



*Catherine E. Pugh  
Mayor*

**COMMISSION FOR  
HISTORICAL & ARCHITECTURAL  
PRESERVATION**

*Tom Liebel, Chairman*

**STAFF REPORT**



*Thomas J. Stosur  
Director*

**April 10, 2018**

**REQUEST:** Construct 10-Story Building – Concept Review

**ADDRESS:** 7-11, 13-15 W. Eager Street and 919 Cathedral Street (Mount Vernon)

**RECOMMENDATION:** Disapproval

**STAFF:** Caitlin Audette

**APPLICANT:** 13 West Eager, LLC

**ARCHITECT:** Ziger/Snead Architects

**SITE/HISTORIC DISTRICT**

Mount Vernon Historic Districts:

The Mount Vernon Historic District encompasses roughly 40 blocks surrounding Mount Vernon Place. The contributing buildings within the district include a diversity of styles and building types including mansions, apartments, offices, and religious structures. The period of significance for the Mount Vernon Historic District extends from 1810 to 1945.

Site Conditions/Architectural Description:

The property in question is located within the Mount Vernon historic district along West Eager Street between Morton Alley and Cathedral Street. The property is composed of the parcels of 7-11 West Eager Street, 13-15 West Eager Street and 919 Cathedral Street.

**BACKGROUND**

- October 19<sup>th</sup> - The Commission determined that the buildings presently located on the given lots are contributing to the Mount Vernon Historic District.
- November 14<sup>th</sup> – The Commission approved the demolition of the contributing buildings following the second demolition hearing for economic hardship.

**PROPOSAL & APPLICATION OF GUIDELINES**

The applicant proposes to construct a 10-story mixed use building following the demolition of the properties previously approved for demolition by the full commission. The building will include one level of underground parking, with food retail on the first floor and apartments on floors two through nine. The 10<sup>th</sup> floor is set back from the main elevation and includes amenity space for a pool, gym, and meeting rooms.

The proposed building is composed of two masonry masses connected by a glazed hyphen. The mass anchoring Cathedral Street extends to 116'-0", while the mass facing Eager Street extends to 103'-0" where there is a setback for the uppermost level which continues to 116'-0".

The rear (south) elevation features inset balconies that extend the entire length of each apartment. Balconies are also found on the north and south elevations of the Cathedral Street massing.

Staff applied the *Mount Vernon Design Guidelines for New Construction*.

**A. Setback** - The proposed design meets the guideline for setback as the proposed new building maintains the plane of the existing buildings along both Eager and Cathedral Streets.

**B. Orientation** – The proposed design is oriented toward Eager Street with garage access along Cathedral Street. The entire first floor will be composed of glazed storefront curtainwall, which will be maintained around the corner of Eager and Cathedral.

**C. Scale** – The 10-story building proposed for the site extends to a height of 116'-0". (Note that the dimensions detailed do not include any mechanical units that may be placed on the building's roof.) At this height the building is out of scale with the buildings immediately surrounding it, which include two three-story rowhouses (approximately 40' high) to the south along Cathedral Street. Across Eager Street 1001 Cathedral Street and 10 W. Eager Street, are exaggerated three-stories and are approximately 45' high. The CVS located at the former Hippo nightclub is a single story building that is approximately 25' high, at its tallest point.

While there is a precedent for mid-rise buildings integrated into with smaller scale buildings in the Mount Vernon Historic District, this proposal would more than double the height of the proposed building's closest neighbor.

**D. Proportion** – The use of a contemporary take on a "base, middle, top" composition help to relate this building to historic buildings of a similar scale. The vertical bays on Cathedral Street are subtly grouped by two as are the horizontal floors on Eager Street.

**E. Rhythm** – The guidelines recommend designing the façade of new construction to maintain the rhythm of the street. This property is unique in that there are few adjacent buildings from which to continue a rhythm. The building has a clear rhythm that does relate to the building across Eager Street, 1001 Cathedral, however the rhythm of the Cathedral Street elevation has little relationship with the two Italianate rowhouses immediately adjacent to the proposed building.

**F. Massing and Composition** – The building is composed of two masonry masses, one each that face Eager and Cathedral, and a glass hyphen connecting the two. This composition helps divide the proposed development, reducing the impact of the overall mass of the building. The use of a contemporary take on a "base, middle, top" composition helps relate this building to historic buildings of a similar size. Within this overall composition, the vertical bays on Cathedral Street are subtly grouped by two as are the horizontal floors on Eager Street.

