Post Steam Plant - Study | Pioneer Square Preservation Board Briefing

June 14, 2022

Looking north on Western Avenue, circa 1910

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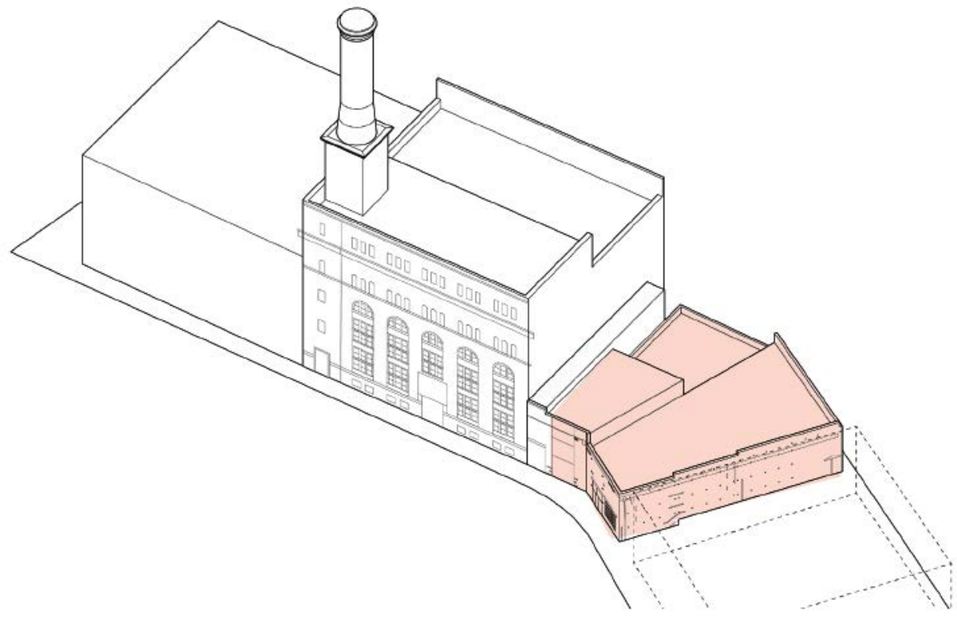
Looking east from Alaskan Way, 1906

HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE - OLD POST STATION

Excerpt from Seattle Historical Sites Survey : (www.seattle.gov/dpd/historicalsite)

'The Old Post Station Facility, along with the Seattle Steam's New Post Station, is one of the last working remnants of the industrial fabric of the Pioneer Square-Skid Road Historic District and definitely dates from before 1903. The Seattle Steam Heat and Power Company was granted a "franchise" by the City of Seattle to provide steam heating and water on February 19, 1890. In a letter of September 24, 1890, the Seattle Steam Company described the imminent completion of a plant at 619 Post Avenue and the two duplex Worthington steam pumps, which would provide water in the event of a fire. Whether all or part of the present building was built around 1890, however, is uncertain. It is known that the east and north masonry walls were constructed before 1903 and that the original boilers were located along a south wall. By 1903, the building had a large stack, as well as boilers on the roof. The original building designer and builder are unknown; however, Stone and Webster, the well-known Boston based utility company who designed the adjacent New Post Station, modified it in 1903, 1910 and 1913. In 1913, the south façade and a portion of the east façade were reconstructed.

Founded in 1889 by Charles A. Stone and Edwin Webster, both graduates of MIT in electrical engineering, the Stone and Webster was originally called the Massachusetts Electrical Company. The firm began by managing utility plants in 1895. By 1902, it had begun financing them through an in-house securities department and actually constructing them; therefore, this building is associated with the company's earliest efforts in King County and one of its earliest enterprises in Seattle. Stone and Webster had, in fact, maintained a significant presence in King County since 1898, when it had acquired the region's first hydroelectric plant at Snoqualmie Falls and its subsidiary, the Seattle Electric Company, took control of Seattle area utilities, as well as the local street car lines. The structure was also further modified by Puget Power in 1922: Interior columns were eliminated and exposed exterior roof trusses on the northeast part of the building were added (only one was clearly visible, until very recently). The only elements that post-date 1922 and that do not contribute to the integrity of this building are the metal doors on the west and east elevations of the building. The building is a rare example of utilitarian architecture common to this area at the turn of the twentieth century. The building has continuously functioned as part of the Steam Plant. While it once provided back-up for the larger plant, it appears to be used as a storage facility.'



HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE - NEW POST STATION

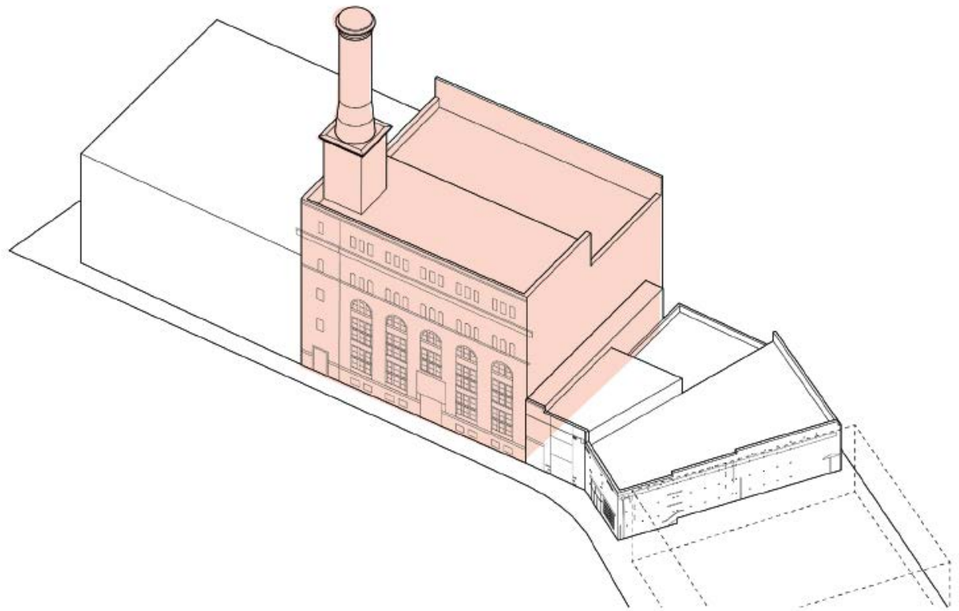
Excerpt from Seattle Historical Sites Survey (www.seattle.gov/dpd/historicalsite)

