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

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Property Address:	<b>3100 Macomb Street, NW</b>	<b>X</b>	Agenda
Landmark:	<b>Tregaron (the Causeway)</b>		Consent Calendar
		<b>X</b>	Concept Review
Meeting Date:	<b>December 15, 2016</b>	<b>X</b>	Alteration
H.P.A. Number:	<b>16-053</b>	<b>X</b>	New Construction
Staff Reviewer:	<b>Steve Callcott</b>		Demolition
			Subdivision

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The Washington International School (WIS) seeks conceptual design review for construction of a two-story science and technology classroom building on its Tregaron campus in Cleveland Park. The project would also result in alterations to two non-contributing buildings (the gym and the library) and involve site and landscape work. The architectural plans have been prepared by Ziger/Snead Architects and the landscape plans by Michael Vergason Landscape Architects.

**Property History and Description**

Tregaron is a 21 acre country estate built in 1912 by Ohio financier James Parmelee. The mansion, dependency buildings and grounds were designed by Charles Adams Platt, the country's premier architect of country houses. The formal and woodland gardens were designed and implemented over a two decade period by Ellen Biddle Shipman, one of the foremost landscape architects of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century who often worked in partnership with Platt.

Platt's plan was developed to respect the site's topography and mature trees, with minimal disturbance to grades and taking advantage of existing views. The plan maintained a sense of privacy to the estate, with only selective removal of trees to enhance the views and to reinforce the distinction between open pastures and dense woodlands. The placement of the mansion and dependencies was based on Beaux-Arts planning and design principles, sited at the top of the hill and with buildings aligned in axial relationships to each other. The symmetry, balance and axes exemplified in the English Georgian Revival mansion control the relationship between the house and its surrounding grounds, including the reciprocal vistas, the formal and informal gardens, and the axis along which the greenhouse, gardener's cottage, carriage house and other buildings are organized.

Both Platt and Shipman's work reinforced that gardens and landscape features closer to the house should be more formal in character and become increasingly informal and naturalistic farther from the house. The planting plans developed by Shipman enhanced the naturalistic character with the understory below the tree canopy planted with flowering trees, shrubs, ground covers and flowering bulbs. Shipman's woodland work at Tregaron has come to be understood as a notable example of a "wild garden," a seemingly natural but actually carefully enhanced composition of naturalistic plantings and man-made features balanced between open meadows and shaded woodlands.

The estate was sold to diplomat Joseph Davies and his wife Marjorie Merriweather Post in 1941. The Davies' most significant contribution to the property was the construction of the dacha, a

Russian folk cottage obtained when Davies served as ambassador to the Soviet Union, regrettably placed in the center of Shipman's formal walled garden.

The property was designated as a DC landmark in 1979 and included within the boundaries of the Cleveland Park Historic District as a contributing property in 1987. In 1980, the site was purchased jointly by the Tregaron Limited Partnership (TLP) and WIS, and divided into two lots. The school, which had leased the buildings on the site since 1972, purchased approximately 6 acres, with an entrance off Macomb Street. The school's property includes the hilltop and all of the landmark's historic structures -- the mansion, stable, greenhouse, gardener's cottage, and dacha. TLP retained ownership of the surrounding fields and woodland with the goal of developing it for residences but repeated efforts to that end were met with strong resistance by the community, led by the non-profit Friends of Tregaron (FOT), for the plans' failure to respect the character of the site.

After years of wrangling over development proposals, a legal agreement was reached in 2006 between TLP, WIS and FOT. The agreement provided for the creation of a non-profit Tregaron Conservancy, with a board comprised of community and WIS representatives. TLP transferred approximately 10 acres of the woodlands to the Conservancy in order for it to be restored according to the vision established by Platt and Shipman for public enjoyment. Three acres were transferred to WIS, largely on the south side of the house to allow expansion of an athletic field but which otherwise would remain open space. TLP was given approval to build two houses along Macomb Street (since completed), a single house on the open portion of Klinge (not yet constructed), and several houses on the closed portion of Klinge Road (which were abandoned when the city permanently closed the street to traffic; this land has since been donated to the Conservancy).

