



Design Review Board Case #2019-0001
WMATA Building - Block 15A / 2395 Mill Road

Application	General Data	
Project Name: WMATA Office Building – Block 15A Location: 2393, 2395, 2403, 2415, & 2421 Mill Road Applicant: WMATA c/o McGuireWoods LLP	DRB Date:	July 18, 2019
	Site Area:	3.116 acres (135,737 sf)
	Zone:	OCM(100) & UT to CDD#2 & UT
	Proposed Use:	Office Building
	Gross Floor Area:	425,187 SF
<p>Purpose of Application: Final design review of a new 14-story, approximately 408,767 square foot (net) office building with parking for 218 vehicles. This is the third review of the proposed project.</p>		
<p>Staff Reviewers: Robert M. Kerns, AICP robert.kerns@alexandriava.gov Thomas H. Canfield, AIA tom.canfield@alexandriava.gov Dirk H. Geratz, AICP dirk.geratz@alexandriava.gov Abigail Harwell abigail.harwell@alexandriava.gov</p>		
<p>DRB WORK SESSION, JUNE 13, 2019:</p> <p>The Board reviewed and discussed the enhancements to the building design and architecture, and offered the following comments for the applicant to consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work on improving the connectivity of the architecture design along the eastern façade, as the area above the loading bay appears inconsistent from the two towers on either side. • The Board was split when discussing the shifting of panels and glass along the front and rear facades that some members found unsettling, but all appreciated the amount of glass integrated into the design of the building. • Discussed continuity of design, such as shape of the columns at the entry and the 5th story level having a different treatment/expression that broke up the façade. • Discussed the purpose of the light bars along the exterior and integrating their purpose into the design. • Discussed possible landscaping, screening and surface options around the building and plaza area. 		

- Further refinement is needed to address connectivity between the different architecture styles around each side of the building.
- There was a consensus among the board regarding the proposed materials, massing, height, location, and asked staff to draft a letter of support for the project to be sent to the Planning Commission and City Council.

I. OVERVIEW

The applicant, Washington Metro Area Transit Authority (WMATA), represented by McGuire Woods LLP, is requesting Design Review Board (DRB) **final approval** of the building’s overall form, design and materials, and site improvements associated with the proposal at 2395 Mill Road (Eisenhower East – Block 15A). This project has been presented to the DRB at work sessions on April 25, 2019 and June 13, 2019.

Due to an expedited construction schedule sought by the applicant, the DRB has been granted final approval of the building design. On July 9, 2019, the City Council held a public hearing regarding Development Special Use Permit (DSUP) #2018-0028, and conditionally approved the proposed project. As a condition of the DSUP approval, Conditions #9 and #10 specifically require DRB review and approval of the final building design. To comply with these conditions, the applicant is requesting the DRB review and approval in order to continue through to the permitting process.

II. BACKGROUND

The proposed project is for a new 14-story office building, with structured above-grade parking, combined with some surface parking. The site is located north of the Hoffman Town Center, at the Mill Road and Mandeville Lane intersection, and on a portion of Block 15 that is proposed to be identified as Block 15A in the Eisenhower East Small Area Plan (EESAP). The triangular-shaped site is located between Mill Road to the south, the Metrorail Blue line tracks to the north, and a city-owned facility to the east. Based on the plans presented to the City Council, the project consists of a 327,725 square foot office building sitting atop a 97,462 square foot parking structure, resulting in a net 408,767 square foot structure. The building is proposed to be measure 200 feet in height, with a rooftop penthouse that provides access to green roof area and terrace.

Changes to the Project

Since the last DRB meeting, the applicant has refined the design of the building to incorporate the input received from the Board members. As documented in the letter from the applicant dated July 3, 2019 (attached), revisions include:

- Simplification of the East façade design, where previously facades followed an A-B-C pattern with differentiation between the three sides, and now follows an A-B-A pattern;
- The western façade has been revised so the “back bar” of the office tower matches the pattern/design of the north façade, and is essentially consistent from ground to the top;

- The 5th floor has been simplified along the north façade to blend with the rest of the façade and eliminate the “belt” that cut through the middle, which on the front (south) side now includes round columns that match the round columns at the ground floor level; and
- Further development of the penthouse massing to incorporate MEP/support spaces.

