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## **HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD**

Historic Landmark Case No. 18-13

### **MacFarland Junior High School**

4400 Iowa Avenue NW  
Square 2915, part of Lot 802

Meeting Date: September 27, 2018  
Applicant: D.C. Department of General Services  
Affected ANC: 4C

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The Historic Preservation Office recommends that the Board designate Henry B.F. MacFarland Junior High (MacFarland Middle School) School a historic landmark in the D.C. Inventory of Historic Sites, and that the Board request that the nomination be forwarded to the National Register of Historic Places for listing as of local significance, with a period of significance of 1923 to 1932, the beginning and end dates of the school's construction.

The management of the District of Columbia's separate-but-typically-unequal school systems had been easier during the nineteenth century, when the city's population was still concentrated near the city center. Victorian-era model elementary schools contained eight classrooms, one for each grade, and served the immediate neighborhood in which they were located. Early high schools, although serving a larger area, were centrally located. After the turn of the century, transportation improvements and an expanding population strained the city's provision of schools, requiring ever more facilities in far-flung neighborhoods.

The rapid development of Petworth in the three decades after 1900 meant that it needed new schools—a priority for the activists of the young civic association. Until the early 1920s, only a single elementary school in the neighborhood. In a sense, Petworth was a microcosm of the city, which developed a huge school-construction backlog by the end of World War I. The war lured more residents, but materiel shortages chilled construction. Addressing what has been characterized as a crisis in school overcrowding would become the principal mission of a new superintendent of schools, Dr. Frank Ballou, and the Office of the Municipal Architect. In 1925, Congress passed a Five-Year School Building Program Act for the construction of mostly suburban schools, but the problem could not wait that long.

The District had introduced an experimental junior high school to the former Central High building in early 1919 and soon adopted the practice generally. The original McKinley Manual Training School was converted to Shaw Junior High in 1922, and Petworth and Eckington received their own junior highs in 1923. The 1925 five-year plan would call for eight more such schools. In this, Washington emulated dozens of other cities that had established several hundred junior highs in the first half of the 1910s. The impetus was as much overcrowding as pedagogy. The junior high school relieved congestion in neighborhood schools by skimming off

the higher grades from several, and putting the pupils into a centralized, thoroughly modern facility without having to disrupt and expand each of the elementary schools. Doing so also constituted a Progressive-era reform of the system, recognizing the particular challenges of teaching children that had reached puberty and holding back the ninth-graders from immersion among older students. The junior highs also incorporated shops for vocational training, giving them the ability to set students on academic or vocational tracks early—often useful, but also a fraught proposition.

Funded, designed and constructed simultaneously, Washington's first purpose-built junior high schools—Eckington's Langley Junior High and Petworth's MacFarland—were nearly identical, especially in their facades. They diverged mainly with later alterations (and the fact that Langley was converted to an elementary school). Red brick with limestone elements, fifteen window bays stretch between antae that served as both corner stair towers and the ends of side-entrance pavilions. Relatively flat with the exception of the towers, a cornice and pilasters, their design suggests both cost-consciousness and a deference to the high schools as the most elaborate edifices in the system. Implied porticoes prefigure the abstraction of classicism that occurred in the designs of the 1940s and 1950s. The buildings are rigidly symmetrical.

The District's second municipal architect, Albert Harris, was responsible for the new schools, which resembled each other in plan, even if the same sections might have different uses. For instance, Langley's lunchroom was in the location of MacFarland's boiler room, and was flanked by sex-segregated gyms. MacFarland's boiler room was punctuated by a smoke stack on the building's central axis—impossible to conceal, it was decorated as a campanile, distinguishing it from its sister school. MacFarland's permanent gymnasium was to be in a separate wing, mirrored by a classroom wing, but the latter was not erected until 1925, and the gym finished only in 1932. These wings completed Harris's initial vision, observing the same strict symmetry as the main block. This design anticipated Harris's "extensible school" model of the 1930s, programmed for expansion into side wings as the need arose or funds became available. The same lack of funds that delayed construction of the wings retarded efforts generally to keep up with the growth of the school-age population in Petworth and surrounding neighborhoods; after MacFarland opened, elementary students were still in portable classrooms in Petworth, Park View and Brightwood Park.

### **Designation criteria**

MacFarland Junior High is old enough to have allowed sufficient time to have passed to evaluate the property in its historic context. Indeed, a public schools survey performed that function a couple of decades ago. The multiple-property document *Public School Buildings of Washington, D.C., 1862-1960* places it within a school period and subtype "The Office of the Municipal Architect, Albert L. Harris, 1921-34." The registration requirements for this subtype include, in part:

Extensible designs should be recognized at all stages of development as should interior design to accommodate new educational methods and programs. The development of the junior high school should be recognized, both in building design and educational program. Buildings associated with the educational programs and administrative innovations of Frank Ballou should also be included.

MacFarland Junior High School merits designation under National Register Criterion C and D.C. Criterion D (“Architecture and Urbanism”) for “embody[ing] the distinguishing characteristics of... building types... or expressions of... urban planning, siting, or design significant to the appearance and development of the District of Columbia or the nation,” as an excellent example of an early, fully realized, and intact junior high school. It is an exemplar of the work of Municipal Architect Albert Harris, as he worked out his ideas for programming the future expansion of schools. With its neighbors Roosevelt High and the Petworth Library, MacFarland comprises an excellent civic complex, the fruit of years of activism by neighborhood groups.

At least as important, McFarland Junior High School meets National Register Criterion A and D.C. Criterion B (“History”) as “associated with historical periods, social movements, groups, institutions, achievements, or patterns of growth and change that contributed significantly to the heritage culture or development of the District of Columbia or the nation” for its essential function of educating the youth of Petworth and adjacent neighborhoods for generations. It is significant for being among the first four of the District of Columbia’s first junior high schools and one of two of the first purpose-built junior highs. It also represents the major construction campaign of the 1920s, meant to address a crisis in school overcrowding.

As a formerly white school, MacFarland only incidentally participates in the story of the struggle for civil rights in terms of equal access to education. Therefore, its proposed period of significance, 1923 to 1932, reflects the era of its construction and expansion only.

MacFarland possesses high historic integrity, consisting of only the original main block and the originally planned wings. It retains the original plan and even the original window configurations.

### **Boundaries**

MacFarland Junior High School shares its lot (Lot 802 in Square 2915) with Roosevelt High School and Petworth Library. MacFarland is separated from Roosevelt by a driveway and fence line.