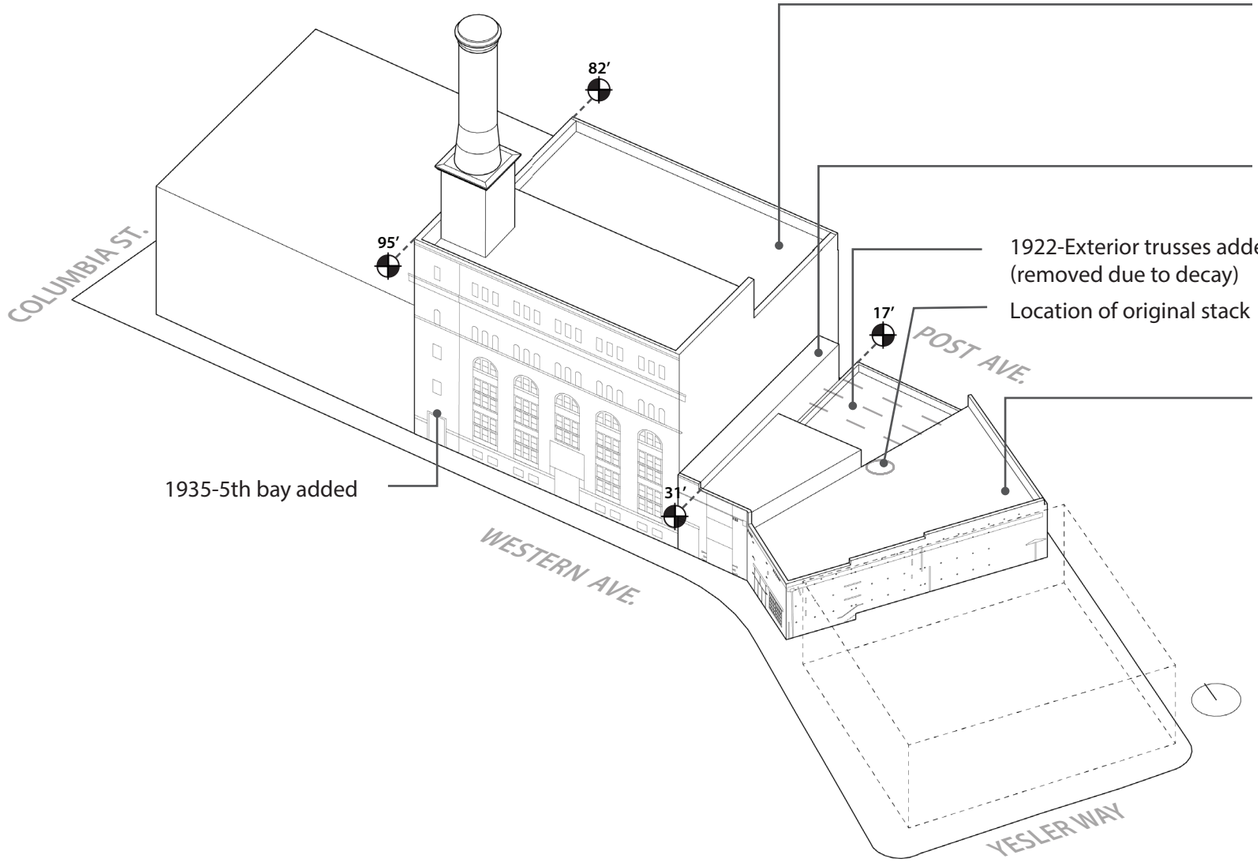
'Along with the adjacent Old Post Station, this is one of the last working remnants of the original industrial fabric of the Pioneer Square Skid Road National Historic District. The building was built between 1900 and 1902 by Stone & Webster, the Boston based utility company. Founded in 1889 by Charles A. Stone and Edwin Webster, both graduates of MIT in electrical engineering, the company was originally called the Massachusetts Electrical Company. The firm began by managing utility plants in 1895. By 1902, it had begun financing them through an in-house securities department and actually constructing them; therefore this Seattle Steam Plant must be among the company's earliest efforts and certainly one of their earliest enterprises in Seattle. Stone and Webster had, in fact, maintained a significant presence in King County since 1898, when it had acquired the region's first hydroelectric plant at Snoqualmie Falls and its subsidiary, the Seattle Electric Company, took control of Seattle area utilities, as well as the local street car lines.

The building has been in continuous use as a steam plant. In terms of function, the interior of the building was designed to maximize the use of gravity in the movement of coal. Coal came into the building through "Hell's alley," located at the southwest corner of the building. From there, it moved to the eastern portion of the building and was raised by a conveyor to the roof, where it was emptied into a covered roof monitor and moved in a north-south direction. From the roof monitor, the coal would be dropped into the coal bunkers below and then from the coal bunkers to the "water-tube" boilers. The plant also produced electricity for the streetcars, which had been operating in Seattle, since before the Great Fire, thanks to two battery rooms, one in the basement and one at the penthouse level. The building still provides steam to most of Pioneer Square and to other areas of Seattle, from Pioneer Square roughly up to Harvard Avenue to the east and between Blanchard Street to the north and King Street to the south. High pressure steam lines provide steam to areas east of Interstate-5, while low pressure lines are used to provide steam to Seattle's downtown and west of the I-5. The fact that this is still a working steam plant, in itself, is significant, since similar buildings throughout the United States have frequently been converted to other uses.

The Neo-Renaissance composition, particularly of the original five bays along Western Avenue is especially striking. In addition, the smokestack, which is visible in many parts of Pioneer Square and Downtown Seattle, is an important visual marker within the city. In the context of American urban history, this building is typical of power production buildings associated with industrial growth at the turn of the twentieth century and is similar to several other industrial buildings produced by and administered by Stone & Webster or its subsidiaries in this period.

The top floor is not shown in the original drawings but appears to have been added at the end of construction in 1902. The northern bay, corresponding to the hoistway and one of the battery rooms, was apparently added in 1935. Both the later date of design and construction and the functional aspects of the interior account for differences between it and the symmetrically composed Neo-Renaissance elements of the earlier part of the façade; but stylistically, the difference between the two parts of the façade is not jarring. Aside from the 1935 addition and an enlargement of a door to accommodate the installation of a new generator, later filled back in, the building's exterior appearance has been not been altered since 1902. This five story building adjoins the more utilitarian one story Old Post Station, also associated with the Steam Plant at 619 Post Avenue.'





