

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:	September 26, 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 the landscaping and site signage for an approved new 14-story office building with above-grade parking. This is the fourth 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 ACTION, SEPTEMBER 26, 2019: The DRB voted unanimously to approve the proposed landscaping and signage, with the equipment enclosure to have a dark metal façade that matches the building and per drawings that the applicant presented. Direction was given to provide as much landscaping space around the enclosure as possible to allow for landscaping that can soften the appearance of the enclosure.</p> <p>DRB ACTION, JULY 18, 2019: The DRB voted unanimously to approve the overall massing, on a motion by Mr. Lewis carried on a vote of 3-0, with Councilwoman Pepper absent. The DRB also voted to approve the exterior and materials of the building, as presented to them at the meeting, on a motion by Mr. Quill carried on a vote of 3-0, with Council woman Pepper absent. The DRB agreed the applicant shall present at the next scheduled meeting the proposed landscaping and signage for the project.</p> <p>DRB WORK SESSION, JUNE 13, 2019: The Board reviewed and discussed the enhancements to the building design and architecture, and offered the following comments for the applicant to consider:</p>		

- 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 proposed landscaping and site signage for the approved new office building located at 2395 Mill Road (Eisenhower East – Block 15A). This project has been previously presented to the DRB on April 25, 2019, June 13, 2019, and July 18, 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 conditioned by the DSUP approval, the DRB granted approval of the final building design on July 18, 2019. Per the conditions, the applicant is requesting the DRB to review and approve the landscaping and site signage in order to complete compliance with the City Council approval and continue through to the permitting process.

II. BACKGROUND

The 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, 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

measure 200 feet in height, with a rooftop penthouse that provides access to a green roof area and terrace. As the building materials and design has previously been supported and approved by the DRB, the applicant now presents additional information regarding the site improvements, landscaping and site signage, as described below.

III. SITE DESIGN IMPROVEMENTS

Plaza and Landscape Improvements

The landscape plans proposed have minimally changed since the versions last presented to the DRB in July. The main entry plaza area coming off the intersection of Mill Road and Mandeville Lane continues to integrate horizontal, decorative pavers for the area between the building and the asphalt surface parking lot. Separation of the plaza into driveway and pedestrian areas is proposed to be accomplished by means of six inch diameter bollards. On the west side of the plaza, between Mill Road and the surface parking lot, three sets of tables and chairs will provide a seating area adjacent to the new multimodal path running in front of the property along Mill Road.

According to the landscape plans submitted for Final Site Plan review, a mix of ornamental and shade trees and shrubs will be used along the front of the property and around the surface parking lot area. In addition to ground cover to add green and fill in areas not intended for walking/driving surfaces, fencing around the property will have vines that grow to provide additional screening and greenery.

Mechanical Equipment Enclosures

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. More information has been provided regarding these enclosures, including design and material solutions. It should be noted that there is a discrepancy between the plans submitted for DRB review and the plans submitted to Staff for Final Site Plan Review, as shown on Exhibit A. The wall surrounding the equipment is to measure 8'-4" tall with hollow metal doors. The material is proposed as a stucco finish, in a color to match the precast of the building. No landscape screening is proposed for either enclosure due to spacing constraints. Staff had asked the applicant to provide additional vegetative screening to soften the appearance of the enclosure walls, with either vines or additional greenery. The applicant has declined to provide this, citing shade concerns and security requirements.

In discussing these enclosures, it should be noted that, while the enclosure on the east side of the building will be minimally visible, the one on the west, sitting as it does directly on axis with the pedestrian and vehicular entry, is visually extremely prominent. At 30 by 40 feet in size, the enclosure is essentially a small building. Since the previous submission, it has been moved to the east, resulting in an unattractive and virtually unmaintainable gap of approximately 18 inches between it and the exterior wall of the office building. A notch has also been cut out of the southeast corner of the enclosure for an access door, which faces the main entry to the site and further draws attention to the uncomfortable juxtaposition of building and transformer enclosure.

