

Robert A.M. Stern to design 16th Street church project



By Jonathan O'Connell, Sunday, April 24, 4:51 PM

The developers planning to [demolish the controversial 16th Street](#) concrete Third Church of Christ, Scientist are bringing in a heavyweight architect to design a future office building and church for the property.

Robert A.M. Stern Architects of New York has been named by developers ICG Properties and the JBG Cos. to design a 160,000-square-foot office building and a new place of worship for the Third Church of Christ, Scientist to replace the current building, an example of the Brutalist architecture movement of the 1960s.

Stern, the firm's founder and namesake, is considered one of the world's top architects and is dean of the Yale School of Architecture. His firm has designed corporate headquarters for the Gap in San Francisco and for Comcast (the tallest building in Philadelphia) as well as landmark residential towers in New York including the 201-unit Fifteen Central Park West, which has totaled nearly \$2.5 billion in condominium sales.

Locally, Stern has done master planning for Georgetown University and designed buildings for the business schools at the University of Virginia and the College of William and Mary. As part of an ongoing relationship with developer Hines, the firm designed the office building at 600 13th St. NW.

"You could not have chosen a better location or site," said Graham Wyatt, a Stern partner, of the property on 16th Street.

Having just signed an engagement letter with the developers last week, the firm has not begun to design the building. But Stern's work will be watched closely by the commercial real estate industry, historic preservationists and competing architects because the project presents the rare opportunity to build a new structure on the doorstep of the White House, which is two blocks south. The project also [replaces a structure](#) that ignited one of the city's [most fierce debates](#) about which buildings ought to be preserved and which ought to make way for others.

Wyatt met with leaders of the Third Church of Christ, Scientist in Washington last week and said incorporating a new church made the venture even more distinctive.

"One of the things that makes this project exciting is the role of the church and the history of the church," Wyatt said.

With such a high-profile choice, the developers are hoping to move the conversation away from what might be lost when the existing church is torn down and toward what might be gained when the building is replaced.

ICG principal David Stern (no relation to the architecture firm's namesake) said ICG and JBG, based in Chevy Chase, considered many proposals. "There was tremendous interest and it was a very thoughtful decision process," he said.