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

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Property Address:	<b>2200 P Street, NW</b>	<b>X</b>	Agenda
Landmark/District:	<b>Embassy Gulf Service Station</b>		Consent Calendar
Meeting Date:	<b>December 1, 2016</b>	<b>X</b>	Concept Review
H.P.A. Number:	<b>17-009</b>	<b>X</b>	Alteration
Staff Reviewer:	<b>Steve Callcott</b>		New Construction
			Demolition
			Subdivision

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Marx Realty & Improvement Company, with plans prepared by Shalom Baranes Architects, seeks conceptual design review for a project involving relocating the Embassy Gulf Service Station and constructing a nine-story plus penthouse retail and residential building.

**Property Description and History**

The Embassy Gulf Service Station is a one-story Neoclassical gas and service station constructed in 1936. Clad in limestone with a slate roof and styled to appear as a classical temple, it is an example of an “artistic” gas station which emerged in the 1920s and 30s when national petroleum distribution corporations were seeking to improve the image of the increasingly ubiquitous building type. These buildings attempted to mimic the dignity and stature of local courthouses, libraries, banks and monuments with classically inspired detailing and forms, and offered a sense of stability and respectability.

The building was designed by Gulf Oil Corporation architect Pierre R.L. Hogner, and is the result of design review by the US Commission of Fine Arts, the National Capitol Park and Planning Commission, and the National Park Service.<sup>1</sup> The building was conceived and sited to complement its setting adjacent to Rock Creek Park, and its stylistic inspiration and selection of materials was influenced by the monumental Church of the Pilgrims located across the small reservation to the north. Prior to the construction of 23<sup>rd</sup> Street, the site plan included a 17’ wide parkland buffer to the west, as well as other landscaping that was required by the review agencies to provide the building with a park-like setting.<sup>2</sup>

The site also includes a very small outbuilding, also classical in style and clad in limestone; the landmark application identifies this feature as “probably from the 1950s”,

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<sup>1</sup> Hogner was also responsible for the design of four Colonial Revival gas stations in the city, including 4861 Massachusetts Avenue (1936), which is designated as part of the landmark Spring Valley Shopping Center. The Embassy station is the only one designed in the more formal Neoclassical style.

<sup>2</sup> The 17’ buffer was conveyed to the city in 1942 for the purposes of extending 23<sup>rd</sup> Street through the square. The landscaping around the perimeter of the site and at the base of the building has largely disappeared.

which is outside the landmark's period of significance (1936). The canopies over the gas pumps are of relatively recent vintage; the original design did not have canopies.

The building is a DC landmark listed on the National Register and is a contributing building to the Dupont Circle Historic District.

### **Proposal**

The proposal presents three options for relocating the building on its site and for constructing a nine-story apartment building with ground-level retail adjacent to it; the gas station building would also be converted to retail. Option A, the applicants' preferred alternative, calls for turning the building 90 degrees so that its front faces east and construction of the new building with a square footprint would be to the south. Option B moves the gas station to the northwest corner of the site with an L-shaped tower wrapping around it to the south and east; Option C moves the gas station to the northeast corner of the site with an L-shaped tower wrapping around it to the south and west. All of the proposals would include a one-story connection to the landmark (not shown on the site plans but illustrated in the perspectives). No design for the new construction has yet been developed; the applicants are primarily interested in getting reactions from the Board on the general concept prior to developing a design.

The project would require a map amendment to change the zoning from MU-17, which permits a 50 foot height and 2.5 FAR, to MU-19, which permits a 90 foot height and 6.0 FAR.

### **Evaluation**

Moving an historic building is not standard preservation practice and is discouraged by the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties. Relocating a property off its original property can sever the relationship between the building and its context, and potentially jeopardizes the building during the process of relocation. Relocation within a building's existing site is somewhat less problematic as it retains the structure on its original property and reduces the potential for damage, but is not ideal as it can still change the relationship of the building to surrounding properties and its site.

The Board has occasionally found the relocation of historic buildings to be an appropriate treatment where their context has been severely compromised, where they are isolated and visually unconnected to their historic district, where the buildings are not individually significant or distinguished from other buildings in the district, and do not gain particular significance from their location on their lots. Examples of relocations approved by the Board that fit these criteria include three bungalows on a site in Takoma Park (6924 and 6926 Willow and 6949 Maple), several buildings on the 600 block of New York Avenue and L Street in the Mount Vernon Square Historic District, 1933-35 9<sup>th</sup> Street in the U Street Historic District, and 3211 Wisconsin Avenue in Cleveland Park. However, none of the criteria or conditions that the Board cited in those previous projects applies here, and none of those properties are designated as landmarks.

A redevelopment project on this site that included relocation and new construction could potentially be found consistent with two of the three purposes of the preservation act in that it could result in the restoration of the landmark and would adapt it for current use.<sup>3</sup> The building is in need of rehabilitation, and removal of the canopies that impinge on views of the building would certainly improve its appearance and appreciation by the public. However, for it to “retain and enhance” the landmark, and the characteristics for which it is designated, the proposal needs to be rethought with the following principles in mind:

*If the building is to be relocated, it should maintain its existing orientation with its primary elevation facing north.* As outlined in the National Register application, the building’s orientation and materials were specifically designed to complement the Church of the Pilgrims. P Street was the approach into and out of Rock Creek Park, to which the formal front of the station was oriented; the side elevations were oriented to the secondary 22<sup>nd</sup> Street and the park (later 23<sup>rd</sup> Street).

*The building’s free-standing nature should be maintained with no substantial above-grade connections nor should any addition overlap or obscure views of the building.* The building was designed as a free-standing temple in the round. While a light, discrete corridor connection might be possible, any addition should not cover or overlap the sides of the landmark.

*Any adjacent new construction should be substantially lower in height than is proposed so as to not loom over the landmark.* The disparity in height between the nine-story new construction and the one-story landmark is stark, discordant and incompatible, and would result in the gas station being left in shadow. While the open lot site to the south is under separate ownership and apparently not available for development, its presence adds to what is an unsatisfying urbanistic solution in which the weight of the new tower is pushed uncomfortably close to the landmark while a large open parking lot would remain on the other side.

### **Recommendation**

*The HPO recommends that the Review Board find the proposals for relocation and new construction incompatible with the character of the landmark and inconsistent with the purposes of the preservation act.*

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<sup>3</sup> The purposes of the preservation act with respect to historic landmarks are:

- (A) To *retain and enhance* historic landmarks in the District of Columbia and to *encourage their adaptation for current use*; and
- (B) To *encourage the restoration* of historic landmarks