Staff’s review of the building’s design, refinements and site improvements are discussed below.

III. Building Design

Overall Form, Massing and Height

The proposed building massing and primary functional design consists of two 65-foot-wide “bars” of office space on each typical floor, separated by a roughly triangular core containing building services (stairs, elevators and restrooms). The proposed ten stories of office space sit atop a four-story podium containing garage parking, a lobby and conference area. The southern “bar” facing Mill Road is set back 5-20 feet from the podium façade below to address the different program demands of office and parking, and to create a more dynamic massing. The northern “bar” facing the train tracks is expressed as a single volume with the podium for the full height of the building, to address the larger-scale environment of the transit corridor.

The podium has a ground level of glass that fronts Mill Road, consisting of a recessed two-story glass lobby with a vestibule and conference area. This projecting volume also creates a usable terrace area for the fifth-floor office space. The rest of the podium garage is devoted to parking and uses a higher than standard floor-floor height of 11’-6”, to allow for future conversion of these levels to office space if and as parking demand decreases. As was presented to the City Council, the building will measure 200 feet in height, with a penthouse on the roof that provides access to a rooftop green space and terrace. The building size, massing and height is consistent with other buildings in the Eisenhower East area. Further, the unique building shape provides a visually interesting structure that will appear different when seen from different angles.

Architectural Design and Articulation

The building elevations employ an overlaid series of patterns to achieve a dynamic expression while maintaining a balance between vertical and horizontal. The most noticeable motif is the use of offset vertical solid panels, in a rhythm of two narrow and one wide, which serve to both hide column locations and evoke the imagery of train windows rushing past in opposing directions. These panels, horizontally scored, are proposed in terracotta for the lower levels, and precast concrete for the upper floors. When previously presented to the DRB, the continuity of the design around the building was discussed, as the shifting arrangement of the solid, metal louvers, and glass panels was found to be inconsistent and unsettling to some of the members. Selected elevations have now been treated more simply, with single-story expression of continuous window wall with high-performance glazing and metal slab edge expression. The DRB had asked for further refinement to improvement continuity on all sides of the building and reduce the amount of variation.

In response, the applicant has made revisions to the elevations that reduced the inconsistency between building facades. On the south façade, the only significant update was changing the columns at the fifth level from square to round, so they are now consistent with the columns at the ground level entrance area. On the north façade, the fifth floor was modified to reduce the amount of solid area, with the introduction of wide fritted glass panels between louvered grills and solid panels. This revision results in an improved visual transition between the parking and office levels by eliminating the mostly solid area that previously resulted in a “band” that was seen as disruptive to the façade pattern.

This revision to the north façade was carried around the corner of the building to the east façade. Previously, the eastern façade employed three different expressions to provide differentiation to the “bars” that were discussed in the massing section above. Based upon the feedback from the DRB, the eastern façade was revised so the sides of the “bars” although slightly different, still have a similar pattern of glass and solid panels that continues the pattern around the corner and complements each other. The space above the loading docks, where the building’s triangular core is expressed, continues to have an all glass façade for the office levels, with metal louvered grills for the parking levels below. With the expansion of the penthouse to the building face on both the east and west elevations, however, staff feels that it is important to carry the glass façade treatment from the office levels to the full height of the penthouse. This will resolve one of the concerns from the previous submission – specifically, that the penthouse form appeared additive, rather than integral. This does not mean that the entire penthouse façade needs to be rendered in glass, but that the faces that are coplanar with glass façade below should, with the transition from glass to metal for the remainder of the penthouse handled in a visually consistent way.

Similar to the eastern façade, the applicant has refined the western façade so the exteriors are consistent. The western façade of the northern “bar” has replaced the continuous louvered grills at the parking levels with a pattern of louvered grills and solid panels that is consistent with the way these levels were treated along other facades.

