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Vol. 37, No. 1

The InTowner®

JULY
2005

Next Issue
August 12

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Neighbors Mobilize to Save 100-Year-Old Tree on Sheridan Circle

By P.L. Wolff

Sheridan-Kalorama neighbors on June 10 learned that the DC Department of Transportation's Urban Forestry Administration had issued a permit to the Latvian Embassy allowing it to have the century-old, 70-foot ginkgo tree, which is directly in front of the historic Alice Pike Barney Studio House which is now the Latvian Chancellery, chopped down.



photo—courtesy Donna Hays.

According to a spokesperson for the Embassy, Pepco, which was preparing to install new conduit to serve their building to accommodate increased electrical requirements, it was necessary to remove the tree because its root system was blocking the patch selected to lay the conduit. Apparently, no consideration was given to the possibility of routing the conduit in a manner that would avoid conflict with the tree's roots.

But Sheridan-Kalorama Historical Association's vice president Donna Hays, along with others, quickly galvanized neigh-

Cont., TREE, p. 4

Longtime 14th St. Auto Repair Business Sells Property to Developer

By Michael K. Wilkinson

Pedro Petrovitch's compatriots from Brazil called him crazy every time he did it.

But he has done it three times over the course of his nearly 40 years in business in downtown Washington: moved his business into an urban frontier and made himself, in his words, "a guest in the area" in order to gain the respect—and the business—of the local population.

A Washington Institution

Petrovitch opened his first auto repair shop in 1969 on 13th Street just south of Logan Circle, behind what is now a "Mr. Wash" car wash facility. Fourteenth Street was in a severe state of decline following the riots of 1968, as home and business owners fled to the suburbs in droves. Two years later, redoubling his commitment to the area, he moved the business into a large industrial structure that had once been an auto sales and service facility, a block away on 14th Street.



photo—Michael K. Wilkinson—The InTowner

View of Petrovitch building and the Comcast satellite signal receiving dishes and antenna tower, showing 14th Street on the lower left leading up the hill to Columbia Heights and Florida Avenue to the lower right toward the east.

Then, in 1987, an opportunity came along for Petrovitch to move his business into a larger building farther up 14th Street, at Florida Avenue. He leased, and later sold, the building at the corner of 14th and P Streets to Joy Zinoman, founding artistic director of the Studio Theater, setting in motion a series of events that have transformed that organization into the model local theater company that it is today.

During 18 years at his current location, Petrovitch jovially told *The InTowner*, "Every time I had a headache, I wanted to sell that goddamned building," while making the point that he never seriously considered selling until fairly recently. "I survived a lot of bad weather around here, but I never had any problems with anyone," he added. "We treated the neighborhood as if we were guests—this is your neighborhood, we are here to serve you."

As the real estate market in the area turned white hot, though, temptation became harder and harder to resist. Still, he viewed his business as something of a local institution, and most offers he received did not seem to take that into consideration; he

Cont., PETROVITCH, p. 10

Historic Preservation Design Decisions Seen as Being Unfair and Inconsistent

By Anthony L. Harvey

As new, large-scale construction projects and the renovation and rehabilitation of older structures continues unabated throughout the historic 14th and U Streets corridors, proponents and opponents of such projects often find themselves on unexpectedly differing sides of the issues brought before such regulatory bodies as the District's Historic Preservation Review Board (HPRB).



photo—courtesy Kelsey & Associates, Paul K. Williams private collection.

Shown in this 1920s-era photo on the southwest corner of 14th and T Streets is the building that had been built in 1919 for the R.L. Taylor and H. Herbert Smith automobile dealership. It's most recent owner has for some time been the Church of the Rapture.

Consider the proposed project to be known as the "Rapture Lofts" at 14th and T Streets, NW. This is by all accounts a bold and innovative proposal for the historic restoration, reconstruction, and rooftop extension to the old automobile showroom, auto supply store, and the small building which houses used furniture and variety stores—all of which adjoin each other along 14th Street at the southwest corner of the intersection. The former automobile showroom, which is three stories tall, is presently occupied by the vibrant, 350-member Church of the Rapture. The adjacent four-story brick auto supply store is used by the church as well, while the three-story building which formerly housed the Ware Department Store, reputed to be the first African-American owned and operated such store in the city, is vacant.

Developer Malik Ellis, with the Church of the Rapture as an equity and

continuing ownership partner in the venture, engaged noted architect Suman Sorg to design a new and enlarged structure that would fully retain these three existing buildings. With the plans recently completed, the architectural designs and a model were presented to the HPRB at its regular monthly meeting on June 23rd.