### **Cultural Landscape Report**

A cornerstone of the 2006 agreement was a cultural landscape report, prepared by Heritage Landscapes, that was developed as a requirement established by the HPRB as a condition for consideration of any development at Tregaron. The report provides a detailed historical and existing conditions analysis of the property and its component parts, and sets forth an integrated plan for the stabilization, rehabilitation and maintenance of the estate.<sup>1</sup> The plan was codified in the legal agreement between the property owners, acknowledged by the Board as the central guiding document for the future management of the property, and found by the Mayor's Agent to be "a key component of the Applicant's special merit case."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Board and Mayor's Agent reviewed a 2005 draft cultural landscape report that was prepared by Heritage Landscapes for the Partnership for the purposes of analyzing the development potential of the TLP-owned land; it did not provide an analysis of the development potential of the WIS property. In 2007, Heritage Landscapes finalized the cultural landscape report for the Conservancy. The final report evaluated the entire 21 acre Tregaron property for the purposes of guiding future management and rehabilitation.

<sup>2</sup> The procedural history of the agreement, the HPRB's multiple reviews, and the Mayor's Agent's review is a long one. While the Board was supportive of the agreement and overall solution for the property, it determined that the subdivision of the property necessary for the TLP houses and the playing field project was "inherently inconsistent with the original unified character of the property" and therefore not consistent with the preservation act. The Mayor's Agent found that the proposal met the definition of special merit, concluding that the landscape rehabilitation plan and the management of a substantial portion of the property by a conservancy dedicated to the "rehabilitation, stewardship, interpretation and to ensuring public access to the site," would constitute an "unusual and substantial historic preservation accomplishment with clear benefits to the public."

Chapter 6 of the report identifies specific landscape areas and preservation recommendations for their management. The Macomb Entry and Woodland Slope is one of the identified areas with its boundaries defined as extending to the crest of the hill “adjacent to the relatively intensive hilltop development of WIS and the residences along Macomb Street.”<sup>3</sup> The report acknowledged that a small area extending from and continuous with the existing Macomb streetscape would be a potentially compatible place for residential development: “A small portion of the area closest to existing homes is suitable for additional houses that fit with the character of the neighborhood. These homes would be screened by using evergreen and deciduous plants from the entrance drive.” Neither the 2005 nor the 2007 versions of the landscape report provided recommendations regarding additional development potential of the WIS portion of the property.

### **Review of New Construction at Tregaron**

Since the property was designated, the Board has reviewed several proposals for new construction on the WIS portion of the property, including for a new classroom building (1988), a gym and classroom building (1999), a library and performing arts building (2006) and a playing field (2007). While all of these projects except for the playing field were reviewed by the Board prior to the development of the cultural landscape report, each of the buildings was ultimately found compatible by meeting the same general design principles. The project were all organized along the axis of historic service buildings in the zone where construction was intended by Platt, they had limited or no visibility from the mansion or from the exterior of the property, they did not intrude on areas that were originally important landscape or buffer zones, they were designed in a manner that broke down their mass, and they used materials and an architectural vocabulary that closely related to the historic buildings on the estate.

Of the school’s projects, the playing field proved to be the most difficult to accommodate, and was the subject of several redesigns and reviews. Despite being substantially lowered in elevation, the field was found to visually intrude on the pond valley, change the open character of the south lawn, and introduce a large artificial man-made element into what was a naturalistic landscape.<sup>4</sup>

### **Proposal**

The current proposal calls for construction of a two-story 34,000 square foot classroom building above a one-story below-grade garage. The primary mass of the building would be located to the north of the gymnasium and west of the carriage house; a one-story element would extend in front of the gym and connect to the library with minimal alterations to those buildings. The building’s north elevation has been broken into a series of cube-like pavilions with connecting hyphens that would be clad in a contemporary vocabulary of weathered copper panels, translucent and reflective glass, and gray brick.

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<sup>3</sup> This section of the report is attached below. The link to the full report is:

<http://www.tregaronconservancy.org/wp-content/uploads/Tregaron-Cultural-Landscape-Report.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> While maintaining concerns about its lack of compatibility and impact on the pond valley, the playing field was ultimately approved by the Board on the understanding that it was part of the 2006 agreement and the Mayor’s Agent finding of special merit for the subdivision which conveyed the land for the field to the school.

The scope of work also includes substantial site alterations. These include: removing surface parking and converting the parking area between the gym and the carriage house into a pedestrian plaza; removing paving in the service court between the mansion's kitchen wing and the walled formal garden and replacing it with landscape, a relocated outdoor grill, and a small drive for loading; converting the formal walled garden to a courtyard with permeable pavers and gravel; rehabilitating the driveway from Macomb Street to expose or reconstruct its original cobbled stone gutters and to improve pedestrian access; redesigning the Macomb Street pedestrian entrance as a woodland garden; improving the hillside path up to the campus; and enhanced tree plantings on the north hillside below the new building.

