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

Landmark/District:	Cardozo High School Modernization	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agenda
Address:	1200 Clifton Street, NW	<input type="checkbox"/> Consent Calendar
Meeting Date:	April 28, 2011	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Alteration
H.P.A. Number:	11-240	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Addition
Staff Reviewer:	Andrew Lewis	<input type="checkbox"/> Demolition
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Conceptual Design

The District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) and the Office of Public Education Facilities Modernization (OPEFM) are proposing to make a number of improvements to Cardozo High School in order to accomplish a variety of important modernization goals. The construction of a new, regulation-sized gymnasium on the western side of the school is the most significant proposed alteration, but the scope of work also includes restoring the exterior, replacing the non-original windows, addressing ADA requirements, improving security and circulation, enclosing courtyards, rearranging the layout of certain functions and implementing a variety of similar improvements. Although the program specifications do not require a natatorium, an optional proposal evaluates the feasibility of constructing such a facility on the eastern lawn.

The Cardozo High School designation does not landmark interiors, but the proposed interior alterations are subject to review by the State Historic Preservation Officer pursuant to Section 9(b) of the Historic Landmark and Historic District Protection Act and are, therefore, evaluated in this report. No substantial demolition is required to achieve any of the modernization goals.

Cardozo High School

Francis L. Cardozo High School, originally known as Central High School, was designed by William B. Ittner, a prominent architect who was nationally recognized during his lifetime as one of the most influential architects in school design. The building, which has been described as an example of the Elizabethan, Late Gothic Revival and Collegiate Gothic Styles, was constructed in 1914-16 on a terraced site that provides extraordinary views of Washington DC and the Potomac River Valley.

Constructed of red brick, the building features a variety of decorative limestone trim and a central, 50' x 80' decorative frieze panel above the primary school entrance which incorporates likenesses of William Ittner, DC Municipal Architect Snowden Ashford, Principal Emory Wilson and other notable figures from the turn of the century. A few colorful and decorative Moravian tiles depicting various trade professions are also incorporated into the lower eastern and western façades of the school.

The four-story + basement and sub-basement school was designed in an enclosed “E” shape with a large, 2000-seat auditorium forming the center of the complex. Open courtyards flank the auditorium and provide light and air to the adjacent classrooms, hallways and ground-floor cafeteria. The choral room and media facilities are located in the front portion of the central block while a swimming pool and boys and girls gymnasiums are stacked on separate floors in the rear. Shops for technical training, an armory, greenhouses and a rifle range are located on either side of these facilities. Administrative space and classrooms round out most of the remaining space on either side of the auditorium. Mechanical functions are contained within the basement and sub-basement areas.

It should be noted that Cardozo was originally intended to provide separate facilities for male and female students. As a result, the building was designed with stairwells located at opposite ends of the building and with limited corridors to connect the two halves of the building.

The nine-acre designed landscape upon which the school is situated is described in the National Register of Historic Places nomination as being “of exceptional distinction.” Bordered by Clifton Street on the north, Florida Avenue on the south, 11th Street on the east and 13th Street on the west, the landscape features balustraded terraces, ornate staircases and brick retaining walls that step down to a granite stadium and athletic field at the bottom of the hill. Tennis courts were located on the central western terrace while decorative stairways on the eastern lawn follow the topography and step down to 11th Street. As mentioned before, the site also provides some of the most impressive views in the city.

When completed, Central High School represented the best and most progressive approaches to academic architecture, incorporating spaces specifically designed to educate students in the fields of science, business, vocational subjects, the fine arts, physical education and a of other topics. In short, Central High School served as the model to which other DC schools aspired.

In the 1950s, Central High School was integrated and renamed in honor of Dr. Francis L. Cardozo, a prominent, late nineteenth century African-American educator and principal of several DC public schools. Another notable individual who is also associated with the school by virtue of having graduated there is J. Edgar Hoover, former Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Cardozo High School was designated a DC Landmark on August 28, 1973 and listed in the National Register of Historic Places on April 25, 1995. Its period of significance extends from 1914 to 1950.

Existing Conditions

Cardozo High School is remarkably intact and still appears much as it did when it was constructed nearly one hundred years ago. The most significant alterations to the building include replacement windows and doors, the installation of security screens and window air conditioning units, the conversion of the tennis courts into a parking lot and the renovated football field which includes a “press box” above the bleachers. Signs of deterioration are also evident in the form of missing balusters and downspouts, spalling and cracked stone,

rusted lintels and other, normally anticipated signs of deferred maintenance. Although the interior has been somewhat altered over time and also shows signs of normal wear and tear, most of the historic interior fabric remains intact. In short, Cardozo High School retains a significant amount of integrity.

Proposed Development and Alterations

As indicated, the construction of a new gymnasium is the most significant development proposed in the modernization plans. The new structure is necessary because the existing gymnasiums do not meet current standards for regulation basketball courts or spectator seating. As a result, the Cardozo High School basketball teams have been unable to play “home games” since the sporting events were relocated to another venue in the 1950s. The proposed gymnasium addition will remedy this situation by providing approximately 42,000 square feet of playing space, 1,400 seats, locker facilities, a weight room and facilities for related functions. The roof of the structure will be utilized to provide the required 86 parking spaces.