NEW POST 1902

1900-1902- BUILDING CONSTRUCTED
1935 NORTHERN-MOST BAY ADDED FOR HOISTWAY
2002 REINFORCEMENT/RESTORATION OF EXISTING STACK

HELL'S ALLEY 1902

INFILL DATE UNKNOWN

OLD POST 1892-1902

~1892 SOUTHERN PORTION OF BUILDING & STACK BUILT (stack demolished at date unknown)
1902 NORTHERN "YARD' ENCLOSED AS PART OF PLANT
1903, 1910 FACADE ALTERATIONS
1913 EAST FACADE RECONSTRUCTION/RESTORATION BY STONE & WEBSTER
1922 INTERIOR COLUMS REMOVED. EXTERIOR EXPOSED ROOF TRUSSES ADDED (trusses have since been removed)
Alterations to exterior openings for vehicles (dates unknown)
2002 INTERIOR MEZZANINE ADDED

SITE SUMMARY:
619 Post Ave, 633 Post Ave, 610 Western Ave, 622 Western Ave

Parcel # 8591400100
Property Name (King County): Seattle Steam Company
Present Use (King County): Industrial (light)
Lot Area (SDCI GIS Data): 19,173 SF
Primary Zoning Designation: PSM 100/100-130 Pioneer Square Mixed 100 Residential Incentive height 100-130

EXISTING CONDITIONS PHOTOGRAPHS - OLD AND NEW POST STATION

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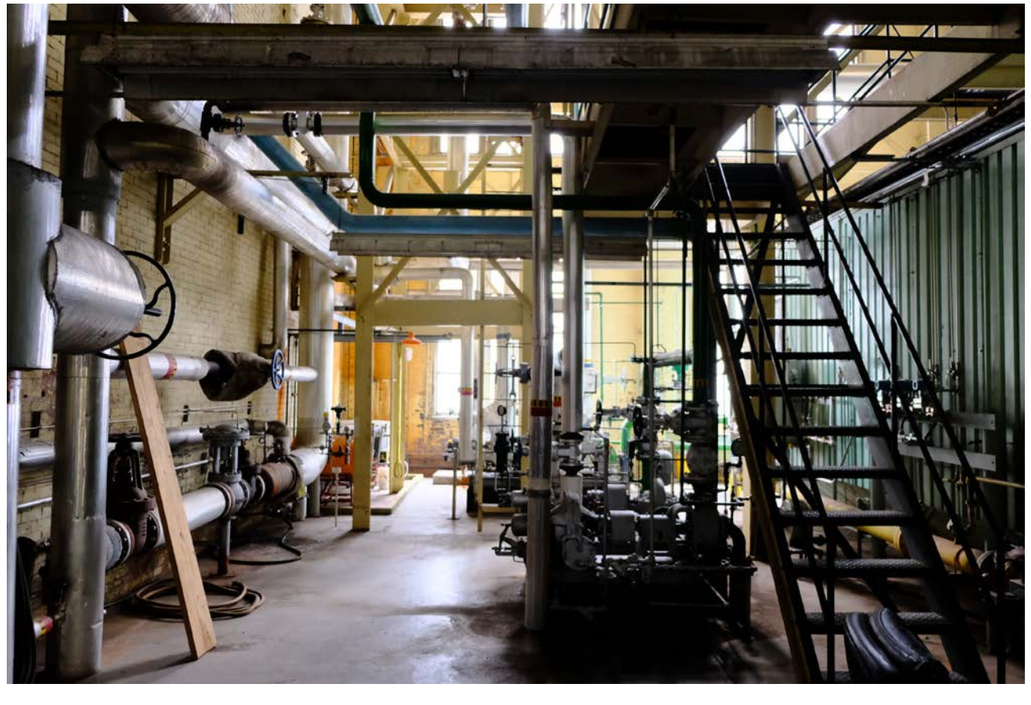
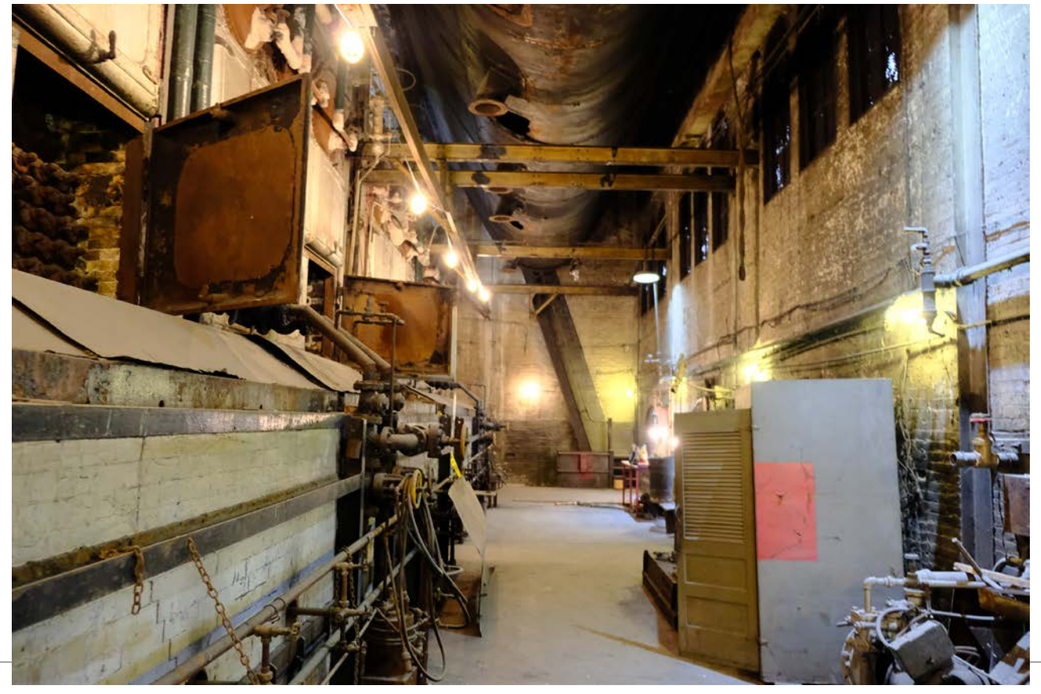
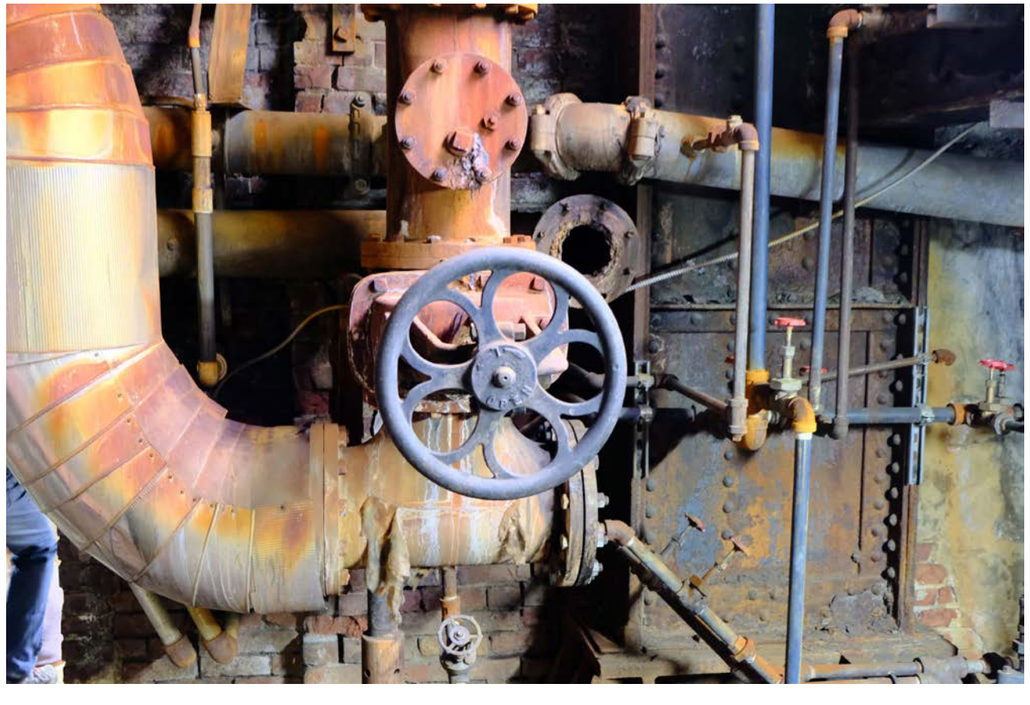
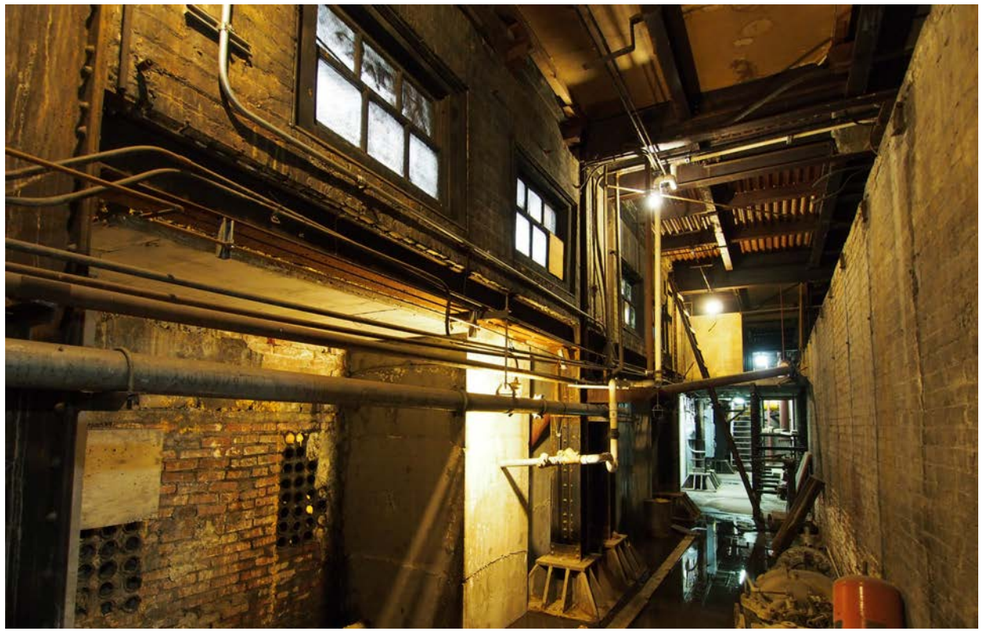