Building Materials and Materials Board

The applicant has provided more information on the materials proposed for this building. In particular, a physical board and a sheet index have been included in the package submitted, that identifies the types of solid and glass materials to be used, with a variety of glazing and exterior finishes. The exterior finishes consist of light and darker colors of concrete, stone and metal panels. Staff supports the proposed variety of materials and colors.

Design of the Parking Structure

Taking a closer look at the façade components proposed for the parking levels, a similar vocabulary as the office levels is proposed. In place of the larger, glazed openings which occur above, metal louvers are proposed with a narrow, strongly vertical glazed opening that may incorporate frosted or fritted glass to help hide the cars and unfinished ceilings of the garage. If these floors are converted in the future to occupiable space, the louvered screens would simply be replaced with vision glass, but the rest of the façade could remain intact and be visually consistent with the office levels above.

Site Design Improvements

Plaza and Landscape Improvements

At this time, no final landscaping plans have been provided, but the applicant has provided general concepts of the surface materials and tree locations. The plaza at the southwest corner of the building is shown with horizontal, decorative pavers that differ from the brick pavers more commonly seen in the area. The architectural plan for the ground floor of the site indicates the use of linear decorative pavers (identified at ST01 on the materials board) and a straight line of bollards that separate the walkways and driveways. A seating area under shade trees is planned just west of the main entrance driveway.

There are two transformer areas indicated on the plans: one area on the west side of the building, at the end of the main entrance driveway, and a second area on the east side of the building, adjacent to the loading bays. As no landscaping plans have been provided at this time, staff encourages the applicant to develop a design for landscaping or architectural screening so these transformers can be hidden from view. Per the letter from the applicant, interior reorganization of the building has increased the number of internal parking spaces in the garage area. Staff recommends the applicant consider relocating the transformers into the garage, possibly in the areas where additional parking area was found, in order to not only reduce the amount of equipment that would need screening at the exterior of the building, but also to provide additional security to this equipment.

Roof Terrace

The top of the building contains a roof terrace, accessible from the penthouse, as well as a green roof area on the north and south sides of the penthouse. The roof terrace is located on the north east corner of the building, which faces east towards the river and has views of the Masonic Temple to the north. The architectural plans for the roof terrace indicate decorative pavers and wood decking, with planters, landscaping and a metal canopy. An additional sheet provided visual precedents for the appearance of features for the roof terrace, but specific materials and colors, and a detailed landscaping plan were not provided and will need to be further addressed.

Relationship with Future Second Building

During the previous DRB discussion, the applicant indicated that a residential building may be built on the property, in the place of the proposed surface parking lot. Although a second building was not approved by the City Council and is not under consideration at this time, the applicant has provided elevation drawings that indicate how a second residential building could be incorporated onto the site. Keeping the same height and building program (towers above structured parking) as the proposed office building, elevations and section drawings show the relationship between the office building and a possible residential building on the site. Since surface parking is discouraged in this area, staff encourages the applicant to pursue a second building on the site which incorporates below-grade or screened above-grade parking, and to develop basic concepts of how this future building would relate in form and language to the current proposal and other surrounding structures, both existing and proposed. A Development Special Use Permit will be required for any additional structures built on the site and the design, massing and materials of the second building would again be subject to DRB review and approval.

Signage

At this time, no information regarding signage has been provided for the site and the applicant will need to provide the DRB with signage plans for the site at a future DRB meeting.

IV. STAFF ANALYSIS

Overall, Staff finds the office building design, massing, and site improvements to be very successful and feel it accomplishes many of the goals and guidelines outlined by the Small Area Plan, as discussed further below. Minor refinements to the design of the exterior amenities and drop off plaza are discussed in the Analysis Narrative and should be addressed in continued coordination with Staff through the site plan approval process.