**G. Height** - The 10-story building proposed for the site exceeds the 100' height limitation by at least 16'-0" (Note that this dimension does not include any mechanical units that may be placed on the building's roof; which would further increase the overall height of the structure.) It should be noted that the incorporation of mid-rise structures throughout the Mount Vernon historic district was prevalent prior to the introduction of the height limitation.

The height limit was sought by the neighborhood association in response to a plan by the Department of Planning in 2004 to create a height limit of 180'. This original height limit was developed by the Department with the intention of providing developers more predictability in the design review process. However, the majority of the neighborhood represented by the neighborhood association was in opposition to this proposal and created a "Fight the Height" campaign, sending numerous letters of opposition to the Department of Planning. As a result, the proposal was modified and, following a variety of proposals developed in coordination with the Mount Vernon neighborhood association, a height limit map was adopted by the Commission in June of 2005 as part of the *Mount Vernon Design Guidelines*. This same map was incorporated into the now-expired 2006 update to the Mount Vernon Urban Renewal Plan. An updated version of the height limit was approved by the Commission in April of 2006, allowing for height bonus criteria which can still be found in Appendix Four of the [Mount Vernon Design Guidelines](#). In the 2017 update to the Zoning Code this bonus criteria was removed and the height limit raised to include the bonus, as the bonus requirements, one of which was LEED certified design, were now largely required for all new construction in the city.

**H. Roofing and Cornices** – The design features a flat green roof at the Eager Street massing and a flat roof with mechanical units at the Cathedral Street massing. A contemporary take on a cornice/cap is visible at the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> floors of the Eager Street massing which features an altered window design further recessed from the main plane of the building. Along Cathedral Street the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> floors feature an altered window design that extends the windows the height of the two story area with a spandrel delineating the floor level.

**I. Steeples, Chimneys, Towers, and Other Roof Projections** – Mechanical equipment will be set back from edge of the roof and will not be visible from the street. The height of the equipment is included in the measurement for the height limit, and thus exceeds the height limit.

**J. Materials** – The design uses a dark gray/black brick as the principle material that is contrasted by proposed gold toned elements. The hyphen separating the two masonry masses will be a glazed curtain wall. As this is concept level review, more detailed information has not been provided to CHAP staff.

**K. Shadows and Depth of Facades** – The proposal uses depth as a design element by recessing the windows along the north elevation at different depths depending on the floor level. Additionally, the hyphen is further set back to clearly define the two main masses. The use of balconies along the south elevation of the Eager Street massing and the north and south elevations of the Cathedral Street massing also provide additional interest, creating shadows

and depth. The use of balconies on the north elevation may create some dark and cold spaces and there will be no direct sunlight on this elevation.

**L. Windows** – The location and basic composition of the windows creates a regular pattern. More information is required about the material and configuration of the windows.

**M. Color** – The building uses a darker color palette than many buildings in Mount Vernon, however the use of more reflective materials will help to mitigate what could be a very dark building. More information is needed on the materials for staff to complete a review.

**N. Details and Ornamentation** – The building is a contemporary design with few ornamental details. Instead the attention to minor details, such as how different materials abut will be critical to the success of the design. This level of detail is not provided in the concept review materials.

Staff also applied the *Baltimore City Design Guidelines Chapter 5: Guidelines for Archeology*, and considered the archaeological potential of these parcels.

## **ANALYSIS**

Staff analyzed the submission to determine whether the new construction met the *Mount Vernon Design Guidelines for New Construction*. CHAP staff found that the proposed building exceeds the height limitation of 100'-0" by at least 16'-0" and likely more as the mechanical units were not included in the provided dimension. This height limit was driven by the community in 2004 and 2005 and has been the standard by which CHAP has reviewed projects since that time. Projects reviewed and approved using these guidelines include proposals at both the existing parking lots at Read and Charles Streets and Eager and Charles Streets.

Besides the height limitation, the design largely meets the guidelines as the contemporary design relates to the surrounding architecture, while still being of its time. Importantly, the design maintains a base, middle, and top configuration and includes elements that create depth and shadow. More details are necessary to better understand the materials and how these materials will interact with one another and connect to the surrounding buildings.

Zoning – It should be noted that because the height limit was incorporated into the zoning code the proposal will require a zoning variance, and will be reviewed by BMZA for its height. The project will also require a variance for parking, as the one level of underground parking will not provide the required parking for either the retail or apartment units.