The exterior of the school will be rehabilitated through a combination of general cleaning, patching, minor structural repairs, in-kind replacement of missing or extremely deteriorated features (e.g. missing balustrades), refurbishing skylights and replacing the existing, non-historic windows.

In order to meet ADA requirements, the main entry plaza will be reconfigured to provide an accessible ramp on the west. The equivalent areaway on the eastern side of the plaza will be modified to provide an area for securing bicycles.

Just beyond the entry plaza, the historically open portico will be enclosed with a new steel entry system that features glass doors with sidelights and transoms. This alteration is necessary to provide much needed additional space for security screening equipment and for students to queue. The adjacent stair hall area will be restored, but will also be modified to provide space for a new ADA lift.

One of the most significant interior modifications proposed in the scope of work is the provision of a new stairwell directly beyond, and on axis with, the entry lobby. As noted earlier, the historically separate male and female facilities required stairways to be located at extreme opposite ends of the building. This condition currently requires students to walk considerable distances to access different floors and results in a generally confusing layout. The new stair will address these issues by providing a new, centrally located means of vertical circulation. Horizontal circulation will also be improved by connecting the traditionally separate halves of the building with new corridors on the southern ends on the upper floors.

Other notable interior modifications include installing skylights over the courtyards and additional glazing in select hallway areas. These modifications will provide additional dining/multi-use space and allow administrative staff to observe students in the hallways. New auditorium seating will be provided and arranged in a manner that optimizes views to the stage and the band room and choral room will be relocated to the original boy's gym to reduce

audible distractions. The former band room will be converted into a new “large group instruction room” for student and community use.

Although the optional new natatorium is not included in the program requirements, the plans propose that it be constructed on the eastern lawn if a decision is made to incorporate the facility into the modernization project. If not, the existing pool area will be modified and improved to the extent feasible.

Evaluation

The new gymnasium presents one of the most difficult architectural challenges of the school modernization project. Adapting the historic boys and girls gymnasias was not an option since these facilities are located on separate floors and their proximity to the central block significantly limits the possibilities for expansion. A number of sites were evaluated as possible locations for the new addition but the topography of the western lawn was the obvious choice because it allows the new structure to be constructed partially underground, thus lessening its visual impact.

When viewed from the north (i.e. the “front” of the school), the new gymnasium will be minimally visible. But when viewed from the south, the primary façade of the new facility will be clearly distinguishable as an important point of entry. It will also reflect and compliment the composition and architectural detailing of the main school entry.

Although raising the existing parking to the same elevation as Clifton Street will cause the structure to appear more prominent in the immediate foreground, the spectacular distant views of the city beyond will remain completely unobstructed.

Alterations to the entry plaza will result in the loss, and/or relocation of some minimal historic fabric, most notably a decorative limestone balustrade. However, an examination of potential alternative solutions suggests that the current proposal is the most appropriate way to balance historic preservation concerns with the necessary requirements of the ADA.

Enclosing the open portico will represent a noticeable alteration to the primary façade of Cardozo High School, but the proposed new glass and steel entry system is in keeping with the original doors, sidelights and transoms that once existed inside the open arched entry portal.

The new central stair will also be a notable alteration to the historic school but the new feature will appear as a clearly modern element and its proposed location, which spans the auditorium and the adjacent hallway spaces, will minimize the degree to which it alters the historic plan of the school. Restoration of the historic, third floor skylight will also mitigate the change to historic fabric by allowing natural light to flood the new stair.

The alterations resulting from the other notable interior modifications will also be appropriate since the skylights over the courtyards will not be visible from the exterior and the glazing proposed for the hallways is limited to specific areas. The auditorium seating that is to be

replaced is not historic and the modifications to relocate and repurpose the band room, choral room and large group instruction room are relatively minor and most likely reversible.

Given the steeply sloping topography of the eastern lawn, constructing the optional natatorium on this location would likely disrupt the symmetrically balanced design of Cardozo's primary façade, obscure distant views and result in the loss of historically landscaped green space. For these reasons, it would be preferable, from a purely historic preservation standpoint, to omit this optional proposal from the modernization plans. If the natatorium is ultimately determined necessary, it should be noted that a more appropriate location for the facility has not been identified.

In summary, the modernization of Cardozo High School will result in some notable alterations to the historic structure, but the proposed modifications are essential to allow the school to meet current educational requirements. Moreover, the proposed alterations are compatible with, and respectful of, this significant historic school building to the extent feasible. Any future revisions to the conceptual designs are likely to consist of minor refinements at most.

Recommendation

Staff recommends that the Board approve of the conceptual design for the Cardozo High School gymnasium addition and modernization project and delegate the remaining design and permit review to staff. If the optional natatorium is ultimately proposed, further analysis should be carried out and more detailed plans for the facility should be reviewed by the Board.