Sorg & Associates have conceived and designed an adaptive re-use historic preservation project that would retain and reveal the original nature and appearance of all three of these historic buildings. Their proposed restoration and reconstruction would remove the inner floors but retain all of the exterior walls, remove the bricks and cinder blocks from boarded-up show room windows, and strip the additions from all four sides of the buildings. Historic detailing on these façades would be both restored or reconstructed; this is especially impor-

Cont., HPRB, p. 6



photo—courtesy Sorg & Associates.

This winter 2005 view clearly shows the complex of buildings that are to be integrated into a unified whole. To the right can be seen the row of two-story houses starting west of the rear alley and extending to 15th Street. Not shown in this view are the larger townhouses and taller apartment buildings directly across on the north side of T Street.

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HPRB

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tant to the eventual restoration back to the original appearance of the old Ware Department Store's façade.



photo—Keith Kreger—The InTowner.

Close-up view of the old Ware Department Store building showing the façade which is to be restored to its original appearance.



illus.—courtesy Sorg & Associates.

This much reduced in size architect's rendering showing the 14th Street façade elevation also includes a schematic to provide an approximate indication of how the proposed added two stories would serve to tie the older structures together to create a fully integrated whole.

In working with neighborhood residents and commercial proprietors, the Dupont Circle Conservancy, and the Dupont Circle Neighborhood Advisory Commission (ANC), the developers and the architects refined their design—eliminating the proposed additional top floor and providing further setbacks on both the 14th and T Streets sides of the new complex that will fully integrate the three original buildings.

Further refinements include underground parking spaces for each of the condominium units, prominent street-level retail spaces, and a modified superstructure designed to tie all three buildings together that will have add only two, rather than three, new floors to the incorporated smaller buildings and only one additional floor to the existing four-story original auto supply building.

This revised design won unanimous approval from the residential and business neighborhood groups, community associations, civic leaders, and the Dupont Circle ANC. And, since the proposed project was well within "matter of right" height, density, and related zoning regulations, smooth sailing might have been predicted for the project's fate before the HPRB, whose statutory mandate is restricted to matters of preservation of historic building façades and the protection of historic sites and districts.

This was not to be, however, seemingly for a variety of reasons. What appeared to be the primary reason to those attending this and previous HPRB monthly public meetings, is the Board's concentration on matters of architectural design and architectural taste and qualitative judgments about architectural styles and historic periods that are often difficult for outsiders to follow. Board membership includes four talented and articulate architects, assisted by the Historic Preservation Office's staff of confident and productive historic preservation "planners" from the Mayor's Office of Planning.

And, in the case of the "Rapture Lofts," attendees at the HPRB June meeting

watched with rapt attention as the Board, guided by the knowledgeable staff, engaged in redesigning the project with the result of making it smaller, different in appearance, and far less profitable to its developers, including the long-standing community-based Church of the Rapture, whose stabilizing presence in the neighborhood since



photo—Keith Kreger—The InTowner.

The notably tall, early 20th century apartment building shown here on the north side of the 1400 block of T Street is directly across from the row of diminutive two-story homes and a half-block west of the former automobile showroom building.

the mid-1970s has been widely commented on by resident activists and the community members generally.

With the former automobile showroom building having long been surrounded by a wildly varying neighborhood context of small, medium, and large buildings, some with massive bulk as well as over seven stories in height, HPRB's focus on the two-story row houses along the south side of the 1400 block of T Street and the used car lot adjacent to the south end of the project seemed to many persons almost willfully obtuse, especially when Sorg's photographic presentation of the neighborhood building context displayed all of this context—low, medium, and high-rise alike.

HPRB's rejection vote of seven to two was noted as having also failed the consistency test. Dissenting Board member Jim Kane commented that the Board had recently approved a set-back rooftop addition to an historic structure incorporated into a project now being constructed at 14th and P Streets, yet was now acting to deny such a rooftop addition to the old Ware Department Store building portion of the Sorg plan.