While staff would strongly prefer a solution that relocated the west transformer yard to the east side of the building (potentially in lieu of the six parking spaces shown near the garage entrance), applicant has explained that existing easements preclude that option.

Given the above, staff feels that the best solution for mitigating the impact of the west transformer enclosure is to treat it as an extension of the office building. Staff recommends using the two adjacent building materials to form the south and west walls of this enclosure – specifically, the stone base (which is approximately four feet tall at this location) combined with the office building façade louver system for the top half of the wall. For the access doors to the enclosure, staff recommends locating them in the middle of the south or west façades. This treatment effectively eliminates the east side of the enclosure, and leaves a single wall facing the rail corridor that could be treated more simply. Staff has provided an exhibit illustrating this concept, simply using elements of the proposed building façade (EXHIBIT B).

Although this would be visible in the perspective view shown in the Final Site Plan submission (EXHIBIT C), but was not show, staff recommends that the applicant prepare an eye-level view showing the final resolution of this design as it would be seen by someone walking or driving into the arrival court, or from the proposed seating area adjacent to that.

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 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.

Signage

The signage for the site is mostly limited to wayfinding or security/ signage. No signage has been proposed for the top of the building, with a large “M” logo sign distinguishing the entrance to the building and a small window sign on the western facade. The wayfinding signage is proposed as freestanding five-foot-tall parking signs at the two driveway entrances that direct drivers to the parking and entrances.

IV. STAFF ANALYSIS

While very little of the information provided was different from previous plans presented to the DRB, staff believes the proposed landscaping and signage are appropriate for the area and consistent with the Eisenhower East Small Area Plan Design Guidelines. Per the Design Guidelines, landscaping is required along sidewalks, with emphasis on landscape entry courtyards and recesses. The applicant has provided both street trees and landscaping along the multi-modal sidewalk at the front of the property, as well as landscaping along the plaza area to help screen the surface parking lot. Regarding signage, the amount has been kept to a minimum to address wayfinding and identification signage. The signage has been limited to the pedestrian level in a

way that does not stand out and blends easily with the building. Additional landscaping or screening of the mechanical enclosure would improve the massing and appearance, especially as seen from the main entrance plaza area. Staff does recommend redesign of the west transformer enclosure, but suggest that this could be accomplished through an electronic review and would not require an additional DRB meeting.

VI. CONCLUSION

Staff recommends DRB **final approval** of the site signage and landscaping, with further review of the west transformer enclosure.

