

**GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
OFFICE OF PLANNING, HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE
1100 4th Street SW, Suite E650, Washington, D.C. 20024**

HPA No. 15-439

IN THE MATTER OF:

**Bancroft Elementary School
1755 Newton Street NW
Square 2610, Lot 654**

DECISION AND ORDER

The District of Columbia Department of General Services (“DGS”) here seeks a permit to demolish a 1938 rear addition to the historic Bancroft School, within the Mount Pleasant Historic District. Such demolition would be part of an extensive project to modernize and expand this neighborhood public elementary school. That applicant argues that such demolition is necessary to construct a project of special merit. For the reasons explained below, the permit will be CLEARED.¹

The school currently consists of five adjoining buildings constructed between 1923 and 1973, on a site that slopes away from Newton Street. Currently, the school facilities not only are outmoded, but the buildings sit on misaligned levels, severely impairing accessibility within the school, especially for students with disabilities. Under the proposal, a large modern wing would be constructed behind the Newton Street-facing 1923 and 1932 wings, the exteriors of which will be restored to their historic appearance, and the 1938 rear addition, a spare gymnasium or multipurpose room, would be demolished. This plan would provide expanded modern educational facilities, with appropriate internal circulation, and an enhanced historic façade for the school.

DGS presented its concept to the Historic Preservation Office (“HPO”), which asked DGS to examine alternatives to demolishing the 1938 addition. DGS did consider four other alternatives, but found that achieving acceptable accessibility by other means would still require damaging the historic character of the gymnasium and also would face major engineering challenges due to the poor condition of the 1938 addition. The Historic Preservation Review Board considered the concept at its June 4, 2015 meeting and placed the proposed demolition on its denial calendar for June 25, 2015. The Board did find that the proposal was inconsistent with the purposes of the Act, because of its demolition of the contributing 1938 rear addition. Nonetheless, the Board deemed the overall concept appropriate for the historic school and the historic district and delegated final approval of plans to the HPO, pending the Mayor’s Agent’s decision on DGS’s special merit claim. As the June 25 staff report explains: “HPO and the Board ultimately agreed that razing the auditorium/gymnasium was the most logical course of action.” This plan has been approved by Advisory Neighborhood Commission 1D and by Historic Mount Pleasant.²

¹ This opinion will constitute the findings and fact and conclusions of law required for decision in a contested case under the D.C. Administrative Procedure Act, D.C. Code § 2-509(e).

² The unanimously approved ANC resolution stated that “the modernization of Bancroft will be an essential step in the upgrading of our neighborhood school to meet the needs of the many young people moving into this neighborhood, and to end the flight from Mount Pleasant by residents discouraged by our neighborhood school.”

This is an easy case. The Historic Landmark and Historic District Protection Act provides that the Mayor's Agent can issue a permit for the demolition of protected historic resources if doing so is "necessary" to construct a project of special merit. D.C. Code §§6-1104(e), - 1102(10). A project of special merit means "a plan or building having significant benefits to the District of Columbia or to the community by virtue of exemplary architecture, specific features of land planning, or social or other benefits having a high priority for community services." Id., §6-1102(11). Here the attractive expansion and modernization of a neighborhood public school, consistent with federal requirements for disability access, provide important community benefits. Additionally, the plan retains and restores the key historic elements of the school, the characterful front-facing 1923 and 1932 wings, which will continue to provide the entrance and public face for the school. The modern additions will not be visible from Newton Street but will be smoothly accessible from the historic wings. Taken together, the project constitutes special merit in its combination of community educational benefits, and retention and restoration of historic architecture in its original use as school. *See Duke Ellington School for the Arts*, HPA No. 14-322, August 29, 2014.

Additionally, the demolition of the rear addition is "necessary" to construct the project of special merit. DGS carefully considered four alternatives before deciding that this approach was the best way to achieve internal circulation without a greater loss of historic fabric, and the HPO and the Board agreed. Finally, the special merit of the project clearly outweighs the loss of the 1938 rear addition, which, while contributing, is a plain, damaged brick box not readily visible from the street.

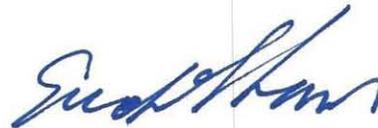
Accordingly, the permit to demolish the gymnasium is CLEARED, pending HPO approval of DGS's final design for the school.

Date: September 8, 2015



J. Peter Byrne
Mayor's Agent Hearing Officer

Confirmed:



Eric D. Shaw
Director, D.C. Office of Planning

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I HEREBY CERTIFY that a copy of the foregoing Decision and Order was served this tenth day of September 2015 via email to the following:

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