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

Landmark/District:	Cleveland Park Historic District	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agenda
Address:	3301 Lowell Street, NW	<input type="checkbox"/> Consent Calendar
Meeting Date:	July 25, 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 approval of revised plans for modernization of the John Eaton Elementary School including rehabilitation, demolition of the building's 1931 addition, construction of a new central wing to house classrooms, a gymnasium and library, and site alterations. Plans have been revised by Cox Graae + Spack Architects and a demolition permit has been submitted for the removal of the 1931 wing.

On May 23, 2019, the Board endorsed many aspects of the initial concept but determined demolition of the 1931 wing inconsistent the Act and referred the matter to the Mayor's Agent. The Board requested further design review of the concept to ensure greater compatibility with the historic school and surrounding historic district if the Mayor's Agent found demolition consistent with the Act or determined the project to be one of special merit. The Mayor's Agent hearing occurred on July 12, 2019. This staff report assumes the Mayor's Agent will determine that modernization of John Eaton Elementary School is a project of special merit.

Revised Proposal

Concept plans have been revised in several ways to respond to comments from the Board and the Historic Preservation Office (HPO). For example, the design of the central Lowell Street (south) pavilion has been greatly simplified so it reads more as a connector than a solid object. The previously proposed terracotta rainscreen façade with punched windows has been replaced almost entirely with glazing that echoes the composition of the adjacent historic windows by being subdivided into three bays and framed with light-colored masonry. Color has also been introduced to reinforce the point of entry.

On the north, a simplified flat roof and a terracotta façade that consistently extends to the eaves have replaced the earlier complicated pitched roof forms and abstract cladding. These revisions, along with the introduction of a dark brick base, simplified fenestration, and a brick-like cladding module allow the new addition to read as a complimentary "third pavilion" which balances well with the two historic ones and, to some degree, recalls the historical development pattern evidenced in the 1931 wing. The notion of the third pavilion is further reinforced by glazed connectors which provide a visual separation between the new and historic portions of the school.

Site improvements have also been simplified to better harmonize with their historic surroundings. The canted elements of the front entry plaza have been shifted so they are parallel with or perpendicular to the school. This includes knee walls, entry stairs, and the historic limestone signage panel that was salvaged and reused when the 1980s addition was constructed. As a result,

the historic sign will be more visible, and the entry stairs will lead visitors more directly to the primary entrance.

The northern playfields remain much the same as before but generally simplified by removing the large vertical climbing structure and replacing the previously proposed exterior bleachers with a canopy that will provide shading to the outdoor classroom on the terrace below. Although the canopy will be taller than the bleachers, it will read as a freestanding element that is appropriate for its setting.

Evaluation

Overall, the revised concept represents a significant improvement over the previous design. The refinements to, and general simplification of the northern and southern pavilions and landscape plans respond well to their historic context and allow the new interventions to read as expressions of their own time while simultaneously complimenting and respecting the buildings that were constructed before them. However, HPO does have some concerns with the revised scheme.

As currently proposed, the lower masonry frame of the Lowell Street elevation “dips” to reflect an interior reading nook from the 1980s addition that DCPS proposes to recreate in the new library. HPO has no objection to incorporating the favored nook but considers an exterior expression of the feature unnecessary and inappropriate because it is at odds with the adjacent horizontal belt courses and the other orthogonal features of the historic school buildings. Although the intent was to introduce a “playful” aspect into the elementary school context, the angle draws undue attention and works counter to the Board’s earlier recommendation to simplify the architecture. The option which incorporates but obscures the nook’s exterior expression (i.e. “ALT 02”) is consistent with the simplification that has occurred on the other façades is more compatible with the historic context, and is the recommended solution.

Similarly, the revised plans suggest that some of the interior stairs, structural elements and/or bracing on the south and east elevations may be painted in bright colors to reinforce the sense of playfulness. HPO recommends that these elements be more muted in color, at least on the surfaces that face towards the exterior, because the contrasting angles and prominent colors may detract from the otherwise simplified façades.

The historic preservation assessment and recommendations report which outlines the measures proposed to offset the loss of the 1931 wing has been updated but additional consultation on the appropriate treatments will be required as detailed plans are developed and more information about the existence and condition of historic fabric becomes available. Results from the Phase IA archaeological assessment are not yet available but the results of that effort will determine if additional investigations warranted.

Recommendation

HPO recommends that the Board approve the revised concept, subject to any Board comments and approval of the demolition by the Mayor’s Agent, and delegate remaining design review and finalization of the scope of preservation and restoration work to HPO.

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