This matter came before the Mayor’s Agent for D.C. Law 2-144, the Historic Landmark and Historic District Protection Act of 1978, on an application for a permit allowing the partial demolition of two existing structures located at 813 and 825 15th Street, N.W. The two buildings are located within the Fifteenth Street Financial Historic District. The buildings, known as the National Bank of Washington ("NBW") Building and the Bowen Building, contribute to the Fifteenth Street Financial Historic District in terms of architecture, scale and period of significance. The proposed project includes the partial demolition as set forth in HPA No. 88-374, together with the proposed alteration and new construction as set forth in HPA No. 87-419. Specifically, the project involves the retention of virtually all of the significant exterior fabric of the two buildings, the removal of recent architecturally inappropriate and historically insignificant alterations and additions and the addition of compatible new construction.

The Historic Preservation Review Board (the "HPRB") reviewed the subject project for conceptual design in HPA No. 87-419 on May 28, 1987 and adopted the HPRB staff report dated May 20, 1987. In its report, the staff noted that it found merit in the proposal to reconstruct the buildings. (See Report attached to Applicant’s Prehearing Submission as Exhibit A). The staff noted that the project offers the potential for a significant enhancement of the streetscape at the northern terminus of the Fifteenth Street Financial Historic District. In its present condition, the low-scale NBW Building ineffectively terminates an otherwise harmoniously composed block.

On February 17, 1988, the Historic Preservation Review Board considered the Applicant’s request for a revised conceptual design approval in HPA No. 87-419. The modification involved a change in the location of the parking garage entrance from the originally proposed location at the south alley side of the Bowen Building to the east end of the I Street facade of the NBW Building. The Board adopted the staff’s recommendation that the Board amend its earlier conceptual approval to permit the vehicular entrance as proposed. (See Staff Report attached to Applicant’s Prehearing Submission as Exhibit B).
On March 16, 1988, the Historic Preservation Review Board considered the Applicant's request for partial demolition permits affecting the Bowen and NBW Buildings in HPA No. 88-374, which is the subject of this hearing. The Applicant requested the demolitions, to allow construction of the project reviewed by the Board in concept on May 28, 1987 and February 17, 1988. The Applicant requested the Board to recommend to the Mayor's Agent that these partial demolitions are consistent with the purposes of the Act. As the staff report dated March 16, 1988 noted, the Board has previously found that partial demolitions can be consistent with the purposes of the Act. The staff report referred to the Bond Building and Almas Temple projects as precedential cases. See Staff Report attached to Applicant's Prehearing Submission as Exhibit C).

In accordance with §5(b) of the Act the HPRB's recommendations on the application were transmitted to the Mayor's Agent. A Notice of Public Hearing to consider HPA No. 88-374 was published in the March 18, 1988 issue of the D.C. Register. On May 10, 1988, the Mayor's Agent conducted a public hearing on said application. At the close of the hearing the Mayor's Agent decided the case by recommending the issuance of the requested partial demolition permits. The record was closed at that time. In accordance with the provisions of the Act, the Mayor's Agent enters the following Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law.

**FINDINGS OF FACT**

1. The Applicants have applied for permits to allow for the partial demolition of the two buildings located at 813 and 825 15th Street, N.W. The proposed development entails the retention of virtually all of the significant exterior fabric of the two buildings, the removal of recent, architecturally inappropriate and historically insignificant alterations and additions, and the addition of compatible new construction. The project involves the retention of the original 15th and I Street facades of the NBW Building and the 15th Street and south alley facades of the Bowen Building. Under the proposed plans, a new interior structure will be built behind these facades and an addition will be constructed above the NBW Building to match the height of the Bowen Building. The new recessed top floor of the Bowen Building will create a unified composition and will reduce the height of the building from its existing height. The Applicant claims that the proposed partial demolitions are "necessary in the public interest" and consistent with the purposes of 52 of the Act.

2. L. Gerald Carlisle, Secretary-Treasurer of the International Union of Bricklayers and Allied Craftsman testified on behalf of the Applicant. Mr. Carlisle stated that the Union purchased the Bowen Building in 1931 and expanded the building in 1935 and 1939. He explained that after determining that the building requires major renovation, the Union retained the architectural firm of Hartman-Cox to devise the most suitable alternatives for the renovation of the building. Mr. Carlisle
stated that the option ultimately chosen maintains the best architectural features and the significant facades of both the Bowen and the NBW buildings. In addition, the plan allows for the combination of the two buildings into modern and efficient office space.

