
**HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD
STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION**

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| Property Address: | 2001 Connecticut Avenue, NW | X | Agenda |
| Landmark/District: | Lothrop Mansion Kalorama Triangle Historic District | | Consent Calendar |
| | | | Concept Review |
| Meeting Date: | December 17, 2015 | X | Alteration |
| H.P.A. Number: | 14-637 | | New Construction |
| Staff Reviewer: | Steve Callcott | | Demolition |
| | | | Subdivision |

Contractor Andrey Veretenov, representing the Government of the Russian Federation, seeks permit review to erect a nine-foot iron fence around the perimeter of the Russian Trade Mission at 2001 Connecticut Avenue.

Property History and Description

2001 Connecticut Avenue, NW is a three-story, limestone faced mansion built in 1908 for Alvin Lothrop (1849-1912), partner in the Woodward and Lothrop Company. The 40 room house was designed by the prominent Washington firm of Hornblower and Marshall. The building was listed as a contributing building in the Kalorama Triangle Historic District in 1987, and designated as an individual landmark in the DC Inventory and National Register in 1988.

Set just north of Florida Avenue (formerly Boundary Street, the old city limit), this area was quickly gaining status as an exclusive residential area at the time of the mansion's construction. The lot is at the apex of Connecticut Avenue where it intersects Columbia Road and California Street, and is physically prominent in location and elevation. In choosing the firm of Hornblower and Marshall, Lothrop selected one of Washington's most respected firms, and one which had recently won two major commissions, the Museum of Natural History in Washington and the U.S. Customs House in Baltimore. The firm was becoming recognized for its skill in the Beaux Arts style, which had come to dominate Washington architecture since the late 1890s.

The majestic quality of the design is heightened by the superb placement of the building. In respect for the building's site, the landscape was treated with as careful a hand as that of the building itself. Capitalizing on the site's natural topography, the architects reconfigured the natural grade to provide a pedestal for the house, elevating it to its prominent location. This gave the house the solid foundation so important to the 20th century interpretation of classical architecture, and ensured the prominence of the house from the street. To further emphasize the visual dominance of the house, it was surrounded by a high retaining wall capped by a classical balustrade. Where the balustrade drops in height due to the rising grade on Connecticut Avenue, an ornamental fence is used to secure the drive and parking area on the north side.

Seeking not to hide, but rather to isolate the structure from the streetscape, the top of the balustrade is set at the horizontal plane of the principal floor. This renders the house almost impossible to view



Existing View

from the adjacent sidewalk, but ensures the view both from the interior and from afar, particularly from the city to the south. Ranging in height from approximately seven feet at the southeast corner to eight and a half feet high at the southwest corner, the wall is constructed in a smooth ashlar stone coordinated with the residence. The paneled base of the wall is solid and absorbs the changing grade of the land. Large stone piers punctuate the run of balusters, articulating the vertical organization of the building's facade. A public space side yard extends northwest of the property along Connecticut Avenue, enclosed by a 36" high iron fence.

Proposal

The project calls for constructing an iron fence immediately behind the existing balustrade. The fence would be approximately 9'6" high, with railing caps and finials extending the height another 18 inches, for a total height of 11 feet. As the existing balustrade is approximately 36" high, the exposed portion of the fence would be approximately 8 feet. The fence is sought for security purposes.

Enclosed with the applicant's submission is a diplomatic note from the U.S. Department of State that states, "In response to positive developments associated with the construction of a new chancery annex at the U.S. Embassy in Moscow, the Department, on the basis of reciprocity, approves the Embassy's request with the understanding that it will comply with local building codes and regulations and obtain all necessary permits from the Government of the District of Columbia."

Evaluation

Already set atop a formidable 7'0" – 8'-6" tall wall, the proposal would result in a barrier exceeding 16-1/2 feet above sidewalk grade at its highest point; as shown in the photo above, the fence would appear as extending to the underside of the second floor balconies. At this location and at this

height, the fence would adversely alter the character and public perception of this highly visible landmark, particularly as proposed along the southern (California Street) frontage. The careful relationship of how the house was designed to sit on an architectural plinth with open views from the south would be severely compromised by the installation of such a tall, heavy iron fence. The proposal is not consistent with the primary stated purposes of the historic preservation act, which is to ensure that landmarks are not only retained, but enhanced and restored, and that alterations be compatible in character.

While the site already appears quite well secured by the existing fences and perimeter wall, the applicants have expressed concerns that a determined intruder could scale the wall. Two of the specific concerns cited were that the shelf on which the balustrade sits could be used as an intermediate surface on which an intruder could hoist themselves up, and that the individual balusters could be grabbed for leverage to surmount the wall. However, alternative solutions that could address these perceived shortcomings and provide a greater level of security in a manner that doesn't have such a detrimental visual impact on the public perception of the property have not been explored. If additional security is desired for the property, alternative means should be evaluated that would not so adversely impact views of the property as seen from the south.



Rendering supplied by applicant showing proposed fence

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Historic Preservation Review Board find the proposal to be incompatible with the character of this historic landmark and the Kalorama Triangle Historic District, and inconsistent with the purposes of the DC Historic Landmark and Historic District Protection Act.