

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

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NCPC File No. 6519



WATHA T. DANIEL (SHAW) NEIGHBORHOOD LIBRARY LIBRARY REPLACEMENT

1701 8th Street, NW
Washington, D.C.

Submitted by the District of Columbia Public Library

October 30, 2008

Abstract

The District of Columbia Public Library has submitted preliminary and final site and building plans for the construction of the Watha T. Daniel (Shaw) Neighborhood Library, located at 1701 8th Street, NW, in Washington D.C. The project will replace the existing library on the same site. The new three story building will have two floors above grade and one floor below grade. The contemporary design of translucent panels, glass and metal screening will mimic the block's triangular formation and will achieve the LEED silver rating for green building design.

Commission Actions Requested by Applicant

Approval of preliminary and final site and building plans pursuant to 40 U.S.C. § 8722 (b)(1) and (e).

Executive Director's Recommendation

The Commission:

Approves preliminary and final site and building plans for the Watha T. Daniel (Shaw) Neighborhood Library, Washington, DC, as shown on NCPC Map File No. 33.10(38.00)42321.

Commends the applicant and its design team for a well developed, sophisticated and complementary addition to the surrounding neighborhood with regard to scale, massing, materials, and details.

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PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Background

The District of Columbia Public Library System (DCPL) is undergoing a transformation that includes services, programs, collections and buildings. DCPL is addressing facility needs across the system and will start with building four new libraries to replace those that have closed. The demolition of the existing Watha T. Daniel (Shaw) Library was completed in March 2008 but for the foundation walls which shall be re-used and integrated into the new design. Construction of the new library is scheduled to begin January 2009 and should be completed by January 2010. The new library is slated to open in March 2010.

NCPC reviewed and approved plans for the Watha T. Daniel Neighborhood Library in 2005; however, DCPL did not move forward with construction because a larger budget was ultimately approved. As a result, DCPL hired the architecture firm of Davis Brody Bond Aedas to redesign the building with the new budget in mind. Over the last year DCPL has held all five planned public meetings in the neighborhood to involve the community in the library's design and future services. NCPC reviewed a revised design for the project in May 2008; that design was later modified to reduce project costs. The revised design before the Commission today is the result of extensive consultation with NCPC staff, additional community meetings, and a partially restored project budget.

Site

The Watha T. Daniel Neighborhood Library will be located at 1701 8th Street, NW in Washington DC. This is the same site as the old library which has been demolished except for the foundation walls. The site is bounded by Rhode Island Ave, NW, 7th Street, NW, 8th Street, NW and R Street, NW. The building's entrance will face the corner of R Street, NW and 7th Street, NW. The site is located in the Shaw School Urban Renewal Area across from the Shaw/Howard University Metro Station on the green line.



Prior Commission Action

The Commission approved the concept design for the Watha T. Daniel (Shaw) Neighborhood Library at its April 2008 meeting. The Executive Director's Recommendation (EDR), which was adopted by the Commission, recommended that "applicant revise the designs for the entryway and streetscape at the corner of 7th and R Streets, NW, to make the library entrance more prominent; and develop the landscape plan to create usable green space for library patrons."

Proposal

DCPL has submitted preliminary and final site and building plans for the construction of Watha T. Daniel Neighborhood Library in Northwest Washington, DC. The new library will include two above grade floors and one floor below grade. The project is being designed for LEED Silver Certification and will include a corrugated, perforated metal sunscreen designed to minimize heat gain and energy usage while maximizing the building's relationship to Rhode Island Avenue.

The ground level of the library, accessible from the entrance at the intersection of R and 7th Streets, will contain a majority of the library's administrative services including the main service desk, express check-out terminals and staff work room. Adult interests such as the book display, "New Materials" and "Sight & Sounds" Division will occupy the space adjacent to the Service Desk with the bulk of the floor devoted to the children's collections/reading and activity areas. The Lower Level will house community-oriented areas such as the Multi-purpose Room as well as building and staff services. The Upper Level will contain the main collection stacks, reading and reference areas, numerous private study rooms and, in the projection picture window located on the Avenue, the Periodicals Division.