Archeological Potential – As there will be significant excavation for this project, staff conducted a review of archeological potential. Staff focused on the parcel at 919 Cathedral Street, which is the only parcel that has the potential for subsurface archaeological deposits, under the parking lot. It is common in urban contexts for surface parking lots to be installed directly on top of the remains of historic structures and intact subsurface archaeological deposits, such as trash pits, privies, etc. After reviewing historic maps and aerial photographs, staff has determined that the construction of the garage and its associated filling station on the property (as well as the presumptive removal of the subterranean tanks following the

demolition of the filling station) would have disturbed any potential archaeological resources. Thus, staff does not recommend archaeological investigations for this parcel prior to demolition or new construction.

### **NEIGHBORHOOD COMMENTS**

The Mount Vernon ARC is in full support of the proposed design, though a formal statement has not yet been received by staff. Staff understands that the applicant has held public meetings for members of the community to review the design and provide feedback. CHAP staff was not invited to the meetings, and most took place prior to the application being presented to CHAP staff.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

While the proposed design largely meets the design guidelines, the building is out of scale with its immediate surroundings. As the proposed design exceeds the strict height restriction, CHAP staff cannot recommend approval for this project as currently proposed. Staff recommends lowering the height of the structure so that it is in compliance with the height restrictions.



**Eric Holcomb,  
Director**





Image 2– Development parcel in the Mount Vernon Historic District

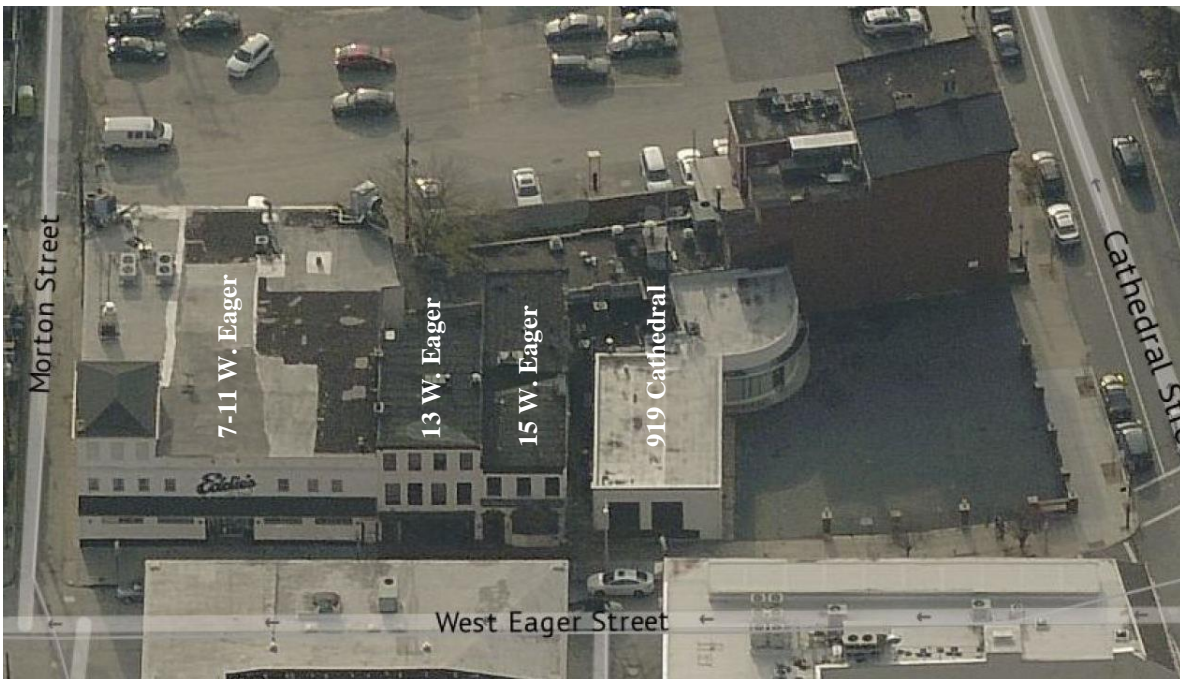


Image 3 – Aerial view of site as seen from north.



Image 4 – Aerial view of site as seen from south





*Image 5*– View northwest of buildings on opposite side of Eager Street.



*Image 6 – View of Eager Street looking west.*



*Image 7– View of site as seen from Eager.*



*Image 8 – View looking west down Eager Street.*



*Image 9 – View of east elevation of Eddie's.*