Exhibit A – Comparison of DRB Plans and Final Site Plans

Image 1: DRB Submitted Ground Floor Plan

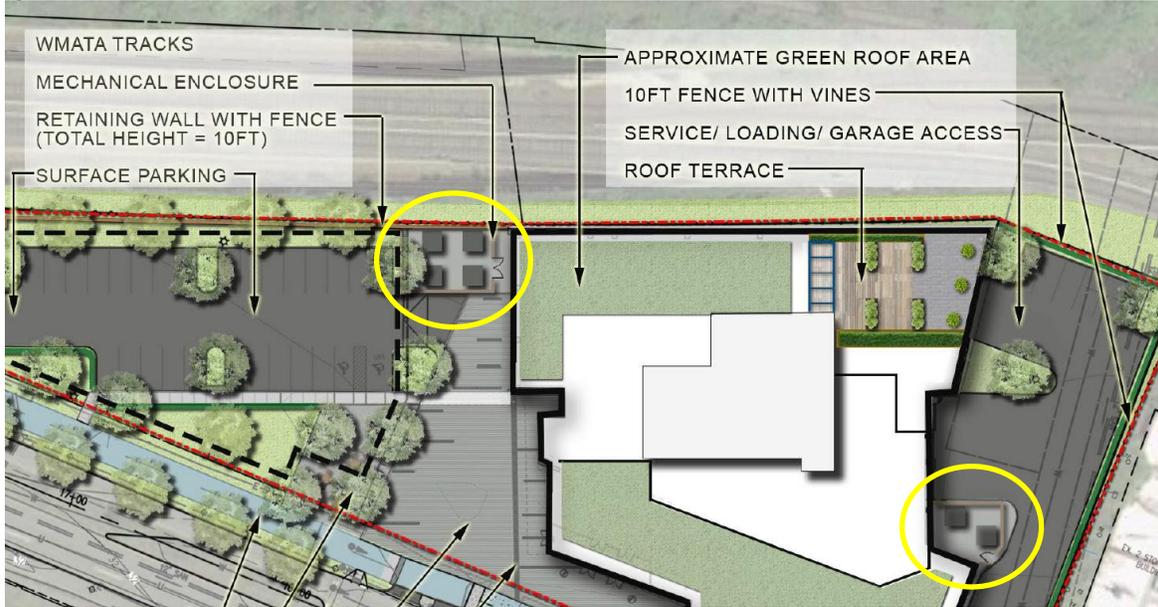


Image 2: Final Site Plan Drawings – Transformer Locations and Elevations (Sheet A203)

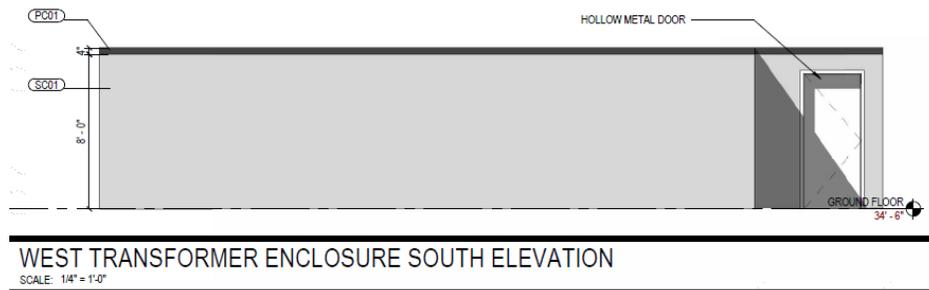
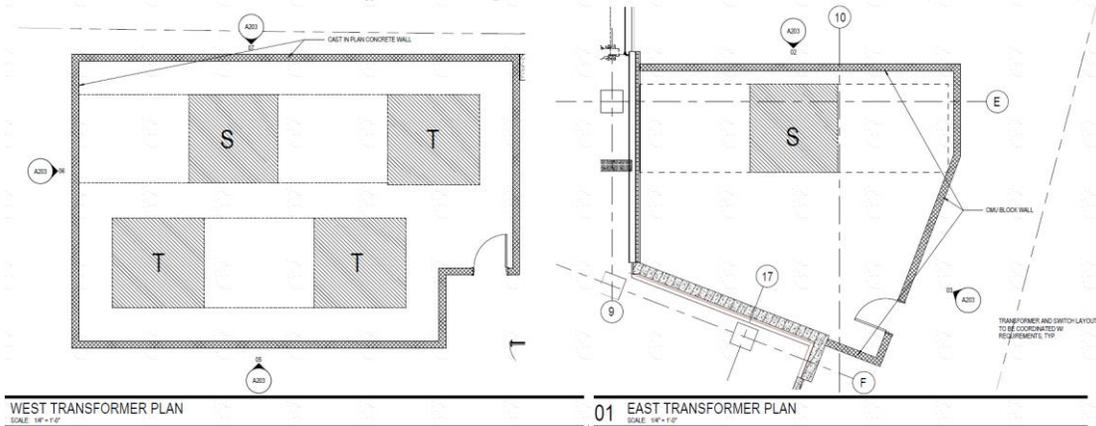


Exhibit B – Concept illustration of western enclosure (as viewed from the south)

