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

Property Address:	1050 21st Street, NW	X Agenda
Landmark/District:	Thaddeus Stevens School	Consent Calendar
Meeting Date:	April 23, 2015	X Concept Review
H.P.A. Number:	15-219	X Alteration
Staff Reviewer:	Steve Callcott	X New Construction
		Demolition
		X Subdivision

The applicants, a partnership between Akridge Real Estate Services, Argos Group Real Estate Development and the Ivymount School, seek conceptual review for rehabilitation of the landmark Stevens School and construction of a ten-story commercial office building on the rear portion of the school's lot and an adjacent corner lot. Architectural plans have been prepared by Martinez and Johnson Architects and a preservation plan prepared by EHT Tracerics.

The school is owned by the District. In 2011, the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development (DMPED), in conjunction with the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education (DME), issued a solicitation for the site's redevelopment. Following a series of community meetings and developer presentations, the District selected the Akridge-Argos-Ivymount team.



Property Description

Originally built in 1868, Stevens School is the oldest surviving public elementary school building in the District. Named after Pennsylvania Congressman and abolitionist Thaddeus Stevens, it was built for African-American students as part of the city's racially segregated

public school system. Though the school was considered to have comparable facilities to those provided for white students, it exemplifies the struggle for equal educational opportunities for black residents in the District after emancipation. The building served as an educational institution for one hundred and forty years, until it was closed in 2008.

In the 1830s, Thaddeus Stevens played a leading role in the establishment of a public school system in Pennsylvania and had early concerned himself with the rights of black Americans. Elected to Congress as a representative from Pennsylvania in 1848, he quickly became a leader of radical antislavery forces. He introduced a bill advocating the abolition of slavery at the beginning of the second session of the thirty-seventh Congress. Although unsuccessful, it stirred controversy that directly led to President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation.

The Georgian/Romanesque Revival-style building has a Palladian five-part plan. The center section, rising three stories in height atop a raised basement was constructed in 1868, with complementary side wings added in 1885. The building's current appearance is the result of a substantial reconstruction in 1896, when the front portion was expanded, refaced and topped with a roof top pediment; two large rear wings were also added at this time. Despite the current paint scheme (applied sometime around 1980) and vinyl window replacements (installed in the 1990s, without approval from the HPRB), the building retains a high degree of integrity in its form, materials, craftsmanship and association.

The Thaddeus Stevens School was designated a local historic landmark and listed in the District of Columbia Inventory of Historic Sites in 1972. It was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 2001.

Proposal

The project calls for rehabilitating the historic building for use by Ivymount, a provider of special-education services. Site work would include repaired concrete stairs, new landscaped courtyard gardens in front of the school, and installation of a statue honoring Thaddeus Stevens.

The preservation plan outlines suggested treatments for the exterior of the building to inform future rehabilitation efforts. The report includes sections on masonry, entryways, fenestration, metalwork, roof structure, and roof materials. Among the suggestions are the need for masonry repairs and repointing, further evaluation of the roof with repair and replacement in-kind of materials as needed, and replacement of windows and doors with more appropriate units. A paint analysis is also provided, prepared by EverGreene Architectural Arts.

A new contemporary 10-story office building would be constructed fronting L Street and extending partially behind the school. The design is composed of a vertically-oriented skin of glass with a square grid of terra cotta or metal superimposed over it that wraps the west portion of the L Street façade and extends up and over to the south elevation adjacent to the school. Above the second floor, the elevation on 21st Street would project slightly over the building line at the corner and angle back toward the school. An open air walk between the office building and school would provide access to a small gallery space in the office building that would commemorate the school and its namesake.

While conceived and designed as an entirely separate building, the new construction would technically be an addition to the landmark connected through the new gallery.

The project would involve a subdivision to combine the landmark (lot 876) with the corner lot (lot 858), currently occupied by a mid-rise office building owned by the Humane Society.

Standards for Review

With respect to landmarks, the purposes of the preservation act are:

- (A) To retain and enhance historic landmarks in the District of Columbia and to encourage their adaptation for current use; and
- (B) To encourage the restoration of historic landmarks.

The Comprehensive Plan provides the following guidance:

HP-2.1: The District government should set the standard for historic preservation in the city, through both committed leadership and exemplary treatment of its own historic properties. The following policies promote District government stewardship in preservation.

Action HP-2.1.C Enhancing Civic Assets

Make exemplary preservation of District of Columbia municipal buildings, include the public schools, libraries, fire stations, and recreational facilities, a model to encourage private investment in the city's historic properties and neighborhoods. Rehabilitate these civic assets and enhance their inherent value with new construction or renovation that sustains the city's tradition of high quality municipal design.

