



MEMORANDUM

TO: District of Columbia Zoning Commission

FROM: Jennifer Steingasser, Deputy Director Development Review & Historic Preservation

DATE: September 24, 2012

SUBJECT: OP Final Report on Zoning Commission Case No. 97-16B
Minor Modification Request for Zoning Commission Case No. 97-16A.
Lowell School Planned Unit Development Application for a Major Modification
1640 Kalmia Road, N.W. and 7775 17th Street N.W. Square 2745F, Lots 815 and 817.

OFFICE OF PLANNING (OP) RECOMMENDATION

OP recommends the Zoning Commission approve the requested design modifications to PUD 97-16A that the applicant is proposing to respond to comments from the Historic Preservation Review Board and the Commission on Fine Arts. The proposed design changes appear to improve the addition's design, would have no negative impacts on the campus or the adjacent neighborhood, and would be consistent with the intent of the approved PUD.

However, approving the design without also granting additional zoning relief could have a negative impact on the integrity of the regulations. Although relief has not been requested by the applicant, OP recommends the Commission grant relief from the following provisions of 11 DCMR, with the specific amount of relief to be determined upon the submission of measurements by the applicant:

§ 406.1, Open Court Width (4 in./foot of height, ≥ 10 feet).

- The approximately 27 foot high court would be approximately 3 to 4 feet wide and would require approximately 6 to 7 feet of relief.

§ 411.3, Single Enclosure for Roof Structures.

- Relief would be required to permit three roof structures: a central mechanical penthouse, a separate stair tower on the northwest corner of the building, and an elevator overrun on the northeast corner of the building.

§ 400.7 (b) Roof Structure Setback at ratio of 1 foot for each 1 foot above roof.

- Relief would be required to permit no setback for the approximately 13 feet of the stair tower enclosure that exceeds the height of the roof, and for the approximately 6 feet of elevator overrun that exceeds the height of the roof.



Figure 1. Lowell School Site & Parkside Building



BACKGROUND

The Parkside Building on the Lowell School campus is an historic landmark within the boundaries of the PUD approved by Order No. 97-16A. The building is located in the southeast portion of the campus, adjacent to the intersection of the campus' main entrance drive with 17th Street, N.W. (See Figure 1).

The PUD was last modified in 2010, when the Commission approved:

- Retaining the enrollment cap of 400 students,
- Addition two new grades (7 and 8)
- Increasing staff from 60 to 100
- Improving school facilities through:
 - Selective demolition and new construction resulting in a net decrease in gross square footage;
 - Construction of a parking garage, and a net increase of parking spaces from 90 to 132; and
 - Reworking of the internal circulation system.

At that time, an addition was approved to the northeast side of the Parkside building. No relief was requested or granted for the addition, but the Order's Condition 13 granted the applicant "the necessary flexibility to modify the proposed plans in response to design recommendations from the HPRB Review Board and the CFA."

Subsequently, the Historic Preservation Review Board and the Fine Arts Commission asked the applicant to make design changes that would reduce the amount of glass in the proposed addition and would give more emphasis to the building entries. The applicant states that the proposed revisions in Case No. 97-16B have been made in response to these requests. They include changes to the proposed grading, the addition's footprint, the location of some classrooms and labs, circulation elements, the relationship of horizontal to vertical design features, the type of windows, entrance treatments and the ratio of stucco wall to glass wall. Of particular interest to this case are the following proposed changes:

- The circulation stair next to the proposed principal building entrance has been pulled out from the main face of the building to become a larger, more prominent "tower" marking the entrance. The uppermost level is approximately 13 feet above the level of the building's roof. That level provides maintenance access to the roof and contains a large exterior clock facing the building's entrance plaza.
- The shape of the construction enclosing the stairs would create two open courts. The court on the southwest side of the stair tower would be approximately 27 feet high, 3 to 4 feet wide and 6 to 7 feet deep, and would require at least 6 feet of relief from the width requirements of Section 406. The other open court, adjacent to the entrance, complies with open court width requirements.
- The proposed location of the building's elevator has also been moved from the center of the building to the northeastern edge of the addition, where it would rise 2 feet 6 inches above the parapet and approximately 6 feet above the roof.