3. Anne Adams, an architectural historian, testified as an expert witness for the Applicant. Ms. Adams described the linear character of the Fifteenth Street Financial Historic District. She noted that the district is characterized by commercial expressions of Beaux-Arts Classicism dating from approximately 1900 through 1930. A consistency of scale, design vocabulary and design quality characterizes the District and the two buildings that form the subject of the application.

4. Ms. Adams noted that the Bowen Building was originally constructed in 1922. It was designed by Jules H. deSibour, one of Washington's most important early 20th century architects. The NBW Building was designed in 1919 by the firm of Holmes and Winslow, a New York architectural firm that specialized in bank design. Ms. Adams described the unfortunate alterations and additions the NBW Building that were performed in 1956. She noted that the alterations severely compromised the architectural integrity of the exterior. Ms. Adams commented that one of the most significant features of the project is that it offers the opportunity to restore the NBW Building to its pre-1956 state.

5. Ms. Adams commented that the buildings stand at the northern terminus of the Fifteenth Street Financial Historic District, adjacent to McPherson Square. The buildings are highly visible from Eye Street and the Square. Unfortunately, in their current state, they do not properly anchor this significant corner. The highly disorganized penthouse scheme, the exposed ductwork up the side of the Bowen Building and the window air conditioning units severely detract from the facades of the buildings and intrude on the streetscape.

6. Ms. Adams stated that the project will achieve, through the combination of these two buildings into a modern office building, several presentation-related goals that could not occur without the partial demolition and alteration of the buildings. Most notably, the project involves the restoration of the facades of both of the buildings thus reinforcing their architectural character. In addition, the architecturally significant interior spaces will be recreated. All of the significant architectural features from the lobby of the Bowen Building such as the light fixtures, the interior shop-front windows, the directory and the mail boxes will be retained and reused in order to recreate the spirit of the original space.

7. Ms. Adams concluded in explaining the extensive program of mitigation that has been adopted in connection with the subject proposal. The program will include the preparation of a monograph about the buildings that will contain photographic
documentation. There will be a physical investigation of the structures through exploratory demolition and recordation. The program of mitigation also contains a salvage program that will encompass significant architectural features of the buildings. Through a public education program, the documentation on the buildings will be distributed to various libraries and historical societies in an effort to disseminate the knowledge that is gained through this research.

8. Warren Cox, architect for the project and expert witness for the Applicant, testified on the existing state of the buildings. Mr. Cox explained several of the problems with the existing buildings including the unsatisfactory air conditioning system, the duplicative core structure and the lack of underground parking. Further, he noted that the NBW Building has been seriously disfigured by the 1956 remodeling. Mr. Cox explained that the proposed design solution will have the salutary effect of providing a proper anchor for the corner and an appropriate end to the historic district. The development proposal will unify the two buildings with a subdued roofscape.

9. Mr. Cox stated that the project involves several significant preservation-related features including the retention of the significant portions of the existing buildings including the recreation of the double-volume lobby and room in the Bowen Building. He noted that the replacement of the original addition to the NBW Building with a more suitable addition will result in a project that is compatible with the Fifteenth Street Financial Historic District, a district which is characterized by monumentality of scale and cohesiveness of design elements. Mr. Cox stated that the development will permit the continued use of the Bowen Building and the NBW Building by many long-time users. By alleviating the awkward interior configuration of the existing buildings and eliminating the problems with the air conditioning, the unsightly roof structures and exposed party wall, the buildings will be converted into a first class office building.

10. Lori M. Ward testified on behalf of the D.C. Preservation League in support of the application for partial demolition. Ms. Ward stated that the League has supported the proposed design solution for several reasons. First, she stated that the Bowen Building has a tradition of sensitive additions and alterations to meet contemporary needs. Second, the building facades, which are the most important contributing features of the buildings, will be retained. Third, the interior of the office floors retain little of their original fabric. Fourth, the plans call for the retention of as much of the original detail of the public spaces as possible.

11. Ms. Ward noted that the partial demolitions will facilitate the removal of the unsympathetic alteration of the NBW Building. Further, they will allow for the construction of a new addition which will contribute to the character of the district and provide a more fitting northern anchor to the historic district.
Finally, Ms. Ward commended the thorough program of documentation and salvage which will be implemented in coordination with the staff of the Historic Preservation Review Board.

