite one Corcoran Street resident complaining that the new building would be out of character with historic row houses on Corcoran Street, the project by developer Fred Greene had unanimous support from the Logan Circle advisory neighborhood commission and Logan Circle Community Association.

The board unanimously approved revised conceptual drawings by architect Brian Perkins and delegated review of the detailed designs to its staff.