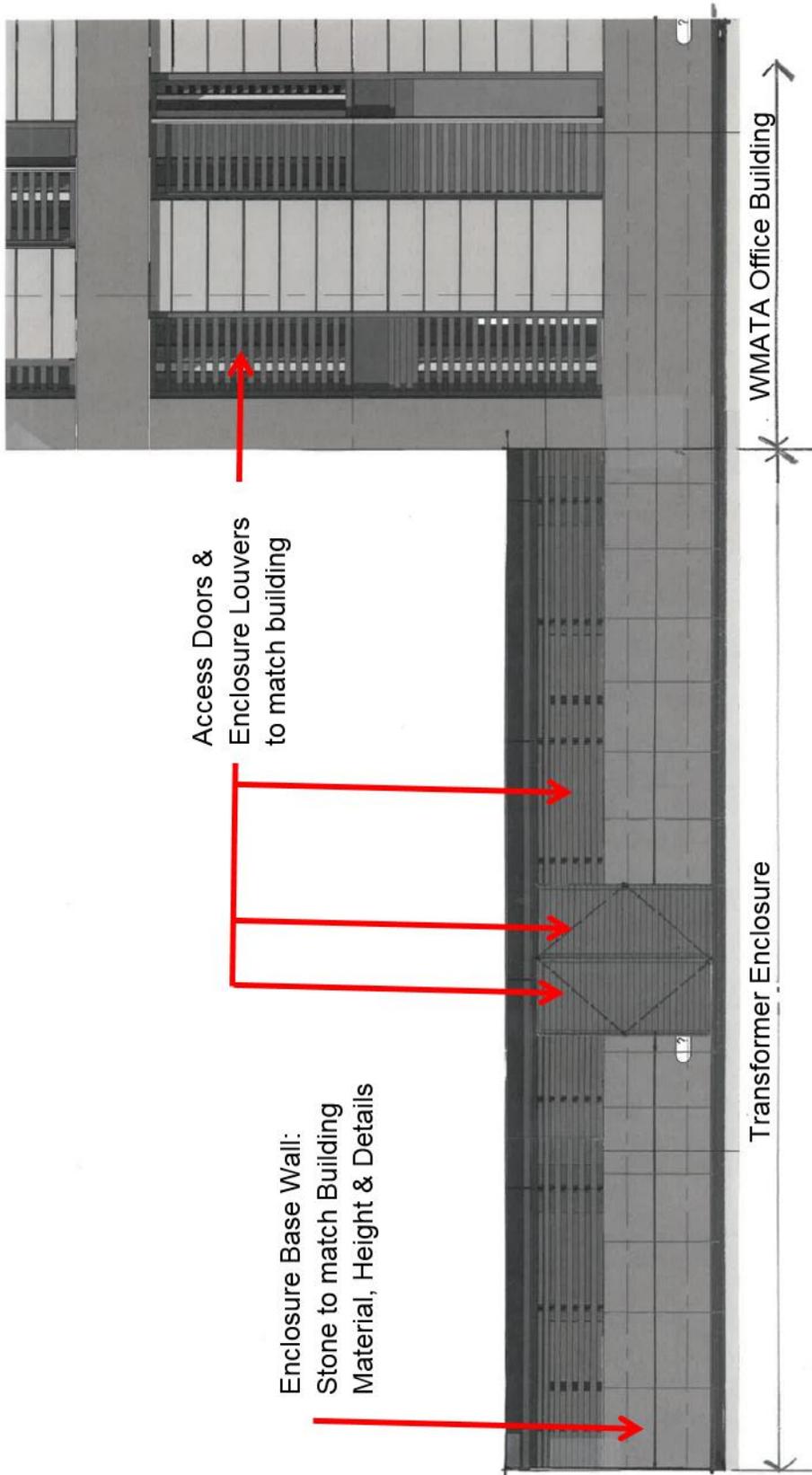


Exhibit C – Perspective of Southwest corner of building (area of enclosure circled in red)

