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

Landmark/District:	Spingarn School (Pending Landmark)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agenda
Address:	801 26th Street, NE	<input type="checkbox"/> Consent
Meeting Date:	November 1, 2012	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Concept
Case Number:	13-004	<input type="checkbox"/> Alteration
Staff Reviewer:	Andrew Lewis	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> New Construction
		<input type="checkbox"/> Demolition
		<input type="checkbox"/> Subdivision

The District of Columbia Department of Transportation (DDOT) proposes to construct a new streetcar maintenance facility and training center on the campus of Joel Elias Spingarn High School, located at 801 26th Street, NE. DDOT has requested an early concept review of the car barn facility since the landmark application that has been filed for Spingarn High School is scheduled to be reviewed at the November 29th HPRB meeting.

Property Description

Spingarn High School was constructed in 1951-1952 to relieve overcrowding and was the first new senior high school built for African American students in the school district in thirty-six years. Based upon a design developed by municipal architect Nathan C. Wyeth, Spingarn is also the last post-war school in the District of Columbia to be constructed in the Colonial Revival Style. This style was selected so that Spingarn would relate to the three 1930's schools that are located immediately to the north along 26th Street; Charles Young Elementary School, Seth L. Phelps Vocational School, and Hugh M. Browne Junior High School.

A notable result of Spingarn's location and design was the enhancement of the schools' picturesque, campus-like setting that is composed of a related architectural vocabulary and the extensive open spaces that surround all of the buildings. This campus-like setting is significantly augmented by Langston Golf Course's open green spaces on the east side of 26th Street.

Proposal

The re-introduction of streetcars into the District of Columbia is a top priority for the Mayor and DDOT. Currently, the first segments of the "One City Line" (from H Street and Benning Road to Union Station), and the "Anacostia Line" (from Bolling Air Force Base to Anacostia) are in the project planning and development stages. Service on the One City Line is scheduled to begin in 2013.

DDOT began evaluating sites for a streetcar maintenance and storage facility as early as 2010. Nine alternative sites were considered, but the Spingarn site was ultimately selected due to its location, cost of construction, District ownership and other related factors. An added benefit of the Spingarn site was that the transportation-focused vocational training program proposed for incorporation into the new car barn facility would work well given its adjacency to the existing educational facilities. Additional information regarding the site analysis and the opportunities that have been provided for the public to comment to date is included in DDOT's supporting materials.

Evaluation

Despite having advantages from a location, cost, and ownership perspective, the Spingarn site does raise issues from a historic preservation point of view. In fact, when DDOT initiated consultation with the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) about the proposal in accordance with Section 9(b) of DC Historic Landmark and Historic District Protection Act, DDOT and the SHPO agreed that the construction of a car barn on the Spingarn site would have an "adverse effect" on the National Register of Historic Places/DC Inventory of Historic Sites-eligible schools because the streetcar facility would interrupt some views to the historically significant buildings and alter their campus-like setting.

In response, DDOT developed additional information to summarize the efforts it had undertaken to avoid the adverse effects by locating the car barn on alternative sites and why those sites were determined infeasible. DDOT then consulted further with SHPO and the Commission of Fine Arts to evaluate a variety of "test fit" scenarios to identify the best way to position the car barn on the Spingarn site so that it would minimize the degree to which the new facility would block views and alter the setting.

It should be noted that DDOT also carried out archaeological investigations and concluded, to the SHPO's satisfaction, that there is no potential to encounter any archaeologically significant resources on the site. Additionally, DDOT and SHPO have completed a draft Memorandum of Agreement which identifies the measures DDOT will implement to mitigate the adverse effects of the project, including the preparation of a Determination of Eligibility Form to document and evaluate the historical significance of all of the schools on the campus and promote appreciation of their historic value. Other measures include the development of streetcar-related interpretive materials, potentially restoring historic streetcars for reuse, a commitment to investigate alternative methods of propulsion that do not rely on overhead wires, and on-going consultation and design review to avoid future, streetcar-related adverse effects.

Although the northwest corner of the Spingarn site was originally favored as the location most likely to minimize the car barn's overall visual impact, it was later agreed that the corner of Benning Road and 26th Street was preferable since it would allow the new facility to better conceal the necessary streetcar tracks and overhead wires, and because it would more closely relate to the orientation of the other buildings on campus, thus providing opportunities to design a more dignified, civic-minded building rather than an industrial structure that was being hidden from view.

The resulting concept design, and its subtle variations, consists of a large, brick-faced streetcar maintenance facility oriented on the same alignment as the rest of the campus buildings and projecting far enough forward to balance the easternmost projection of Brown Junior High School to the north. The street-facing façade of this component of the car barn will be articulated with large louvered openings, clerestories or other elements that will establish a visual connection to the regular fenestration of the Spingarn and other schools to the north. Solar panels will be incorporated onto the roof of the facility to maximize its energy efficiency.

To the south of the maintenance facility, offices, training facilities, public meeting spaces and related functions will be housed in a lower, sweeping arm of the building that curves to respond to the alignment of Benning Road and establishes a more pedestrian scaled public entrance at the prominent corner of 26th and Benning Road. Although the specific materials that will be used to complete this portion of the car barn have yet to be identified, they are likely to consist of light colored, solid cladding materials and curtain walls of translucent glass.

Through a combination of massing and orientation, the currently proposed concept design establishes a logical and complimentary relationship to the arrangement and hierarchy of buildings on the campus and to their open setting. The proposed red brick of the maintenance facility contrasted with the light colored solid materials and translucent glass of the office portion of the car barn also relate directly to the schools' predominant red brick and limestone color palette. In short, the concept as currently proposed appears to be generally compatible with its historic context. However, some further refinement of the building design and site features will likely be necessary to better relate the new facility to the historic schools and other historic properties in the surrounding area, including the landmarked Langston Terrace Dwellings which are located just to the west.

Recommendation

The staff recommends that the Board:

- *find the concept design for the car barn on the Spingarn site, as developed to date, to be consistent with the purposes of the preservation act, subject to further design development, material selection, and refinements; and*
- *delegate final design development and approval to staff, subject to comments made by the Board.*