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

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| Landmark/District: | Cleveland Park Historic District | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agenda |
| Address: | 3301 Lowell Street, NW | <input type="checkbox"/> Consent Calendar |
| Meeting Date: | May 23, 2019 | <input type="checkbox"/> New Construction |
| H.P.A. Numbers: | 19-325 (concept), 19-328 (demolition permit) | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Alteration |
| | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Demolition |

District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) seeks conceptual design review for a project at the John Eaton Elementary School involving rehabilitation, demolition of the building's 1931 wing, construction of a new central wing to house classrooms, a gymnasium and library, and site alterations. Plans have been prepared by Cox Graae + Spack Architects. A demolition permit has also been submitted for the removal of the 1931 wing.

On October 4, 2018, DCPS gave an informational presentation to the Board regarding its feasibility study for modernization of the school. Although no formal decision was made, the Board acknowledged the merits of "Option B" which proposed razing the 1931 central wing and constructing a new addition in its place. Testimony from representatives of the community also supported this approach. Since that time, DCPS has further evaluated the range of alternatives, concluded that razing the 1931 wing is the most appropriate course of action, and is proceeding with a concept based on the wing's removal. The applicants have requested a hearing before the Mayor's Agent, scheduled for June 25, to argue that the project is necessary in the public interest to achieve a project of special merit and that demolition is consistent with the purposes of the preservation act.

Property History and Description

John Eaton Elementary School consists of three buildings constructed in 1910, 1923 and 1931. Appleton P. Clark designed the earliest and most ornate building, while Arthur B. Heaton and Albert L. Harris designed the later additions respectively. The most notable unifying aspects of the three buildings include red brick walls with contrasting beige brick window surrounds, belt courses and friezes. While civic in character, these buildings share a common sense of scale, detailing and texture that relates to the scale of the surrounding residential neighborhood. All three buildings were constructed within the Cleveland Park Historic District's 1880-1941 Period of Significance and are contributing to the district. A central, Brutalist-styled concrete addition that was constructed between the two earliest buildings in 1981 shares none of the unifying characteristics of the other three buildings, was built well beyond the district's period of significance, and is non-contributing.

Proposal

DCPS and Cox Graae + Spack Architects have worked with the Historic Preservation Office (HPO) and Commission of Fine Arts over the last several months to develop and evaluate the range of alternatives, including some that would preserve all, or significant portions of the 1931 wing. Due to issues relating to limited lot size, disparate floor levels, access to natural light,

inefficient circulation, the cost of underpinning and below-grade construction, the requirement to respond to the neighborhood context, and a variety of related concerns, the supplemental evaluation of alternatives ultimately reached the same conclusion as the earlier feasibility study – that replacing the 1931 and 1981 wings with a new addition is the most effective way to meet program goals and appropriately respond to the Cleveland Park Historic District.

The concept that has been developed calls for replacing the 1931 and 1981 wings with a three-story addition in a contemporary vocabulary consisting of a terra cotta rain screen, dark brick, glass curtain wall, and vertical slate siding. The lower level of the new central wing will house a partially-submerged gymnasium and cafeteria while classroom, administration, library and related functions will be accommodated on the upper levels. The rehabilitated historic buildings will also provide additional classroom space. Circulation among all three buildings will occur along efficient east-west/north-south spines that are intuitively placed and designed to fully address ADA requirements. The surrounding grounds will be renovated for upgraded athletic fields, ball courts and playgrounds, with a new stone retaining wall along Macomb Street and 33rd Place and loading access remaining in the current location off 34th Street.

Evaluation

While resulting in demolition as defined in the preservation regulations,¹ HPO concurs with the findings of the feasibility study and subsequent evaluation by the project team that removal of the 1931 wing is the most effective way to achieve the project’s programmatic needs and to achieve compatibility with the Cleveland Park Historic District. The alternative plans that retained the 1931 wing resulted in new wings that were incompatible in height and mass with the surrounding district, destroyed the building’s balanced symmetrical composition, and obscured large portions of the historic building from public view.