EXISTING CONDITIONS PHOTOGRAPHS - OLD AND NEW POST STATION



PROPOSAL SUMMARY

The former Seattle Steam Company facility (the two buildings known as Old Post and New Post) are currently being decommissioned by the utility CenTrio (formerly the Seattle Steam Company). CenTrio anticipates that decommissioning will be completed in 2022, at which point the two buildings may be marketed for sale. The owner anticipates adaptive reuse of the buildings with a multi-story addition. At this stage, ownership is seeking input from the Pioneer Square Preservation Board on an initial adaptive reuse massing concept that may garner Board support under the Code and Secretary of Interior's Standards. The owner acknowledges that a Certificate of Approval would be required, but wanted to get the Board's initial feedback on the massing concepts for additions on Old and New Post.

Both the Old Post and New Post buildings have served as an operating steam plant for more than 125 years, beginning in the 1890s. The buildings currently contain a very significant amount industrial equipment, including coal-burning furnaces, insulated piping, fuel storage, battery storage, and electrical switchgear. As a result of this prolonged heavy industrial use, the building interior, the equipment, and the soil beneath the building are known to contain significant quantities of hazardous materials. The removal of the industrial equipment and the associated hazardous materials abatement represent very significant costs, far beyond that of typical historic buildings in the District.

Furthermore, the rehabilitation of the buildings will require thorough adaptation of the structures to allow new uses, which are likely to include a combination of retail, commercial office, and residential. This work likely will be classified by Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections (SDCI) as a Substantial Alteration, and therefore the rehabilitation and adaptive reuse of the buildings would also likely include a seismic retrofit as well as general structural upgrades, new stairs and elevators, completely new mechanical, plumbing, fire protection, and electrical systems, as well as comprehensive energy code compliance upgrades.