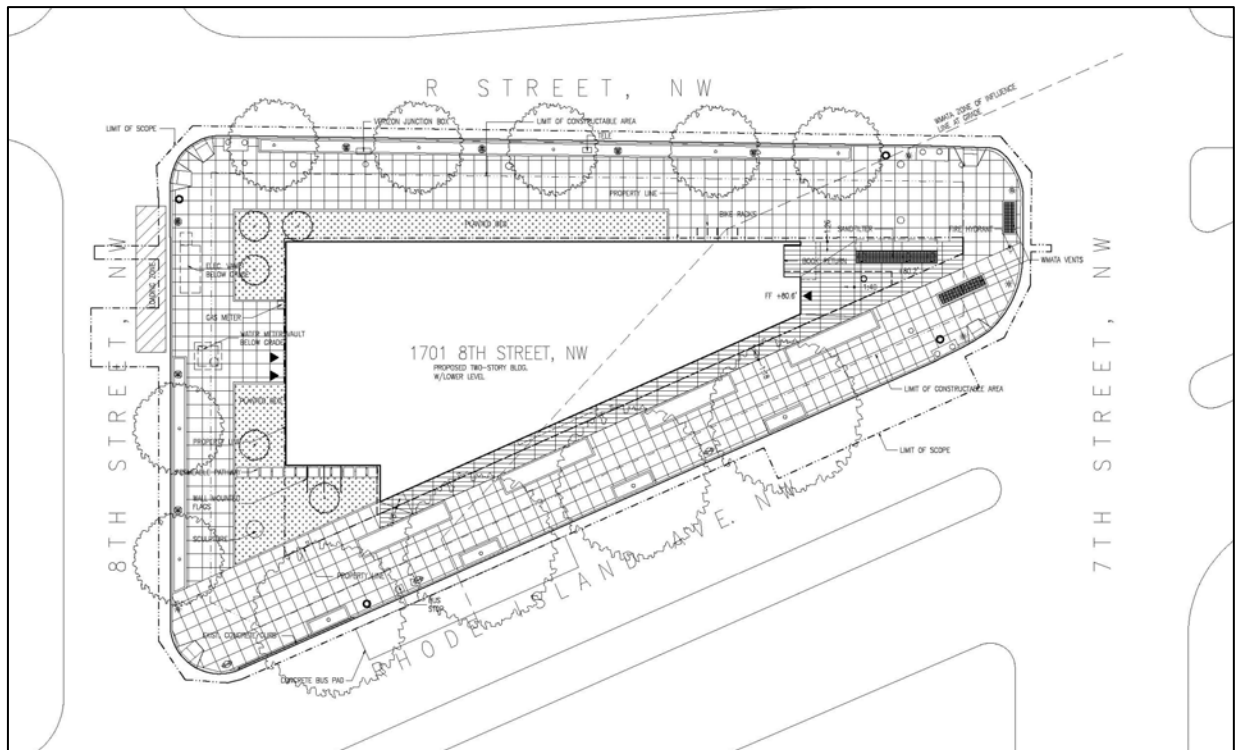


Main entrance at 7th St between Rhode Island and R Streets



View from 7th and R Streets, NW

The design of the library was developed in response to the project site, environmental factors, public comment and NCPC staff consultation. The form of the building is a combination of a triangular form rising vertically on Rhode Island Avenue, its civic front, which is then wrapped with a secondary, lower “L” shaped form. These two volumes are defined by subtly different, but related, materials - one more open of glazing and the other a translucent panel system. The result, in day or night and from exterior to interior, will be an elegant composition of light and diffuse shadow in concert with the original concept of the building as a glowing jewel. Signage for the building will consist of six-foot tall letters spelling out ‘Shaw’ on the northern façade and ‘Library’ on the southern façade of the building.



SITE PLAN

The total site area is 9,836 square feet with a building footprint of 8,164 square feet. The site has an 83 percent lot coverage with the remainder of the lot being covered by hardscape and landscape. The public space surrounding the site will be landscaped and includes raised planting areas, a sculpture and new public sidewalks. Exterior lighting will be included at the employee and main entrances for safety and at the flagpoles located at the southwestern portion of the site. The proposed building materials include a translucent panel system, structural glass and a corrugated, perforated metal sunscreen.