This project was initially submitted in October 2015 and scheduled for hearing by the HPRB in March and May, but was deferred at the request of the applicants to address HPO and community concerns. The building and landscape plans have undergone some additional design revisions since the last submission was circulated to the Board.

While the applicants are seeking the Board's approval of the concept as consistent with the preservation act, they are prepared to seek approval of the project as one of special merit from the Mayor's Agent.

### **Evaluation**

The preservation law sets a high bar for the treatment of landmarks, with the purposes being to *retain and enhance* them, to *encourage their adaptation for current use*, and to *encourage their restoration*. The law also provides a process by which proposals that do not meet these standards can be evaluated by the Mayor's Agent and found to be necessary in the public interest if determined to constitute a project of special merit. After many months of discussion between the applicants, community and HPO, it is recommended that this project be determined by the Board to be inconsistent with the purposes of the preservation act, as it would not enhance the landmark, and that the proposal either be rethought or proceed to the Mayor's Agent for review as a project of special merit.

In evaluating the new construction according the principles cited in previous reviews and the cultural landscape report, the new building would have minimal visual impact from many vantage points inside the property. It would have no visibility from the mansion, and only be glimpsed at the visual terminus of the service road in the same view shed with the historic dependency buildings. While quite different in architectural character and materials, the building as it would face the plaza would be compatible in size and height with the adjacent carriage house, and its scale and relationship with the more traditionally styled buildings around it could result in a clearly differentiated but compatible relationship.

However, the size and placement of the proposed building is incompatible with the character of this unique country house property and its carefully balanced landscape. The proposal would introduce an extremely large institutional building – 215 feet in length and with only minor breaks in plane and mass – into an area that is a wooded hillside that would be prominently visible from both inside and outside the property. The building would be significantly larger than the mansion, any other building on the estate, any building along Macomb Street, and (other than on the Cathedral Close) within the Cleveland Park Historic District. The new building is incompatible with the landmark's

appearance as a country estate ringed by woodland in which the mansion is the property's primary building.

The proposal's incompatibility of size is exacerbated by its location at the crest of the hill and pushing down into the woodland hillside. Platt's plan for the estate's dependencies along the service drive was intentional in pulling them away from the edge of the hill to diminish their visual impact from within the property and from Macomb Street. This is an important characteristic in conveying that the property is a country house surrounded by woodlands. This design principle was cited in the review of the gymnasium project in 1999, in which the proposal was pulled further back from the hillside to lessen its impact,<sup>5</sup> and was at the core of the Board's concerns when it reviewed the playing field and its intrusion into the pond valley in 2007. Based on the principles that have been applied by the HPO and HPRB in the review of previous projects, the historic development pattern of this estate, the character of this portion of the landmark as evaluated in the cultural landscape report, and the visual impact the proposal would have both from the historic district and from inside the landmark, the woodland hillside is ultimately not a compatible location for new development and would diminish the property's character as a country house seen surrounded by woodlands, open meadows and naturalistic gardens.

This determination is not intended to diminish the value of the proposed landscape improvements or the applicants' efforts to try to mitigate the proposal's adverse impacts. The replanting of the area around the Macomb entrance as a woodland garden is consistent with Shipman's design philosophy and the replanting of the north woodland slope would help to restore its wooded appearance and, in time, help soften the impact of the proposed building. The repair/ reconstruction of the Macomb driveway and its distinctive cobblestone gutters, removal of parking from around the service court adjacent to the mansion, and the redesign of the service court as a pedestrian plaza would all be restorative improvements consistent with the landmark's character. The updated plan for the service court has also included relocation of the barbeque pavilion to remove it from the south lawn, as was suggested in a previous report. While covering the remaining parterres of the formal walled garden with pavers is not the best preservation treatment, some reversible redesign of this area that provides a balance of paving and landscape that allows it to be used more intensively by the students should continue to be explored. As well, recent design revisions to break the building down into components to provide some variety in plane and to use a neutral palette of glass, weathered copper and gray brick have been worthwhile, in as far as they go, in helping to mitigate the impact of the building's size and placement. However, these efforts at mitigation do not result in the project being an enhancement to or compatible with the landmark.

## **Recommendations**

*The HPO recommends that the Board find the conceptual proposal incompatible in its size and location with the character of the Tregaron landmark.*

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<sup>5</sup> When initially submitted for HPRB review, the gymnasium was larger and extended to the crest of the hill. In negotiations with the community and HPO, WIS reduced the footprint of the gym and pulled it back from the hillside edge to reduce its impact and visibility. The initial version was not presented to the Board, but was referenced in the staff report, which stated: "In a major concession to community concerns, the school has reduced the proposed size of the gymnasium by almost 20 percent in order to make it less visible from the neighborhood."