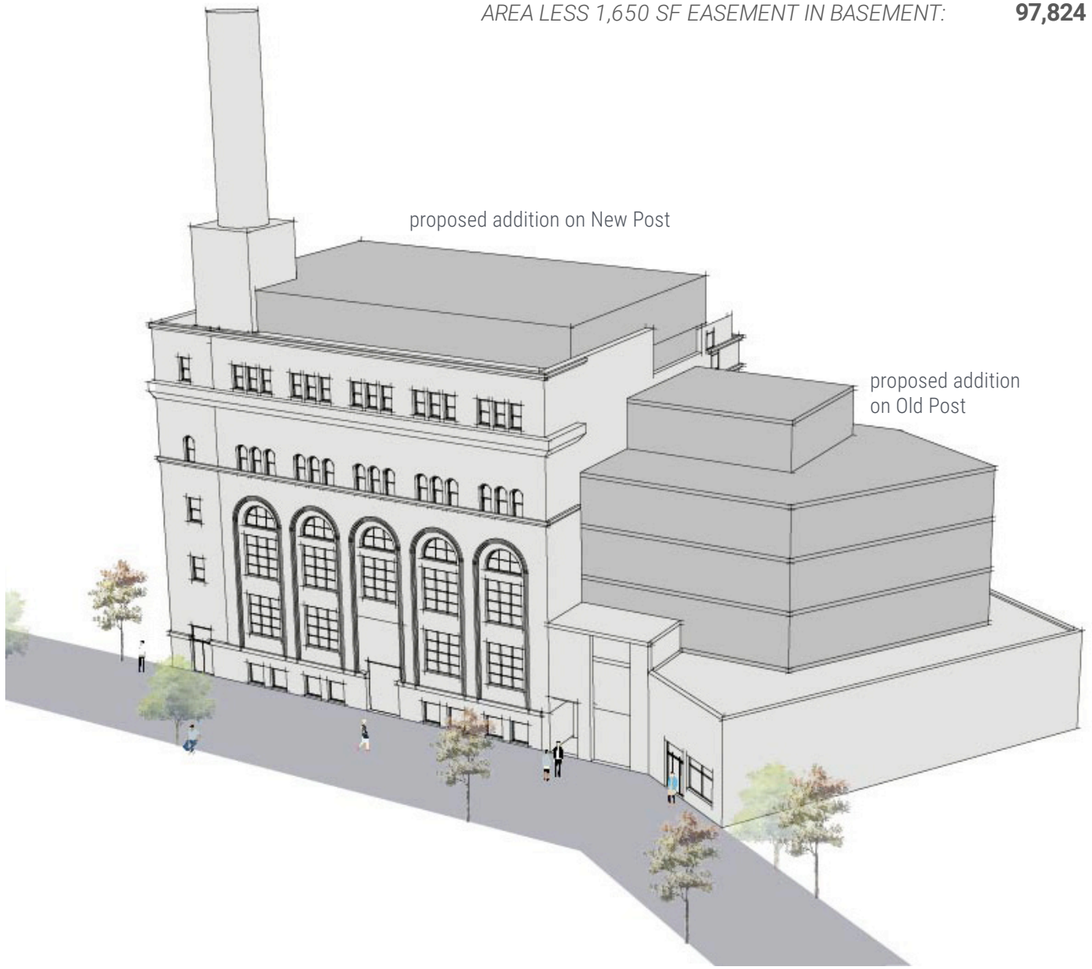
In summary, this unusual combination of interior demolition, environmental cleanup, structural work, and code-mandated upgrades represents an exceptionally high financial burden on any proposal to rehabilitate and re-use the buildings. If the buildings cannot be rehabilitated, they will be unused and fall into further disrepair – which will pose significant risks to the public safety, economic vitality, and cultural heritage of the District.

We believe that the proposed massing strategy presented herein is a financially viable framework to rehabilitate and reuse Old Post and New Post. This is because the added area of the proposed additions will provide an increase in value which can offset the substantial and unusual development costs outlined above. We understand that Board's approval of multi-story additions to historic, contributing buildings must be consistent with the Code and respond appropriately to its unique District context. In response we have taken steps to reduce the apparent mass and the visibility of the proposed additions from the street, as shown in the multiple street level perspective views of the proposal. As a result of the effort to develop a massing strategy that fits in with the adjacent context, we are certain that this proposed massing strategy can be developed to create a rehabilitation and reuse project for Old Post and New Post that follows the Code, Secretary of the Interior's Standards, and Preservation Brief 14. We look forward to discussing this proposal with the Board.

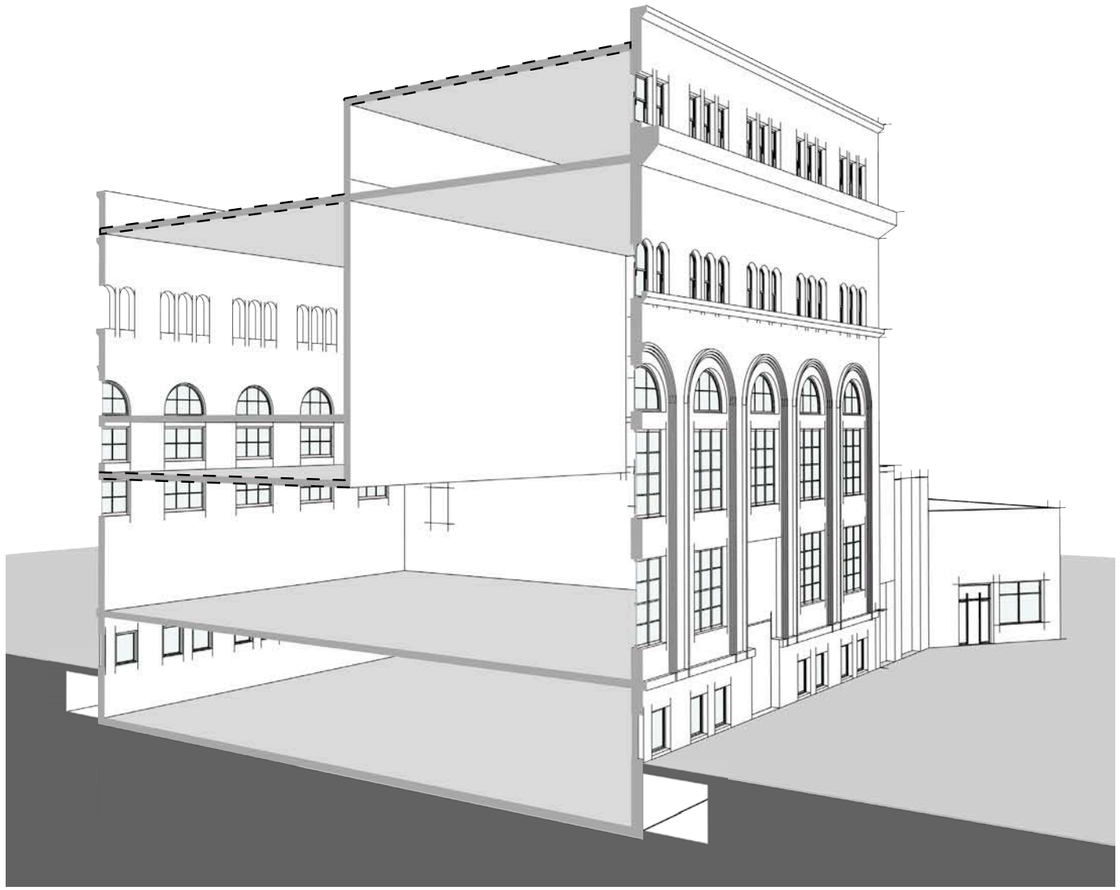
	NEW POST	OLD POST	TOTAL GSF
SEVENTH FLOOR	6,609	0	6,609
SIXTH FLOOR	9,990	1,469	11,459
FIFTH FLOOR	10,455	4,361	14,816
FOURTH FLOOR	10,455	4,361	14,816
THIRD FLOOR	10,455	4,361	14,816
SECOND FLOOR	10,455	4,361	14,816
FIRST FLOOR MEZZANINE	0	3,892	3,892
FIRST FLOOR	0	7,795	7,795
BASEMENT	10,455	0	10,455