PROJECT ANALYSIS

Staff finds that the proposed preliminary and final site and building plans for the Watha T. Daniel Neighborhood Library is well developed and architecturally compatible with the surrounding neighborhood with regard to scale, massing, materials, and details. Additionally,

the sophisticated design and integration of sustainable development techniques is to be commended.

In response to the Commission Action at the concept design review, the applicant has revised the entrance, to increase its prominence by receding the screen and the column at this location, creating an “outdoor room.” The effect is that of a more formally marked building entrance whether viewing the building from the Metro exit to the north or approaching when walking north up 7th Street.



LANDSCAPE PLAN

In response to the Commission’s comment to create a usable green space for library patrons, the applicant determined that an outdoor plaza concept would attract activity adverse to library use. The lawn in the previous design, however, has been changed to raised 6” planters. Staff has worked with the architects to ensure compliance with ADA accessibility for the entrance and surrounding public space and ensure the overall design is sensitive to public space. The applicant’s revised landscaping plan reinforces the notion of the “civic front”, creating a uniquely urban and formal edge on Rhode Island Avenue with the hardscaped surface running right up to the face of the building punctuated only by low planted, linear beds. On the 8th Street and R Street sides of the site the landscape provides a more buffered and picturesque treatment of raised beds featuring ornamental trees and woody native groundcovers.

Subsequent to the Concept design review, staff notes the applicant has changed the building material from channel glass to translucent panel and clear glass. While partly in response to budgetary concerns, the shift away from the channel glass has been made more as a result of the design benefits gained for library patrons to clearly see outside from the inside of the building.

CONFORMANCE

Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital

Staff has determined that the proposed project is not inconsistent with the *Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital: Federal Elements*.

Shaw School Urban Renewal Plan

Staff has determined that the proposed project consistent with the *Shaw School Urban Renewal Plan* because there is no change in use.

National Environmental Policy Act

The Watha T. Daniel Neighborhood Library is a District of Columbia public project in the Central Area and therefore NCPC has independent responsibility for the project under the National Environmental Policy Act. The District of Columbia has stated that the project is excluded from environmental review requirements under the District of Columbia environmental review statute because it is in the Central Employment Area. Thus, in accordance with NCPC's Environmental and Historic Preservation policies and procedures, the project qualifies for NCPC categorical exclusion Section 8(C)8. Additionally, the use, location, and scale of the proposed project are the same as the library that it replaces, so that under the NEPA status quo doctrine environmental review is not required.

National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA)

NCPC has lead Section 106 responsibilities for District of Columbia projects in the Central Area. The library site is near the Shaw and Greater U Street Historic Districts and at a prominent convergence of L'Enfant Plan streets. After consultation with the D.C. State Historic Preservation Office (DC-SHPO), the office concurred that the demolition of the library and the construction of a new library on the triangle-shaped parcel would have no adverse effect on the nearby historic districts or the L'Enfant Plan. The footprint and the program of the proposed library complement the form and integrity of the parcel, with an emphasis on the parcel apex through the design and placement of the main entrance facing 7th Street, NW.

CONSULTATION

Coordinating Committee

The Coordinating Committee reviewed the proposal at its August 13, 2008 meeting and forwarded it to the Commission with the statement that the project has been coordinated with all agencies. The participating agencies were NCPC; the District of Columbia Office of Planning (DCOP), the District Department of Transportation (DDOT), and the District Department of Housing and Community Development. The project has changed since it was coordinated, but the applicant has been in contact with both OP and DDOT and there are no outstanding issues.

U.S. Commission of Fine Arts (CFA)

The U.S. Commission of Fine Arts reviewed and approved the concept for the project at its meeting on February 21, 2008. The Commission members commented favorably on the design but recommended pulling back the south façade screen from the entrance area to reveal the glassy skin of the library behind; and to restudy the column and roof configuration at the entrance to create more openness and a stronger presence along the street. They also suggested a re-evaluation of the landscape design in order to present a more urban rather than suburban character. The current design conforms to these recommendations. On November 20, 2008 the Commission will review the revised project proposal.