

[Working Through Artistic Differences on U Street](#)

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Greg Kearley of [Inscape Studio](#) will go before the Historic Preservation Review Board ([HPRB](#)) on Thursday for review of the proposed adjoining 3- and 5-story mixed-use buildings that, pending approval, will replace the currently vacant lot at 1932 9th street NW with work and residential space for artists. Developer and property owner **Paul So** also developed another property nearby, "[510nm](#)" at 1353 U Street NW. Both So properties are geared towards the arts community, though the Historic Preservation Office ([HPO](#)) staff report may lead to the HPRB "censoring" some of So's artistic endeavors.



So wants his new buildings - a mixture of housing, office and studio spaces - to serve the burgeoning artist community in the U Street neighborhood. The building that will face 9th St NW is designed for four stories near the street, with a fifth-floor penthouse set back 18 feet, bringing the entire height to 58 ft, and will incorporate a mix of ground floor retail and second floor office space, the rest to serve as residential and studio space. The other building, connected via a breezeway, fronts 9 1/2 St and will be three stories to include live/work space for artists in the [Hamiltonian Artists](#) fellowship program. The first floor would have an open space for working and for the fellows to brainstorm; the other two floors are designed for discounted living space for fellows.

So intends to build his second development to "LEED Platinum at least" - meaning exceeding the highest green rating standards. His current building on U Street boasts a long list of green design features including recycled paper countertops (Paperstone), daylight interiors, passive solar design strategies including southern exposure for passive solar heating in winter and overhangs at southern glazing for shade in summer, green roofs and rain barrels to conserve water usage. According to So, when he and his architect (occupying the office space on the second floor of his U Street building) were planning 9th Street, they consulted with the artists about their needs and came up with the common space for the first floor so they can converse, and special features like ventilation for work rooms.



So what's the problem? The HPO staff report concluded that the three-story building on 9 1/2 St. could move forward, but the building planned for 9th St. was too large in scale compared to surrounding buildings. According to architect Greg Kearley, when the project went through staff review over a year ago, the plan was for a 5-story building on 9th street with a 6th floor penthouse, and the more diminutive adjustment seemed to be something everyone was "comfortable with."

Owner So said his "game plan" is to go before the board to find out what "they would like us to do" so that he and his architect can accommodate their findings into a new plan. Though Kearley did express concern that a smaller building might not be economically feasible, considering much of the space is already slotted for use that will not generate much income. It would stand to reason that the extra floor and those penthouse condos are key to the developer's bottom line. Any fellow can see that.