TOTAL GROSS AREA: **99,474**

AREA LESS 1,650 SF EASEMENT IN BASEMENT: **97,824**



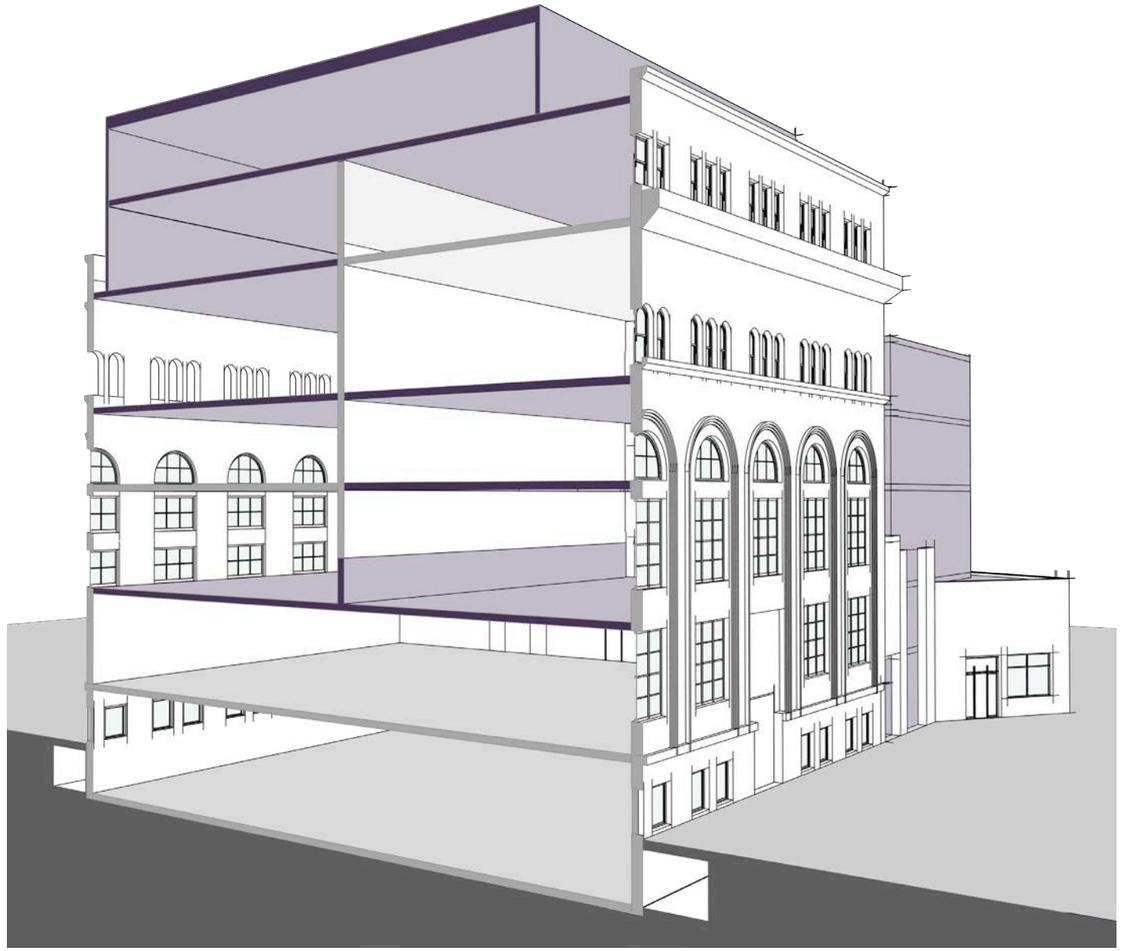
NEW POST EXISTING INTERNAL FLOORS
AND FLOORS/ROOF TO BE REMOVED



EXISTING TO REMAIN

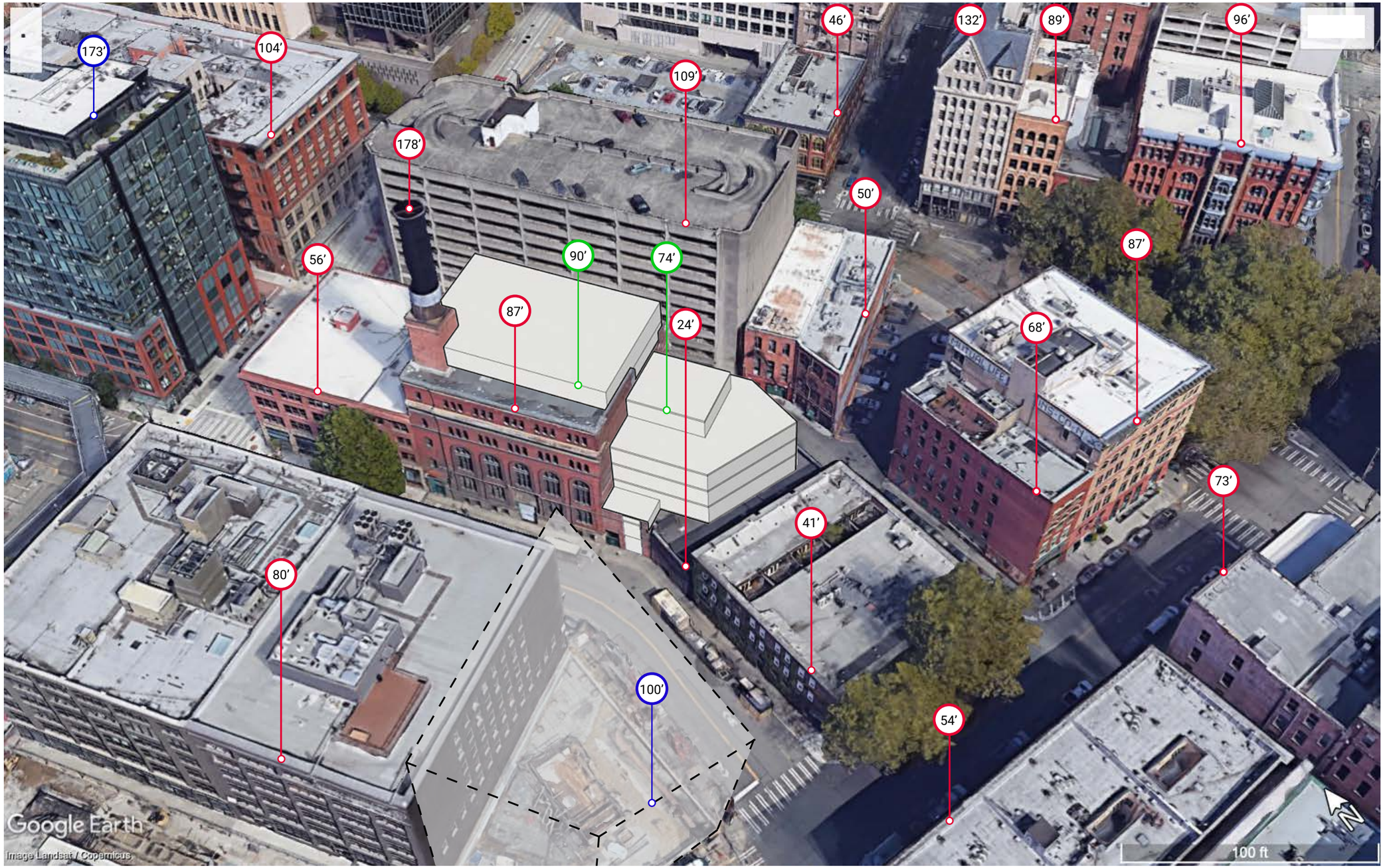
EXISTING TO BE DEMOLISHED

NEW POST EXISTING INTERNAL FLOORS WITH
PROPOSED NEW FLOORS/ROOF SHOWN



EXISTING TO REMAIN

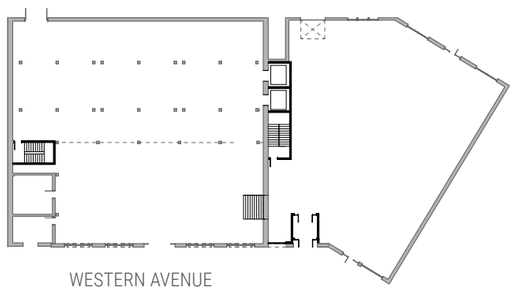
NEW



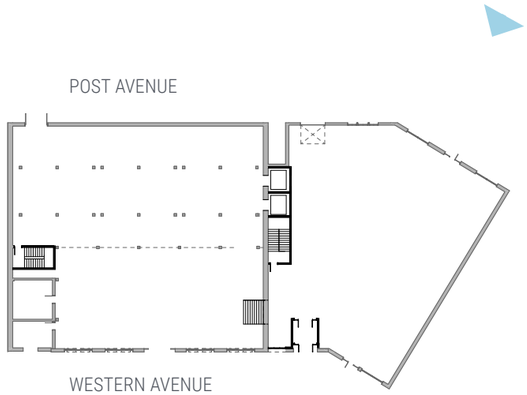
Height of Historic Buildings
Height of Recent Construction
Height of Proposed Addition

CONTEXT ANALYSIS - HEIGHT OF HISTORIC BUILDINGS AND HEIGHT OF RECENT CONSTRUCTION