Compliance with the Eisenhower East Small Area Plan and Design Guidelines

The table below provides a summary of how each option for this project complies with the intent of the Eisenhower East Small Area Plan and Design Guidelines:

Guideline	Plan Requirement	Proposed Plan	Complies with intent?
Land Use	Office	Office	Yes
Retail Locations	No retail requirement for this block	Retail is not currently proposed	Yes
Allowable Gross Floor Area	425,187 sf	425,187 sf	Yes
Building Height	Maximum height of 200 feet	200 feet	Yes
Architectural Articulation	- "C" Street Facades (Mill Road): Facades shall be an integrated component of the overall building design.	Above-grade parking is screened to blend with the rest of the building.	Yes
Architectural Expression	HVAC and mechanical equipment shall be integrated in the overall building design.	Approved design of the office building penthouse demonstrates integration with the overall architecture of the building.	Yes

Guideline	Plan Requirement	Proposed Plan	Complies with intent?
Street Frontage: C Street (Mill Road)	-Buildings shall generally be built to the Build to Line. -Parking and garage entries -Curb cuts	Buildings generally meet the Build to Line. The parking garage entrance and loading spaces do not front Mill Road. Curb cuts have been reduced from three to two to minimize the amount of disruptions	Yes
Massing	Provide a clear base, middle, top with appropriate building setbacks and street walls.	The office building has been designed with a clear massing articulation, appropriate setbacks and with a first level floor that provides interaction and openness to the street.	Yes
Public Realm – Parks and Squares	Parklands shall have active and passive uses with biking and hiking trails, set amongst a natural setting.	Public parks or squares are not required. Perpetual public access easements over all at-grade privately owned open space areas to be provided.	N/A

V. ANALYSIS NARRATIVE

Staff believes that the office building design, footprint and massing, and site improvements meet the intentions of the Eisenhower East Small Area Plan (EESAP) and Design Guidelines. The applicant has requested a building size and height consistent with what is currently planned within the area and consistent with the direction of the Eisenhower East Small Area Plan update. The approved building size, which is currently proposed at 408,767 square feet (net) and 200 feet in height, is similar in size to other structures and approvals in the area. The existing building in the area range from 200 to 270 feet in height, and 10 to 20 stories, and averages around 435,425 square feet in size.

Staff is supportive of the proposed development of the office building to the Eisenhower East Station neighborhood of the Eisenhower East district. The proposed project would promote the redevelopment on a presently vacant lot and would activate space at the intersection of Mill Road and Mandeville Lane. The addition of a large employer to the area would provide additional population to the area who may choose to live near their work. The proposed development is a realization of the intended goals of the EESAP to create a vibrant, active urban neighborhood. The

design and site improvements support these goals with advanced architecture and design that is visually interesting from not only the pedestrian and street views, but also from the Metro Blue line rail tracks. The location is highly visible, and the architecture of the building and design of the site has taken this into consideration, to serve not just as an enhancement to the Eisenhower East plan area, but also provide a landmark headquarters building for WMATA.

Furthermore, Staff recommends that the applicant continue to work with Staff to further refine the below listed items through the final site plan approval process:

1. Continue to refine elevation expression and details to incorporate staff comments in this report as well as any additional guidance received from the DRB;
2. Integrate the penthouse materials and expression with the now-coplanar building “core” glass facades below and resolve penthouse architecture;
3. Continue to work with staff on the following refinements to the exterior amenities and central drop-off plaza:
 - a. Paving materials, site furniture, plantings, and light fixture types/locations.
 - b. Refinement of the design for the rooftop amenity terraces.
4. Refinement of the streetscape elements on Mill Road.

VI. CONCLUSION

Staff recommends DRB **final approval** of the overall building architecture and design, massing, and materials, with advancement of the designs in consideration of the items described in the Analysis Narrative and continued coordination with Staff.

Next Steps

Due to an accelerated timeline for this project, the applicant is requesting final approval of the building design and materials in order for the project to continue to be processed. An additional DRB meeting will be needed in order to address signage for the site, as well as the final design of landscaping, and any remaining building design issues. The next meeting has been scheduled for **September 26, 2019**.