ANALYSIS

The applicant has told OP that it did not file relief requests for the stair tower and elevator overruns for the following reasons:

- *§ 400.9 An institutional building or structure may be erected to a height not exceeding ninety feet (90 ft.); provided, that the building or structure shall be removed from all lot lines of its lot a distance of not less than one foot (1 ft.) for each foot of height in excess of that authorized in the district in which it is located.*
- *§ 411.17 Roof structures less than four feet (4 ft. in height above a roof or parapet wall shall not be subject to the requirements of this section.*

The R-1-A zone district authorizes a 40 foot building height. The top of the stair tower is approximately 43 feet above the building's measuring point; i.e. three feet above the zone-authorized height. The stair tower is a part of the building. Since the building is removed more than three feet of height from all lot lines, the 43 foot height of this institutional building or structure would be permitted by § 400.9. The applicant has also stated that the elevator overrun could be permitted by § 400.9, but need not be, since the overrun would be only 2 feet 6 inches above the parapet, a height that § 411.17 removes the overrun from being subject to § 411.

OP notes that § 400.9 permits greater height to an institutional building or structure but does not modify the zone's limitation on the number of stories. It permits a maximum of three. If the applicant wishes to consider the stair tower as part of the building, then the building would have to be considered as four stories high because of the portion of the stair tower that rises above the third floor to provide access to the roof. The proposed design would then require relief from § 400.9 rather than §§ 400.7 (b) and 411.3. If, on the other hand, the applicant wishes the top portion of the stairway to be considered as other than a story, then § 199.1's definitions of "Story" and "Story, top" would require it to be considered as a roof structure, in which case the setback relief would also be required.

Under either relief scenario, open court relief from § 406.1 would be required. This had not been discussed in Case 97-16A.

Granting the roof structure relief would not have negative impacts on the building design, the users of the building, the public or the zoning regulations.

- The placement on the perimeter walls of the building of the elevator overrun and the set of stairs providing circulation and roof-access and circulations stairs would enable an efficient building layout;
- Their varied heights would contribute to a more interesting silhouette for the building;
- Their surfaces would be finished with the same materials as the building's façade, which would contribute an ornamental appearance to the functional structures;
- The additional heights on the building's façade would not create objectionable shadows on neighboring buildings or on the school grounds. The building is well removed from adjacent residential development. The upward slope of the site between the Parkside Building and the

main, larger campus buildings would render inconsequential the minor increases in The Parkview Building's height and/or the lack of some setbacks.

Granting the open court relief would not have substantial negative impacts. Under the proposed building layout the following uses would face the court: a music storage room on the third floor, a room for administrative staff on the second floor, and a mechanical equipment roof on the first floor. Because the side of the staircase enclosure facing the court would have no windows there would be no privacy issues, and the combination of the light-colored exterior paint and interior lighting would more than compensate for the loss of access to direct sunlight for the office on the second floor.

The proposed design changes would appear to improve the addition's design, would have no negative impacts on the campus or the adjacent neighborhood, and would be consistent with the intent of the approved PUD. Taken together the changes would:

- Make clearer distinctions between the existing rectangular building and the more curving addition;
- Increase plaza space around the entrances to make the entrances more prominent and more welcoming;
- Better integrate the addition with the main Parkside Building and the overall campus by nestling the addition into a more gradual grade than was previously approved, and by increasing the use of stucco – the principle façade material on the school's campus.

Overall, the proposed modifications would be in accordance with § 3030.13. They would not substantially change the balance between requested relief and project benefits. The re-design appears to improve the relationship between the existing building and the addition and to improve the appearance of the combined structure. They seem *“to be consistent with the intent of the Commission in approving its original order”*.

JLS/slc
Stephen Cochran, project manager