

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

Property:	Palisades Playground Recreation Center	X	Agenda
Address:	5200 Sherier Place NW		Consent Calendar
Meeting Date:	December 1, 2016	X	Concept Review
H.P.A. Number:	17-037	X	Alteration
Staff Reviewer:	Anne Brockett		New Construction

In April 2016, the HPRB designated the Palisades Playground, including the Recreation Center, a landmark for its architectural and archaeological significance and its role in the evolution of park planning and design in the District of Columbia. An important aspect of the designation is the site layout with its axial relationship of playing field to Recreation Center to scenic overlook over the Potomac River.

The Recreation Center was constructed in 1936 in the Colonial Revival style, common to recreation center buildings that were designed in the early 1930s by Municipal Architect Albert Harris, and with the endorsement of the Commission of Fine Arts. The building was constructed all at one time, despite its tripartite composition of porch-front building on the east (similar to other recreation centers of the 1930s), taller auditorium in the center, and small office ell on the west. The location and orientation of the building and original park amenities were dictated by the overlook, which also informed the building's rear terrace design.

The Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) in conjunction with the Department of General Services and Cox Graae + Spack Architects, seeks the Board's review of a concept to add to the rear of the Palisades Recreation Center.

Project Description

The project would add substantially to the rear of the rec center in order to meet DPR goals and satisfy community needs. The addition is composed of a center two-story, half-court gym flanked by one-story fitness, recreation, and office spaces. It leaves virtually all of the original building intact, connecting to it via a one-story corridor of generous width and setting in from the east and west sides with largely glass, hyphen-like compositions.

The addition would occupy most of the landscaped area framing the vista from the existing terrace, but would leave intact the two community gardens and a substantial tree on the downward slope. A new terrace would extend off the rear of the addition to overlook the river below.

The material palette is much in keeping with a Colonial Revival building, but applied in a modern way. Brick with rusticated brick panels and stretches of storefront glazing form the base, while dark grey slate clads the upper half of the walls. Horizontal wood slats would span the upper part of the gymnasium windows.

Evaluation

Over the past two years, the design team has explored many options for an addition with HPO, the park's Site Improvement Team, the ANC, the Palisades Citizens' Association, Councilmember Cheh, and the community at large. This series of options has responded to often strongly divergent views in the community about whether to preserve the historic building, how much new space to provide, and where any addition to the existing building should be placed on the site. After numerous iterations, the final design has evolved to a compact footprint tucked behind the existing building. While this option significantly alters the building's existing riverview terrace, it retains the entire historic structure, adds compatible new construction, and recreates a terrace that serves the same function and design intent as the original. It has also achieved significant community support as expressed in a unanimous ANC resolution.

In composition, the addition mimics that of the existing Colonial Revival building with a central, taller block flanked by lower wings. Where it connects to the historic building, the addition is one story in height, only rising to an increased height over the gymnasium itself, which is centered behind the taller auditorium portion of the existing building. In fact, the gym roof will sit slightly lower in height than the peak of the auditorium's gable roof. The addition is compatible in massing, scale, setback and height.

Importantly, the addition maintains the axial relationship of the building with its site. Although it alters the location of the terrace overlook by pushing it closer to the descent to the river, an imaginary line drawn through the middle of the existing building aligns with the center of the glass wall of the new gymnasium and the new terrace that arcs out from the building. The preservation of a terrace overlook and the transparency of the gym wall will echo the original design intent, which featured four French doors opening onto the terrace. To some extent, the visual connection to the south will be restored by replacing the extant non-original metal doors in the auditorium with historically appropriate multi-pane French doors, allowing a view through the new gym to the woods and river beyond. The addition is compatible in orientation.

The addition utilizes a range of materials that echoes those of the current Rec Center and that help it blend in with both the architectural and environmental context. Its flat roofs will be green roofs on the center and east portions and will hold screened mechanical equipment on the west side. The rec center will continue to use the existing front door under the porch as the main entry. The proposed accessible ramp within the porch footprint will likely be moved elsewhere with a slight grade change introduced to obviate the need for a ramp with handrails. The addition is compatible in materials and details.

The project team has committed to continuing to work with the State Archaeologist, and will complete a phased archaeological investigation prior to any construction on the site.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Board approve the concept for this addition as compatible in mass, scale, materials, orientation, setback, and height and delegate final review to staff.