CONTEXT ANALYSIS - PERSPECTIVE VIEW OF PROPOSED ADDITION MASSING STRATEGY



CONTEXT STUDY - PERSPECTIVE VIEW OF PROPOSED ADDITION MASSING STRATEGY



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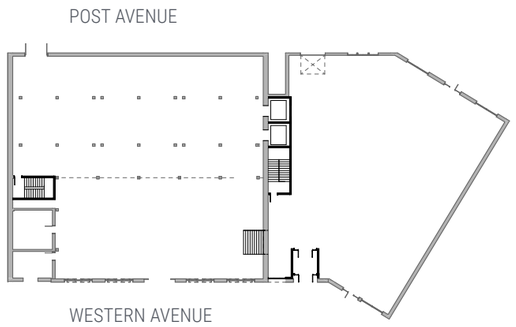

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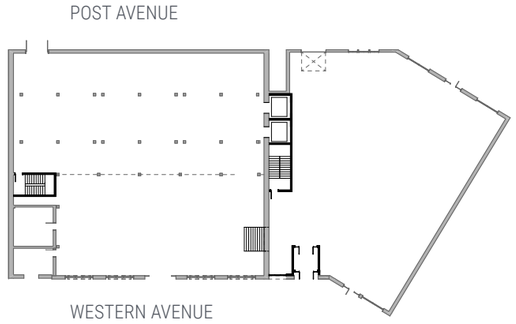

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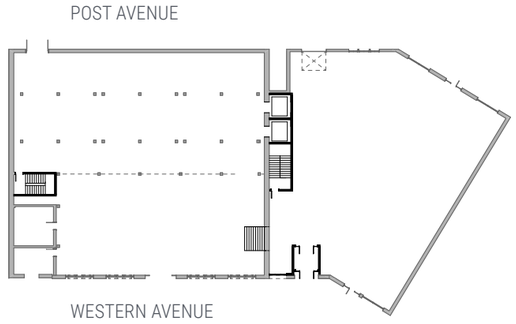

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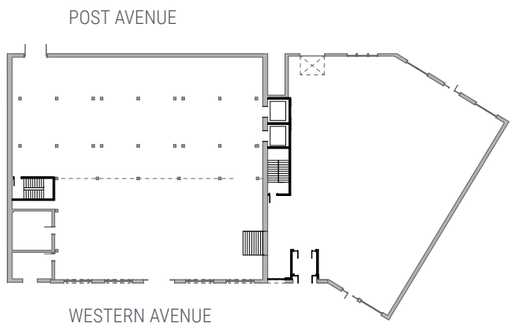

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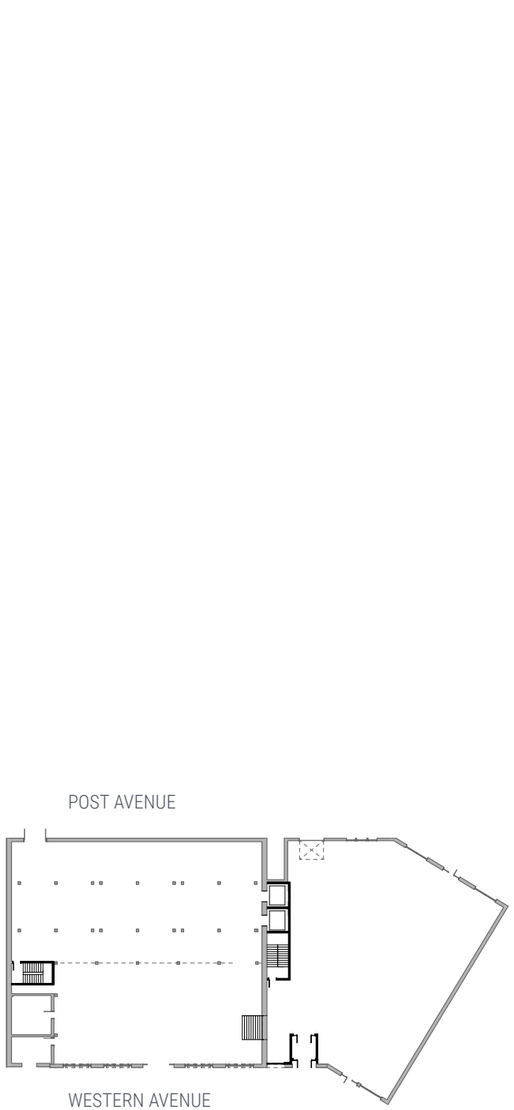