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CRIME

From p. 8

- **7th & R:** boy walking to school accosted by 4 others, one of whom grabbed him around the neck & began choking him, punched him about his body & took cash from his pocket [1pm, Fri., 6/10]
- **8th, 1400 blk.:** property snatched from person or persons by one or more others (no further details provided) [7:30pm, Wed., 6/1]
- **8th, 1900 blk.:** man found stumbling in street suffering from multiple gunshot wounds, later died [3am, Sun., 6/26]
- **9th, 1300 blk.:** man walking to his car approached from behind by 2 others, one of who began to punch him in the face when he resisted his having grabbed his pocket, while the other joined in robbing him [2am, Sat., 6/18]
- **10th, 1200 blk.:** man assaulted & robbed by 2 others who jumped out of car that nearly ran him down, first yelling, "Don't touch my car" & then struck him about his face & body [4:45pm, Sat., 6/18]
- **11th & N:** man waiting for bus robbed by another who reached into his back pocket & then punched him on his side [2:45pm, Sun., 6/12]
- **11th, 1500 blk.:** man robbed at knifepoint by 2 others [7:30pm, Thu., 6/16]
- **12th & P:** man approached from behind by 2 others brandishing knife & demanding money, whereupon man started to flee but was caught & robbed [3am, Sat., 6/25]
- **12th, 1200 blk.:** man robbed by 2 others who first assaulted him by punching him about his face & body & also kicking him [11pm, Thu., 6/2]
- **14th & Harvard:** man surrounded by 6 others who demanded his cell phone & then kicked him in his leg when he attempted to flee [10:30pm, Sat., 6/25]
- **14th & Meridian:** 3 persons accosted by gang of 15-20 juveniles who began hitting them about the face & body & although 2 of them were able to flee, the 3rd fell to ground & was robbed [11:15pm, Fri., 6/17]
- **14th & Otis:** man riding bike accosted by 4 others, one of whom kicked him off the bike while another struck him in the face & was then robbed [8:30pm, Sat., 6/11]
- **14th & Otis:** man surrounded by juveniles who had first thrown eggs at him & then robbed of cell phone by one of them who snatched it from him [9pm, Wed., 6/15]
- **14th, 3400 blk.:** man accosted by 3 others, one of whom grabbed him by his neck while the other 2 robbed him [12:45am, 6/10]
- **15th, 1700 blk.:** man returning to his parked car with companion confronted by another who had smashed window & broken into it & who jumped out at them brandishing a kitchen knife & swinging it at them [2:15am, Sun., 6/19]
- **15th, 1700 blk.:** man approached by 4 others demanding "all" his money, following which he stated, "I don't have any f... g money!" (no further details provided) [10:45pm, Mon., 6/20]
- **15th, 2300 blk.:** person robbed at gunpoint by 2 men thought to be between 18 & 21 yrs. [12:45am, Wed., 6/22]
- **16th, 1300 blk.:** person or persons robbed at gunpoint by one or more others (no further details provided) [8:30pm, Mon., 6/6]
- **16th, 3100 blk.:** murdered Latino woman's body discovered by MPD officers after being called to scene [3:45pm, Sun., 6/5]
- **16th, 3100 blk.:** man walking home robbed at knifepoint by 2 men [1:15am, Sat., 6/25]
- **18th & Newton:** property snatched from person or persons by one or more others (no further details provided) [7:30pm, Mon., 6/6]
- **18th & S:** woman's purse snatched off sidewalk café table by bicyclist who grabbed it as he rode past [11:30pm, Fri., 6/24] (*note similarity with incident that occurred the previous Fri. in the 1400 blk. of P St., noted above*)
- **18th, 2400 blk.:** person or persons robbed at gunpoint by one or more others (no further details provided) [11:15pm, Sun., 6/5]
- **18th, 2400 blk.:** One of 2 persons who got into argument over a parking space with 7 others which escalated into a physical altercation shot in upper chest by one of the 7, all of whom then fled scene [3:30am, Sun., 6/19]
- **18th, 2400 blk.:** man found shot in left side transported to hospital in critical condition [3am, Sun., 6/26]



illus.—BBG Architects, courtesy FLGA, LLC Real Estate Group.

Sketch of the new condominium building that will occupy the former gas station site on the northeast corner of 14th and Corcoran Streets showing its relationship not only to the existing buildings along 14th Street up to R Street but also as it would relate to the historic row of Second Empire-style houses along the north side of the 1300 block of Corcoran Street.


HPRB

From p. 6

These inconsistencies were especially ironical to the church's outreach pastor, the Rev. Lawrence Garrison who, in conversation with *The InTowner*, questioned the fairness of the city having granted new developers—some barely acquainted with the neighborhood—far more generous profit opportunities than it was offering to a long-time resident such as the Church, a resident, Rev. Garrison observed, that has been

instrumental in bringing the neighborhood back to where it is today.

And indeed, at the same June meeting that rejected the "Rapture Lofts" proposal, the HPRB approved a 14th and Corcoran Streets condominium project calling for the construction of seven-and-a-half stories of steel, glass, and limestone by neighborhood newcomer Brennan Beer Gorman Architects (for the developer FLGA, LLC) on a block of late 19th century Second Empire-style, three-and-a-half story red brick homes across from the historic Romanesque-style John Wesley AME Church. □



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