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**HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD  
STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION**

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Property Address:	<b>4220 Nebraska Avenue NW</b>	<b>X</b>	Agenda
Landmark/District:	<b>Under Oak [possible landmark]</b>		Consent Calendar
Meeting Date:	<b>July 1, 2021</b>	<b>X</b>	Concept Review
H.P.A. Number:	<b>21-130</b>	<b>X</b>	Alteration
			New Construction
			Demolition

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The River School, a contract purchaser, with plans prepared by architects Shalom Baranes Architects, seeks on-going conceptual design review for site alterations and new construction on the site of the “Under Oak” estate in Tenleytown for use as a private school campus. While the property is not currently subject to review under the preservation law, the applicants have committed to nominating it for landmark designation if they take ownership of the property; as part of their project planning, they are requesting a courtesy conceptual review by the Board to see whether their proposed project would meet preservation standards.

When the Board reviewed an earlier version of the project in February, no formal action was taken but the Board members expressed concerns that the proposed new construction was far too dominant in relationship to the site’s buildings and landscape and needed to be substantially reduced in above-grade size and mass in order to be found compatible. The members cited the manner in which the existing house, while large, was broken down into smaller components, which they thought might provide direction for a future design. Concerns were also raised about the new building’s aggressive geometry, the orientation of the pavilion on 42<sup>nd</sup> Street, the lack of a defined space for the interior of the campus, and the loss of the frame garage.

**Property History and Description**

Under Oak is a 1.4 acre estate bounded by Nebraska Avenue and 42nd and Van Ness streets. The property’s primary building is a two-story picturesque French Norman Revival styled mansion sited to address an open greenspace which contained the estate’s eponymous oak tree (since deceased). The house was designed and constructed in 1927 by architect Victor Mindeleff and expanded with architecturally sympathetic additions in the 1950s. Additional buildings on the site include a one-story frame garage, a two-story brick garage, a two-story brick and stucco gatehouse adjacent to the entrance driveway, a one-story brick pool house, a cupola that serves as a garden folly, and several utilitarian sheds. The remainder of the site consists of gardens, lawns, woods along the perimeter of the site, and some notable specimen trees.

**Proposal**

The project has been revised in response to the Board’s comments. The sharp angular geometries of the new building have been abandoned in favor of a smaller footprint pushed to the outside edges of the property and expressed as a semi-circular form facing into the campus to frame the property’s open lawn. The height of the building has been lowered from four stories to three, and the opening between the primary building and the separate pavilion to the northeast widened to open views into the property.

As before, the new construction would be broken down into three primary masses (or pavilions) and further broken with steps down in height and changes in wall plane. The semi-circular elevation facing in toward the campus would be planted with trees in front and a living green wall. The pavilions would be clad in red brick and two of the three would be capped with low-pitched gabled roofs clad in slate.

In addition to the plantings associated with the buildings, landscape plans have been developed to create circulation and usable play areas, for the treatment of the lawns and informal area outside the existing brick garden wall, and for the relocation of two heritage trees on the site. The frame garage has been retained and the pool pavilion relocated to the 42<sup>nd</sup> Street side of the property.

### **Evaluation**

The revised plans significantly improve the compatibility of the new construction and are responsive to the Board's comments. The reduction in height, modulated massing, pushing the building further from the house, and shaping it to frame the property's open green space are all contextual and respectful to the site's architectural and landscape character. The landscape plan for the central green brings unity to a space that is challenged by a bifurcating brick wall and compatibly incorporates additional circulation and spaces that are necessary for reuse as a school.

### **Recommendation**

*HPO recommends that the Board find the revised concept to be compatible with the character of the site.*

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