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

Landmark/District:	Anacostia Historic District	(x) Agenda
Address:	1409 V Street SE	
Meeting Date:	September 24, 2015	(x) Additions
Case Number:	15-577	(x) Subdivision
Staff Reviewer:	Tim Dennée	(x) Concept

The applicant, FDP Acquisitions (FD Stonewater LLC), agent for the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Washington, the property owner, requests the Board's review of a concept to construct two three-story school wings atop parking garages and flanking the former Saint Theresa's school. The expanded building would become a charter school.

The three-story brick school was designed by Julius Wenig and erected by the Cassidy Company in 1909. It has been vacant for years.

The project would subdivide the present lot, so as to separate out the two-story house at 1401 V Street, built as a convent in 1950. The drawings (Sheet 6) suggest that there may be two underlying lots of record, but that the subdivision would detach a portion of the convent lot for the sake of enlarging the school site.

Two large wings would be constructed on what is now largely paved parking and playground space, occupying most of the lot, but retaining a rear yard/play area. There would be a service drive off the ten-foot-wide alley at rear.

The project would retain nearly the entire historic school.

A new stairway would be constructed to connect the public sidewalk to the much higher historic school entrance. A second entrance at sidewalk grade would become the main entrance.

Evaluation

The proposed use is a compatible one, as reinstituting a building's original use is more likely to be sympathetic and require fewer adverse alterations to a property. Especially with the proposed subdivision, the parcel would be a little larger (and a little deeper on average) than the parcel on the 1200 block of W Street recently considered for another charter school. And here, the presence of the historic school provides a scheme and a compelling purpose to divide the whole into pavilions.

The idea of the school being flanked by large wings is compatible with the characteristics of the site and with the way many historic schools have been expanded in Washington. A fundamental question is whether the wings will overwhelm the historic building. Initially submitted drawings

have here been improved upon with some setback of the wings and the introduction of what look like glassy hyphens, as well as revised window openings more in scale with those of the old building.

The whole still appears a bit overwhelming as it stretches most of the block, opposite modestly sized homes on a lower grade. Some of this can be addressed by adjustments to the building's footprint. For instance, the west wing looms over the former convent, and its relationship would be improved by having some kind of side yard (which would allow access to and around all sides of the building). Some adjustment there might make the west wing more similar in size to the east. Also, the extent and shape of the rear yard set aside for outdoor recreation makes for pretty meager play space.

Not trying to portray rooftop mechanical enclosures at this initial conceptual stage perhaps allows a false sense of the additions' real or perceived heights relative to the central block and the surrounding buildings.

The provision of parking is fairly extensive. It would be better if the educational functions could utilize some of that volume. Or the building might step more, taking advantage of the changing topography across the site. Putting the loading off the narrow alley at rear seems questionable, but there are no obviously better locations for any of the vehicular entrances—unless the breadth of the building were reduced, and they were placed on driveways along the ends of the wings.

The other unfortunate aspect of the parking is that it requires *two* entrances because of the difficulty of connecting the garages below or behind the historic school.

Even without excavating under or around the gym for parking, there will have to be a considerable amount of underpinning of the school. We do not have detailed demolition drawings, but the historic building as a whole would be retained. The side wings would be gutted, however, because they would become the new circulation nodes.

Setting the main entrance below the main level is unfortunate, but probably unavoidable for accessibility reasons. At least it takes advantage of the present lower grade on the west end of the site. But there is an inherent tension between providing a “natural” and commodious entrance and retaining the sense of the natural topography.

The retaining wall at the sidewalk requires reconstruction. The new stairs to the original main entrance should be revised so as not to read like a large stoop with freestanding rail, but rather be of masonry walls built into the hill, not dissimilar to the original (Sheet 4). Given the shallow front yard, however, the stair would have to be very carefully worked out to retain sufficient space between it and the front of the building.

To help mitigate any adverse effects, the paint should be stripped from the school's façade to restore it to its early appearance.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Board support the general outlines of the project but request revisions along the lines suggested above, recognizing that much greater detail (including rear elevations) will be necessary before the concept could be approved.