

STAFF REPORT: 10-12-2022 REGULAR MEETING
APPLICATION NUMBER: 20-6663
ADDRESSES: 269-291 WINDER, 2515 BRUSH
HISTORIC DISTRICT: BRUSH PARK
APPLICANT: MHT HOUSING, INC./KEM-TEC
OWNER: MHT HOUSING, INC.
DATE OF COMPLETE APPLICATION: 10-03-2022
DATES OF STAFF SITE VISIT: 03-08-2020, 10-05-2022

PREPARED BY: G. LANDSBERG

SCOPE: REVISION TO PREVIOUSLY APPROVED DESIGN

EXISTING CONDITIONS

The site is an empty grass lot composed of several parcels, situated in the far southeast corner of Brush Park.



Staff photo at Brush and Winter Streets, looking northwest. October 5, 2022.

BACKGROUND

In April 2020, the Commission issued a COA for the subject project, based on design improvements made to an earlier version reviewed (and subsequently tabled) by the Commission at the March 2020 meeting. Some of these necessary improvements were specifically related to the articulation/texture of the façade system in order to address concerns regarding the “flatness” of the facades.

REVISED PROPOSAL

In reviewing the formal permit submission for the project, which was directed to HDC staff for review by BSEED in August 2022, staff noted that the design had changed from that approved by the Commission. Most substantially, the applicant now proposes mechanical screens in place of the previously-approved venting slots integrated into the building’s façade system. These metal screens are proposed to be “painted to match” the surrounding façade. Other changes include less variety at the base (mostly storefront glass, instead of a mix of surfaces in the approved design), the simplification of entranceways, and the elimination of some “double-height” window and slot patterns at the corner.



Top view: Original design as approved by Commission in April 2020



View from Winder and Brush



*Bottom view: Revised design now proposed for the Commission’s review
Red arrows highlight some (but not all) areas of change.*

STAFF OBSERVATIONS AND RESEARCH

- **Staff notes that the previous two staff reports for this project, dated March and April 2020, are included with the submitted documents on the website's property page. The Commission is strongly urged to review them, and the COA issued in April 2020, in the context of this latest proposed change, to achieve a full understanding of the development of the design since that time.**
- To staff's knowledge, the architect for the original submission to the Commission, Hamilton-Anderson, was not involved in these revisions resulting in the current proposal.
- As with all design changes detected in final permit drawings, staff considered whether the modifications were "consistent with the intent of the Commission's approval" per Resolution 19-05. Staff decided that they were not, as the original design proposed a concrete plank system that featured prominent, full-height vertical slot openings deployed purposefully across the facade to admit air for mechanical ventilation. They added important texture, shadow, and architectural detail to the design. Replacement of this distinctive and elegant feature with an off-the-shelf metal ventilation panel was not, in staff's opinion, consistent with the expectations of the original approval.
- While the slots in the originally approved design (some of them extending across two floors, or accompanying entryways) doubled as modern architectural embellishments (i.e., they were meant to be seen, and lend character to the building), the revision to a mechanical panel now appears to reverse the design intent, in that the ventilation openings are meant to be disguised/hidden, blurring into the surrounding façade.
- Additional options were suggested by the applicant in late August, which largely consisted of alternate closure panels that more closely approximated the vertical slots but nevertheless varied substantially from the original design intent.

ISSUES

- Though not consistent with the Commission's earlier approval, this does not mean that staff recommends the revised design for Denial. This new design should be reviewed by the Commission on its own merits.
- While the originally approved design from April 2020 was more cohesive, textured and elegant, staff recommends that this design, though of lesser quality, is not necessarily inappropriate in the context of a modern new building.

RECOMMENDATION

It is staff's opinion that the revised proposal should qualify for a Certificate of Appropriateness. Staff recommends that the Commission approve a COA for the proposed application, as it meets the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and the District's Elements of Design, with the conditions that:

- The permit drawings be updated to show the proper tan color tone of the concrete panels (beige instead of polar white)