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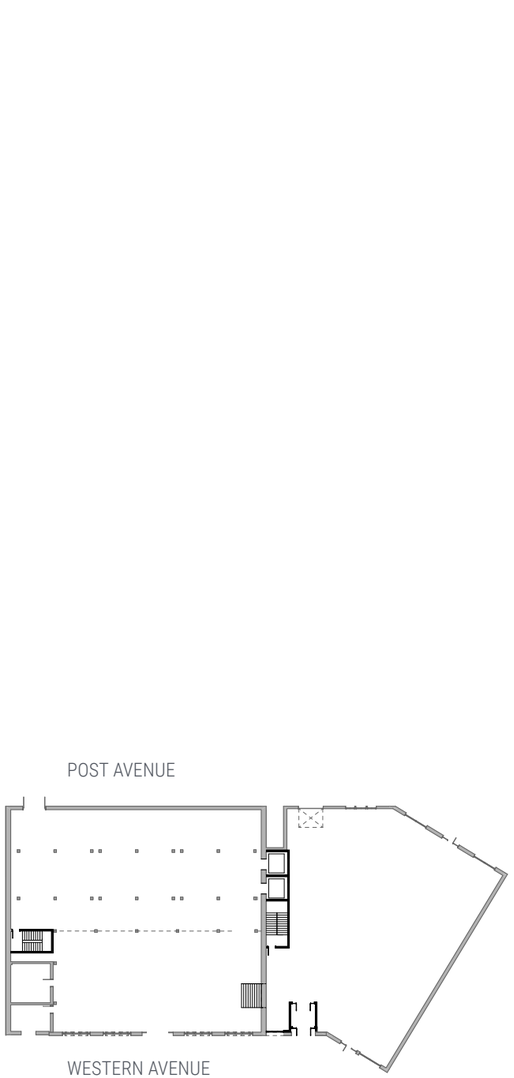

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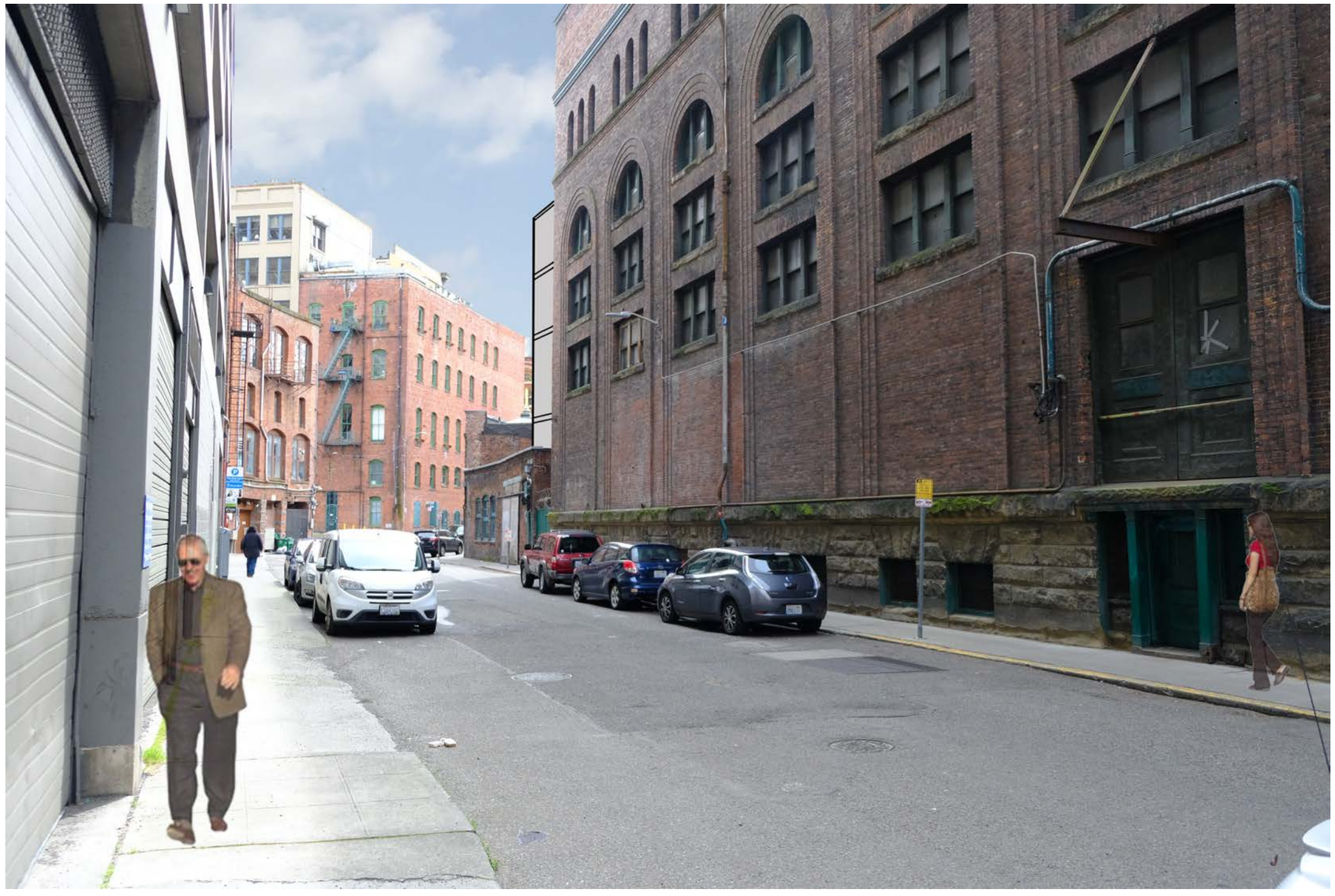

CONTEXT STUDY - PERSPECTIVE VIEW OF PROPOSED ADDITION MASSING STRATEGY