

DRB #2015-0001

**Carlyle/Eisenhower East Design Review Board
May 21, 2015**

REQUEST: Approval for design revisions, including materials and treatment.

LOCATION: Carlyle Plaza, 765 John Carlyle Street (Block P)

APPLICANT: JM Zell Partnership, by Elizabeth Wilcox

STAFF: Thomas Canfield, City Architect, Planning & Zoning
Gary Wagner, Principal Planner, Planning & Zoning

I. HISTORY AND PREVIOUS APPROVALS

This project was previously heard by the DRB at the January 18th and April 27th 2006 meetings (Design Guideline Revisions), and then at the November 30th 2006 and again the February 8th, March 14th, and May 9th 2007 meetings, at which the project received approval for Design Concept with a number of conditions. Additional approvals were voted: on July 17th 2007, for final design of materials, with conditions, and on September 18th 2007, for treatment of parking garage and building top.

Following the September 2007 DRB approval, the applicant returned to propose several design revisions and refinements to the building, triggering an additional DRB review. A number of these revisions were approved by the DRB on March 27th 2008, including changes to the precast colors, the addition of vertical fluting and other scaling devices to the precast, and adjustments to increase the expressed height of the retail glass on the north and south elevations. These changes, as approved by DRB, are reflected in the current approvals, and reflected in the final approved Mylar documents and elevations, dated June 18th, 2008.

II. STAFF ANALYSIS

The applicant has now returned, requesting approval of a series of additional design modifications, some of which have a substantial impact on the appearance of the proposed building, and some of which are admittedly more minor in nature. In general, there is a desire shown to move away from some of the strongly decorative surface treatments that had characterized this proposal – for example in the rich detail of the garage screens, the use of translucent onyx panels in the monumental lobby wall, the scoring and fluting of the precast verticals, the use of glass “fin” extensions in the curtainwall to create a sense of lightness and dematerialization, and the elimination of the GreenScreen along the south and west garage

elevations. The following is an effort to describe these in a logical sequence, with staff's analysis and recommendation for each one following in turn.

1. **All Elevations:** applicant is proposing to simplify the grillwork that partially conceals the above-grade parking levels (page 12 of submission booklet).

Staff feels that simplification of these elements is reasonable, but that the current iteration may be oversimplified: introduction of slightly more complexity, combined with the judicious use of gaps, could yield a solution that rises above utilitarian, and retains more of the elegance of the approved design, while still reducing cost.

2. **All Elevations:** applicant is proposing to do away with the vertical fluting was introduced in the March, 2008 approved revisions (page 12, and approved Mylar elevations dated January 11, 2008), and to replace the green granite spandrel panels with an unspecified material.

Staff notes that this is basically a return to the September 18th, 2007 approved design that was modified to a more detailed version at applicant's request in March of 2008. This is, however, a departure from what is shown in the approved mylar set, and as such, staff asks the DRB to consider this request carefully. Convincing arguments can be made for or against these changes, as many of these are essentially a matter of style. Comparable to the simplification request for the grillwork (1, above) staff feels that if the currently approved version is to be revised, that it should still include some degree of detailing that emphasizes the verticality of the piers. A more toned-down version of the current approval that is less decorative in nature, could be acceptable.

3. **East Elevation:**
 - a. Replace green granite retail base with precast concrete
 - b. Redesign light sconces (reduced height)
 - c. Replace translucent onyx panels in entrance with fritted glass

Regarding the above, if it is given sufficient richness in surface treatment and detailing, staff does not object to the idea of replacing the green granite with a comparable color of precast, but notes that the subtle slate green color which was woven throughout the building (since it also appeared in the spandrels) added a layer of richness and interest to the overall building. Staff has no objection to the reduction in size for the light sconces, and similarly to the replacement of the thin-cut onyx with an art glass treatment for the lobby wall, using fritted glass; however, staff notes that additional detail studies should be provided for these three items to allow for better understanding and a more thorough review by staff and DRB.

4. **North Elevation:**
 - a. Refine glass design at garage levels

- b. Reduce the expressed height of retail glass (reversal of March 2008 change)

Regarding the above, staff has real concerns regarding the proposed change to the expressed height of the retail glass: this is a subtle but important point, for in the approved version, the retail glass succeeded at reading as a full two-story volume from the street (the actual slab-slab distance is 19'-1", but the previous design expressed glass to slightly above this elevation); in the proposed revision, the very important retail glass appears visually compressed and minimized by the building mass above. Staff is unclear what is involved in the change to glass design at the garage levels (see also comment for 5, below).

5. South and West Elevations:

- a. Remove GreenScreen and replace with redesigned grilles

Staff does not object to the replacement of the GreenScreen with additional ornamental grillework for the garage levels in these areas, while repeating the comments above regarding the retention of more detail in the design of these grilles (since there will be a substantial increase in their extent.) Staff does note, however, a negative side effect of this change: the removal of the GreenScreen, along with the strong projecting precast ledges that previously wrapped around the west and south sides of the south tower, have resulted in the south elevation appearing stark and unbalanced: there is too great an extent of plain, exposed garage facing south, and the glass corner accent at the southwest corner now seems too short. Staff suggests that extending this corner down several floors, to interlock with the garage base (as has been the case with its northeast twin) could help mitigate this imbalance, but there may still be a need for additional horizontal expression in the lower precast. Staff feels that both of these issues merit additional study.

6. South Elevation:

- a. Lower buttresses at building top
- b. Remove eyebrow forms at building top
- c. Remove horizontal fins from tower top (N.B.: various representations of this condition exist)

Regarding the above three proposed changes, staff feels strongly that they should not be implemented. The visual strength of this key tower element, which will be highly visible from the Capital Beltway, is precisely what both Planning Commission and City Council, as well as the City's Small Area Plan and Design Guidelines, have asked for in new buildings of this height and prominent location. Staff does note that there may be more cost-effective ways (such as substitution of precast concrete with strong horizontal ribbing for the previous metal panel and fin detail) of achieving the approved appearance, but does not support stripping off the rich detailing that was approved for this important building top.

7. Penthouse:

- a. Expansion of penthouse for mechanical equipment on both the north and south towers

Staff does not see any significant issue with this proposed change, although without accompanying plans, it is difficult to understand the extent of the increase. Given that the applicant has chosen to retain the open-frame expression along the top of all the precast walls adjacent to this condition, it will probably not be perceivable from street level. Staff does ask for plans showing this condition more clearly, along with further information on the materials and detailing of the penthouse enclosures.

Summary

1. Staff feels that the current group of proposed changes can be divided into three categories, and asks the DRB to consider them in the following groups:
2. Simple changes that have little effect on the approved design:
 - a. Changes to sconces along retail base;
 - b. Change from onyx to decorative glass at entry (details required);
3. Changes to which Staff does not inherently object, but which require additional study/detailing to integrate successfully with the design concept, and to evaluate correctly:
 - a. Some simplification of garage grillwork;
 - b. Some simplification of precast concrete detailing;
 - c. Change from granite to precast concrete (consider detailing and typical spandrels);
 - d. Deletion of GreenScreen from entire building (but note proportional issues raised by this change, and discussed above);
4. Changes which staff feels are detrimental to the approved design intent:
 - a. Removal of three key detail features from top of south tower top;
 - b. Revisions to expressed height of retail glazing at north and south elevations of the building;

Staff looks forward to receiving detailed input from the DRB on all of the above issues, and continuing to work closely with the applicant to realize this strong design in built form.