12. Subsequent to the presentation of the testimony of all the witnesses, counsel for the Applicant submitted a set of plans to the record that further refined the originally submitted plans. In connection with the granting of the necessary relief, counsel for the Applicant also requested a delegation of authority by the Mayor's Agent to the Historic Preservation Division staff and the Historic Preservation Review Board to review and approve all further refinements of the new construction. The purpose of the request was to insure that minor Board-approved changes would not require further public hearings before the Mayor's Agent.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

Pursuant to 55(e) of the Act, no demolition permit may be issued unless the Mayor or his designated agent finds that issuance of the permit is "necessary in the public interest, or that failure to issue the permit will result in unreasonable economic hardship to the owner". Section 3(j) of the Act defines "necessary in the public interest" as "consistent with the proposes of this Act as set forth in §2(b) or necessary to allow the construction of a project of special merit". The purposes of the Act as set forth in §2(b) with respect to properties in historic districts are:

(A) To retain and enhance those properties which contribute to the character of the historic district and to encourage their adaptation for current use:

(B) To assure that alterations of existing structures are compatible with the character of the historic district; and

(C) To assure that new construction and subdivisions of lots in an historic district are compatible with the character of the historic district.

As noted above, the Applicant claims that proposed partial demolitions are "necessary in the public interest" because the partial demolitions of the buildings are consistent with the purposes of §2 of the Act.

Based on the evidence of record, the Mayor's Agent concludes that the Applicant has proposed a project that is consistent with the purposes of the Act. The Applicant has achieved a design of exemplary architecture which sympathetically relates to the existing buildings and properly anchors the prominent corner upon which the buildings are located. Credible evidence presented by the Applicant describes a project which retains and enhances the existing buildings, contributes to the character of the historic district, and provides for the adaptive reuse and restoration of the facades, as well as the recreation of
the significant interior spaces. The project entails the retention of virtually all of the significant exterior fabric of the two buildings, the removal of recent architecturally inappropriate and historically insignificant alterations and additions and the addition of compatible new construction.

The Mayor’s Agent concludes that the new interior structure that will be built behind these facades and the addition that will be constructed above the NBW Building to match the height of the Bowen Building will be highly compatible with the district. Further, the new recessed top floor of the Bowen Building will create a unified composition and will slightly reduce the height of the building.

The Mayor’s Agent accepts the recommendations of the Historic Preservation Review Board to grant conceptual design approval of the project in HPA No. 87-419 as well as the Board’s subsequent unanimous approval of the modification to the prior conceptual design approval of the project, and the recommendation in favor of granting the permits for partial demolition in HPA No. 88-374. The Mayor’s Agent concurs with the recommendations of the Historic Preservation Review Board at its March 16, 1988 meeting that the issuance of the partial demolition permits would be consistent with the purposes of the Act. The Mayor’s Agent finds that the restoration and retention of significant portions of the facades will enhance the historic district and this corner site, which is highly visible from McPherson Square.

The Mayor’s Agent commends the Applicant for its thorough program of mitigation and finds that it is highly consistent with the purposes of the Act. The Mayor’s Agent specifically commends the photographic documentation and public education aspects of the program. Finally, the Mayor’s Agent concludes that the partial demolition of the Bowen and NBW Buildings is highly consistent with the purposes of the Act as set forth in §2(b)(1)(A), §2(b)(1)(B), §2(b)(1)(C), §2(a)(1), §2(a)(2) and §2(a)(5). The partial demolition will result in the retention and enhancement of properties which contribute to the character of the historic district and will encourage the adaptation of the existing buildings for current use. The partial demolitions will effect and accomplish the protection, enhancement and perpetuation of the improvements and landscape features of landmarks and districts which represent distinctive elements of the District’s cultural, social, economic, political and architectural history. Further, the partial demolitions will safeguard the District’s historic, aesthetic and cultural heritage as embodied in and reflected in such landmarks and districts and will promote the use of landmarks and historic districts for the education, pleasure and welfare of the people of the District of Columbia.

ORDER

Issue demolition permits. Application—HPA No. 88-374 is necessary in the public interest because it is consistent with the purposes of
the Act. The entire project will be carried out in accordance with the plans reviewed by the Historic Preservation Division staff in HPA No. 88-374 and its companion case, HPA 87-419. Further refinements of such plans must be reviewed and approved by the Historic Preservation Review Board and the Historic Preservation Division staff.

August 5, 1988

Diane L. Herndon, Esquire
Mayor’s Agent for D.C. Law 2-144