Many aspects of the current concept are well-designed and noteworthy. The proposal involves rehabilitating the two earliest buildings with the new building between them. Though wider and taller than the 1931 multi-purpose wing, the new construction will essentially occupy the same footprint and airspace, thus perpetuating the historical development pattern and building composition of the site. Materials have been selected in an attempt to visually integrate the exterior of the new building into the historic school complex, break down its façades, and diminish its perceived size. Most areas of the new building will be clad in a terra cotta rainscreen of a reddish hue compatible with the school’s historic red brick but a darker, slate rainscreen will also be used to make some walls appear to recede. Cast stone window frames will echo the prominent historic window frames of beige brick. These treatments are most successful on the east and west side elevations where they are seen adjacent to the 1910 and 1923 buildings; without being replicative, the compositions exhibit a similar sense of balance, order and cadence in their rhythm of openings.

By contrast, the front (south) and rear (north) elevations are less successful in their composition and scale. On the front elevation, suggestions for further study include reducing the scale of the overly large “window” so that it better relates to the size of the other windows; resolving the

¹ DCMR 10-C, Chapter 3, Section 305.1: Work considered demolition under the Act shall include, but is not limited to, any of the following, as determined by the Mayor’s Agent: (d) The removal or destruction of all or substantially all of an entire wing or appendage of the building, such as a rear ell, unless the wing lacks physical or historic integrity, or is not a character-defining feature;

contrasting simplicity of the relatively small, punched windows and largely blank elevation on the other side of the façade; revising the excessive asymmetry of the elevation so that it better relates to its highly symmetrical context; and modifying the entrance so that its location is more pronounced and celebrated rather than hidden beneath an overhanging projection. The close proximity of the addition to the flanking historic wings on this elevation makes the disparity in scale between the addition's terra cotta panels and single-light windows and the historic building's brick and multi-paned windows more pronounced than on the side elevations. Some further study and refinement of the scale of these elements should also be carried out.

On the rear elevation, the fractured composition of rainscreen panels and contrasting roof forms could benefit from a more unified approach that visually ties this elevation in with the remainder of the complex. Establishing a consistent cornice line and similarly pitched roofs, limiting the use of cast stone to window surrounds or other trim details, and uniting the two side elevations should be studied.

The roofs also warrant some additional design attention. Specifically, the newly proposed skylight on the 1923 building should be flush rather than angled since historic drawings proposed a ventilator similar to one on the 1910 building but there is no evidence to suggest it was ever constructed. The contemporary design of the proposed skylight is too visible and contrasting with the otherwise unaltered building. Similarly, the visibility of the mechanical equipment on the roof of the new building should be minimized to the greatest extent possible.

Although the concept proposes to raze the 1931 addition, it includes some preservation benefits that help offset the loss of the historic wing. The list of restoration work is still being negotiated but, at present, includes items such as recreating the marquee canopy that originally covered the 1910 building's southern entrance; reopening exterior door openings that have been bricked-in; installing replacement doors based upon historic drawings; restoring the highly decorative 1910 roof ventilator; retaining the decorative brick chimney in the 1923 building; incorporating the cast stone school sign from the original connector into a seat wall in the entry plaza; and salvaging the 1931 cupola for future use either on-site or in another, appropriate location.

Eaton School's interiors are not designated but are subject to HPO review as part of this DC Government project. Proposals to significantly alter one original stair in each of the historic buildings (i.e. infill one for program space and convert another to ADA ramps) underscore the need to provide preservation benefits on the interior as well. At present, these benefits include restoration of historic trim and other details in the south stair vestibule as well as restoration of historic floors (i.e. terrazzo with marble inlay), doors, transoms and other historic conditions in the central halls (i.e. removal of 1980s ceiling and walls alterations).

With regard to archaeology, the project site has prehistoric and historical archaeological potential. DGS contracted with Stantec to conduct a Ph IA Archaeological Assessment survey including geoarchaeological consultation and the work plan for the investigations was approved on March 26, 2019. The results of the study will determine if Phase IB Identification survey is warranted.

Recommendation

HPO recommends that the Board:

1. *Acknowledge that alternatives to preserve the 1931 wing have been thoroughly evaluated;*

2. *Find the proposed demolition of the 1931 wing inconsistent with the purposes of the DC Historic Landmark and Historic District Protection Act, and recommend that the case proceed to the Mayor's Agent for review;*
3. *Find that many aspects of the proposed concept, including the overall height, footprint, massing and the general design direction are appropriate for the historic school and surrounding historic district; and*
4. *If the Mayor's Agent determines that the project is found to constitute a project of special merit and/or consistent with the Act, request that the Mayor's Agent direct the applicants to return to the Board for further design review to ensure an appropriate level of compatibility for the new construction and to finalize the scope of preservation and restoration work proposed to offset the loss of historic fabric.*

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