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

Landmark/District: **Logan Elementary/Capitol Hill Montessori School Modernization**
Capitol Hill Historic District () Agenda
Address: **215 G Street, NE** (X) Consent Calendar
Meeting Date: **September 26, 2019** (X) New Construction
H.P.A. Numbers: **19-271** (X) Alteration
() Demolition

District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS), along with R. McGhee & Associates and Studio MB Architects are seeking final concept approval for modernization of the historic Logan Elementary/Capitol Hill Montessori School. The Board approved the massing on May 23, 2019 and most design details on July 25, 2019, but requested additional review of the cladding materials, landscape treatments, fencing and a few other relatively minor details. The concept has been revised according to comments proffered during the last hearing. This report addresses only the issues that remain unresolved.

Logan Elementary School / Capitol Hill Montessori School

Logan School was designed by the Office of the Municipal Architect under the direction of Nathan C. Wyeth. The first wing was constructed on the western half of the site in 1936. All other sections were constructed in 1949. Logan Elementary/Capitol Hill Montessori School is located within and contributes to the significance of the Capitol Hill Historic District.

Proposal

Dark gray bricks were previously proposed for the bases of the large western and two smaller southern additions, but the materials palette has been revised to a three-color blend featuring approximately 65-80% reddish hues and 20-35% dark maroon/gray colors. A reddish mortar is also proposed. The remaining elements of the new additions are still proposed to be clad in synthetic wood known as “Knotwood” and synthetic “Tactl” panels that resemble stone.

With regard to landscaping, an earlier rendering depicted tall trees in the central courtyard with limbs extending well above the eaves of the historic school, but the concept has been revised to indicate trees that are not much taller than the first-floor windows.

Standard black, steel picket fences are specified for most of the site, but a secondary picket fence composed of matching “Knotwood” cladding is also proposed along approximately half of the school’s western boundary. The primary purpose of this fence is to conceal the trash/recycling storage area that will be installed due south of the new building. Unwanted views will be obscured by panels which provide varying degrees of porosity depending upon the width of individual pickets and the space between them, the least porous of which will be situated immediately in front of the trash/recycling storage area.

Finally, the large bay on G Street which read strongly as an entrance despite not being one, has been revised so that it no longer extends to the ground plane, but now cantilevers out as a projecting bay.

Evaluation

The Historic Preservation Office's primary concern about the previously proposed materials palette was that it was too distinct from the historic school and did not establish a visual connection between old and new. However, the currently proposed three-color blend of mostly reddish hues and the use of reddish mortar will provide a common vocabulary that ties the overall composition together. Even though the proposed reddish hues do not match Logan's exactly, a careful examination reveals that the historic school is also composed of a blend of brick colors, including some that are relatively dark. This variation in reddish hues will create a visual harmony while maintaining a clear distinction between the historic buildings and their new additions.

Refinements to the three-color blend of bricks and the color and texture of the "Knotwood" and "Tactl" panels are still being made, but mock-ups suggest that the final selections will bolster rather than weaken these important visual connections.

Similarly, other refinements will also improve the overall compatibility of the project, including more appropriately sized trees in the historic central courtyard and a redesigned projecting bay on the northern elevation that no longer reads as an entrance. While the proposed "Knotwood" fence will be unique, the fact that it will be set back several feet from the property line and composed of the some of the same materials that clad the building will ensure that it blends well into its context. It will also serve an important purpose in obscuring views to the trash storage area.

Unfortunately, tiles within the interior main hallways tested positive for lead and must be removed. Interiors are not subject to HRPB review, but the removal of historic fabric may still constitute an "adverse effect" in accordance with Section 9b of the DC Historic Landmark and Historic District Protection Act. HPO will continue to work with DCPS to minimize and/or mitigate the adverse effect as much as possible. At a minimum, the original double-loaded corridor walls will be rebuilt in their original locations.

Archaeological identification and evaluation investigations are also ongoing. The bulk of the Phase I testing was completed the week of September 3, 2019 except for one area that is currently inaccessible to the archaeologists. That work will occur later in the preconstruction stage of the project after which HPO will determine if eligibility investigations are merited for any identified resources.

Recommendation

HPO recommends that the Board:

- 1. Find the remaining aspects of the proposed concept compatible with the historic school and the surrounding historic district; and*
- 2. Delegate final review of approval of the materials palette to HPO.*

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