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## 6 – MACOMB ENTRY & WOODLAND SLOPE

### 6a. Macomb Entry & Woodland Slope History & Character

The Macomb Street entry was the northern “front door” of the Tregaron landscape. This frontage formed the edge where the estate met the historic residential neighborhood of Cleveland Park. With the 19th century suburbanization of many large Cleveland Park summer home tracts, a new eclectic community came to embrace the Twin Oaks Estate and The Causeway, later to be named Tregaron. Around 1912 shortly after the development of the remainder of the Tregaron, the Macomb entry was constructed to provide a continuous circuit through the property. The graceful curves of the entrance drive reflected the sinuous alignment of the southern entrance and Causeway Bridge as it leads up toward the hilltop and mansion. At this time Ellen Biddle Shipman prepared plans for shaping the small, level space around the entrance and the surrounding slopes. The plans, however, were not carried out in full. A few decades later, aerial photographs revealed that entrance plantings with residential character were thriving in the mottled shade of the surrounding woodland canopy. Beyond the perimeter fence, tall evergreens and loose cluster of deciduous shrubs created a border along the entrance drive.

Today, the Macomb frontage area consists of level turf, a steep ravine, and a wooded slope along the sides of the entry drive. Referenced as Landscape Unit 6, it includes the remaining historic Japanese maple trees and a small wooded area to the south that frames the Tregaron entry, abuts the TLP lots to the north, and the wooded slopes and hillside up to the WIS facilities to the east. The drive skirts the ravine and creek as it climbs toward the hilltop and WIS. The roadside frontage of Tregaron interfaces with the domestic landscapes of Queen Anne, Shingle, Classical Revival, and Mission homes along Macomb Street. The entry area reflects a degree of disturbance although some historical landscape features persist. Recent work by the local sewer authority has significantly disrupted soils, grades and the stream source arrangement between the drive and the street. Remaining historic built elements in this area include the entry drive, partially obscured cobblestone gutters, and several stone retaining walls on the downhill side between this landscape unit and the adjacent woodland. The frontage fence does not appear to be original. Contemporary stone and wood steps snake down the steep hillside for pedestrian access to the far corner of WIS. However, the eroding path dangerously drops walkers onto the entrance drive without a dedicated route to reach Macomb Street.

The current woodland overstory of the area is characterized by a mixture of American beech and red, white, and chestnut oaks. A small number of tulip trees are also present. A range of remnant ornamental species characterizes the entryway including rhododendron, flowering dogwood, Japanese maple, euonymus shrubs, Japanese andromeda, barberry, and leucothoe. The framing Japanese maple trees at the entry are the green-leaved form and are relatively old but may be either from the Parmelee or Davies-Post ownership periods. With the exception of numerous rhododendron, individual plants and small groups populate the area rather than large stands. Most of these are ground plane plants including pachysandra, English ivy, and Christmas fern. Little regeneration of canopy trees is present in the understory. Invasive species found on the wooded slopes of the area include ornamental groundcovers such as English ivy and pachysandra.

### 6b. Macomb Entry & Woodland Slope Preservation Approach

The mission of the Tregaron Conservancy for this area is to draw on historical antecedents and recapture of the beauty and dignity of the Macomb entrance and drive. The area is a principal entryway for the school. A clean and simple approach to this area is recommended in order to bring together both sides of the drive to form a more visually apparent entry. Circulation should be enhanced to preserve historic retaining wall features and allow pedestrians to access the hilltop. Today a confusing combination of older trees and volunteer species on the wooded hillside obscure the impression of passage into the historic landscape of the estate. This situation should be amended; however, precise historic designs cannot be restored. Although Ellen Biddle Shipman created garden designs for the area no strong evidence exists that they were carried out. The designs suggest a clear intent to develop a more formal entryway stretching from the street

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### Chapter VI: Landscape Preservation Treatment Recommendations

along the drive by using selected plantings including undulating drifts of perennial plants, shrubs, and small trees. This design concept should be followed in a rehabilitation treatment.

The entry area can be framed with more intensive plantings with reference to the Shipman plans. The heavy application of shrubs complemented with small trees and smaller perennial plants dominate Shipman's designs for this area. Plans call for a shrub border to be planted along Macomb Street frontage. A separate drawing also calls for shrubs to be planted along sections of the entrance drive. Upon entering the estate, a small garden is shown adjacent to the drive as a special feature. These historic design plans are housed in the Shipman Archive at the Cornell University Library and can be consulted to inspire the specific planting palette and spatial arrangement for the entrance drive and Macomb frontage.

