

Proposed Design for 16th Street Complex to Replace Existing Brutalist-Style Third Church Christ, Scientist Near White House Well-Received by Dupont Circle ANC

PUBLISHED: NOVEMBER 13TH, 2011

By Anthony L. Harvey

Dramatically rendered architectural concept drawings for the construction of a large office building complex at 910 16th Street, one which included three floors for the Third Church of Christ, Scientist's new gathering space for its congregation and reading room facilities, received enthusiastic endorsement from the Dupont Circle Advisory Neighborhood Commission (ANC) at its November 9th monthly meeting.



This view from the northeast corner of 16th & K Streets looking to the south shows the conceptual design for the church (foreground) and the office building façade to I Street. (illus.—courtesy Robert A.M. Stern Architects). / [Click on image to enlarge.](#)

The project, which is being developed by ICG Properties in partnership with the JBG Companies and the church, will replace the existing Brutalist-style, bunker-like church building and the next door — across a little plaza — small modernist office building housing the Christian Science Monitor. These structures will occupy most of the west side of the 1600 block from I Street north to where they will abut the ICG-owned World Center Building at K Street; ICG will retain ownership following completion.

As part of this project, the partnership is proposing a handsome, wide greensward with two continuous stands of trees, comprised of small street trees between the curb and sidewalk and large, canopied trees between the sidewalk and the front of the buildings.



Landscape plan showing placement of large and small trees on the west side of 16th St. between I (left) and K (right) Sts. (illus--Michael Vergason Landscape Architects) / Click on image to enlarge.

The immediate focus of the ANC Commissioners was in the high praise of their response to project architect Graham Wyatt's 16th Street drawing depicting his architectural concept for the new church facilities, which he described as being a faceted, crystalline, jewel-like structure that would project the congregation's wish to present an open, welcoming, and light-filled, transparent frontage to the downtown streetscape being planned as part of this ambitious effort. This glass frontage, complete with a glass faceted sculptural element linking the street level Christian Science reading room with a high ceiling, double floor church auditorium on the second and third floors, will have two street level entrances, one for the reading room and one for the church proper. The church will sit at the center of the block between the new office building at the I Street south corner of the complex and the World Center Building at the K Street north corner.

The double floor, one atop the other, limestone window design concept of the office building's 90-foot 16th Street frontage was also singled out for specific endorsement by ANC commissioners and members of its zoning, historic, and development review committee as exemplifying the architectural sense of this important, double corner location on 16th Street just two blocks from the White House. So too was the commission's reaction to the proposed double stands of street trees, both large and small, extending the entire length of the block in a landscape proposal that was heartily supported with the caveat of further study or elaboration of the effect on tree soil space of that part of the architectural vault necessary for the first level of underground parking space — one that would be below the large trees in the public space adjacent to the buildings' front faades.

Wyatt, a partner in the Robert Stern Architects firm who is experienced in the ways of Washington architectural practice, described the overall concepts of the office building facades as being one of stone and steel, with the 90-foot stone and glass facades on 16th Street being surrounded on the I Street corner and above the 90-foot 16th Street facade of limestone and the church's three floors by bronzed steel and glass, with narrow, design connecting stone piers on the window elements of the taller, set-back levels of the office structure — ultimately 130 feet in height.

How well the limestone design elements serving to unify the upper, set-back levels of bronze and glass with the limestone facade of the 16th Street side of the structure will work — an overall design concept which the ANC commissioners unanimously endorsed — was nonetheless recommended by some for further study. Also discussed was the question of slight, further set-backs at the higher levels of the building which might serve to lessen a visual sense of the magnitude of the building's massing; it is planned to be a 160,000 square-foot structure.

Total satisfaction on the part of the commission at the prospect of replacing the existing Brutalist church building with that of the design concept as presented was clearly expressed, as was that of the commission's appreciation for the sensitivity of the design of the overall building complex with that of the existing built environment surrounding the site. Commission Chair Will Stevens expressed specific appreciation for the architect's additional slides showing how the new structure would relate to its surrounding neighbors, whereupon the project team received a round of applause.

The District's Historic Preservation Review Board will consider this concept design proposal at a forthcoming monthly meeting, the first step in what may be a protracted series of steps that will be necessary before permits are issued and construction begins. Completion date is estimated to be early 2015.

Editor's Note: For background on this case, see "After Four Years of Controversy Christian Science Church Near White House on Track to Get New Home as Part of Office Complex," *The InTowner*, May 2011, issue PDF page 1. All news reports are available in the Current & Back Issues Archive at www.intowner.com.