The wooded hillside lies between the drive and the newer WIS facilities. Treatment of this area should begin with removal of invasive plants and hazardous trees and removal of the winding wooden staircase. Following these actions, a dedicated pedestrian pathway would also be developed to allow students to safely use the entrance drive for access to the hilltop. With new circulation established for pedestrians, the hillside could be replanted as a backdrop for the entry experience.

Removal of undesirable woody plants should commence by using the "cut and paint" method as outlined in the Appendix. This cut and paint method is safe and effective because it focuses on the undesirable plants, kills roots through absorption into plant tissue, and limits any migration of herbicide into the broader landscape. Another method for the uprooting of small trees is the use of a Weed Wrench or similar tool.

Maintenance is also important for the long term success of renewal and recapture efforts. In order to reestablish the mixed hardwood forest of oak, beech, and tulip tree, a reliable watering system will need to be improvised for the slope. For minor watering a mobile watering system can be used with a water tank on a truck filled at a spigot. A gravity fed system is possible since the hilltop is accessible by vehicle. A hose connection also may be possible from the adjacent WIS facilities.

Woodland renewal would continue with the selective pruning and replanting of flowering dogwoods and broadleaf evergreen shrubs such as rhododendrons and azaleas. In order to maintain the character of the hillside into the future, a few areas would be planted with young oak and beech trees to eventually replace the existing mature trees. The invasive ground covers of English ivy and pachysandra should be replaced with other ground covers such as eastern teaberry and ferns.

Circulation concerns will be addressed in the rehabilitation treatment of the Macomb Entry area. The drive exhibits multiple layers of asphalt patching, over-paving and deterioration of cobble gutters, failure of drainage, and drive edge deterioration from erosion. After resolving drainage issues, the sections of original stone retaining walls to the east side of the drive require inspection and repair. This would entail cleaning and mortar repointing and selected stone resetting. In general Heritage Landscapes recommends milling the drive asphalt, repairing and



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reconstructing cobble gutters, cleaning and repairing original drains including pipes and outflows, and stabilizing and repairing stone walls as required. Improvements in pedestrian circulation would occur concurrently with the improvement in the gutter system. A new path would be constructed between Macomb Street and the hilltop along the edge of the drive. This path could be paved with brick to match the historic paving in locations on the hilltop. The path would also connect to trails on the other side of the drive near the meadow. A fork in the path will lead toward the new structures built by WIS.

This entrance area is adjacent to the relatively intensive hilltop development of WIS and the residences along Macomb Street. The unit can be considered for development extending from and contiguous with the existing Macomb streetscape. A small portion of the area closest to existing homes is suitable for additional houses that fit with the character of the neighborhood. These homes would be screened by using evergreen and deciduous plants from the entrance drive.

Creation of planting plans to screen adjacent homes, management of the wooded hillside, and removal of invasive plants and failing specimens can begin at anytime. Long term issues including irrigation and maintenance should be determined prior to carrying out new plantings in the area. Irrigation could be of the hose bib approach, as was used historically on the property—remnants of which are found today throughout the site. Since the Macomb entry is an important front door to the school and larger estate property, design decisions and maintenance responsibility should be discussed between the Tregaron Conservancy and WIS.

B. TREGARON LANDSCAPE PRESERVATION RECOMMENDATIONS  
SUMMARY

Several commonalities exist as the range of landscape preservation interventions is explored above. Remaining historic landscape features should be preserved, stabilized, repaired, with more extreme interventions of restoration and reconstruction applied to severely deteriorated and degraded features. Invasive species suppression and woodland management is also another critical piece in the recapture of the historic character and appearance of Tregaron. Initial work in the woodlands removing hazardous and felled trees has begun the process of greater access. While some efforts can be undertaken with volunteers, ongoing consistent work on landscape renewal will require either staff or contracted services. Opportunities to engage volunteers yield three aspects of potential volunteer efforts:

- Weed Team- Invasive Species suppression
- Trail Team- Trail upgrades and maintenance
- Planting Team- New trees, shrubs and herbaceous planting

The organization and effectiveness of ideal levels volunteer efforts and contractual efforts can be understood by relating the Tregaron landscape types to standard staffing levels. Based on management practices at other public institutions, including the Indianapolis Museum of Art, The New York Botanical Garden, and Heritage Landscapes experience, the following chart has