Evaluation

Restoration of landmark

As a city-owned landmark and a city-sponsored project, it is expected that the project will result in an exemplary treatment of the building. The conceptual treatment of the interior – which retains the building's floor plan and minimizes alterations and demolition – is illustrative of a respectful approach to an historic building, with only minor modifications to the interior plans and floor elevations to provide accessibility and modern program needs. While some additional on-site evaluation of the building's roof and masonry finishes are acknowledged as needed, the preservation plan provides a strong framework for guiding the treatment of the exterior. As the precise exterior scope of work related to this project is finalized, it is recommended that it definitively include the following components:

- 1) Replacing the non-permitted windows and doors with units that replicate the material, profiles, and appearance of the originals on the primary elevations;
- 2) Repointing and repairing the exterior masonry, including restoring original openings on the façade back to their original size and removing unneeded through-wall vents;

- 3) Removing existing paint and restoring the masonry to one that replicates the building's appearance within the period of significance or to its early 20th century appearance, as is technically feasible and as can be appropriately documented.

Despite the paint analysis, the original appearance and finish of the building is not exactly known. It appears from a 1904 photograph that the building may have had some coloration different from its underlying red brick, but the extent and visual effect of this initial layer of ocher tinted lime wash is not clear. While the analysis subsequent to that time records multiple layers of a thin, tinted lime-based wash (the tint varied between black and gray), photographic documentation between the 1930s and 1980 appear to show the building as an unpainted red brick building with white trim, as was typical of DC public school buildings in this period. It is likely that the lime wash, with the possible exception of the initial coat that shows a more obvious tint in the 1904 photograph, merely had the effect of evening out the mortar and natural variations in red brick to provide the building with a smooth, monolithic appearance. The preservation plan identifies the building's period of significance as its construction between 1868-1896, however, the National Register nomination identifies the period as extending until desegregation of the District school system in 1954, and cites the school's historical and cultural significance during the 20th century in which it served as an important community institution for the Foggy Bottom and West End neighborhoods. As such, rather than returning the building to a short-lived 19th century appearance (on which there is not conclusive documentation), it is recommended that it be returned to the better documented 20th century appearance that represents how it is remembered by the living graduates of the school. It is understood that testing remains to be done on the feasibility of removing the paint and restoring the building to its red brick appearance, but it is recommended that this be the anticipated exterior masonry treatment.

New Construction

As a basic principle of compatibility, the Board has generally required that additions to historic property be subordinate to the buildings to which they are being attached. However, in an acknowledgement that Washington's historic properties exist in and adjacent to a variety of often disparate contexts, exceptions to this approach have been made where the addition can be designed convincingly to appear as a separate adjacent building. In these cases, the Board has reviewed these additions as if they were new construction, requiring that the addition appear truly separate, that the new building be compatible with its context, and that it not result in an incompatible relationship with the historic building to which it is adjacent. The concept has been developed appropriately to be seen as a completely separate adjacent building, and in this instance, such an approach is consistent with the Board's practice to review the proposal according to the standards for new construction.

In general, the project has been designed to retain the free-standing, three-dimensional character of the landmark and is connected only at the rear so that the school and office building appear as separate structures. Given the school's surrounding urban context – one that has been defined by 90-110' high office and apartment buildings for many decades – a new building of this size is not incompatible or unexpected. As one would expect from a separate, stand-alone building, the new construction has been designed as a contemporary office building, without

overt references to the school but rather a relationship with the late 20th century office buildings surrounding it. The building's deference to the school includes recessed first floors on 21st Street that will provide some greater visibility of the school and its courtyards than would be provided by building at the building line, and a vertically-oriented glass skin that has glazing components of the same proportions as the school's windows.

As the design of the new construction continues to be developed, consideration should be given to increasing the size of the pedestrian alley leading to the museum, which is proportionally narrow to the heights of the buildings on either side (page 47 of applicant's submission). As well, consideration should be given to the portion of the gridded screen on the new building's south (rear) elevation which projects above the roof. While this element works architecturally to tie the front and rear elevations of the new construction together, it results in additional height and a perforated roofline that visually competes with the school's roofline (page 43).

Subdivision

Subdivisions involving the combination or segmentation of landmark lots are subject to review and approval by the Mayor's Agent, following a recommendation by the Board. Subdivisions involving consolidation of a landmark lot with additional lots outside the landmark, such as is proposed by this application, have typically been found to be compatible and consistent with the Act by the Board and the Mayor's Agent, as they do not sever property away from but add to the size of the landmark lot. Carving out a portion of an existing landmark lot has more rarely been found to be a compatible treatment by the Board and the Mayor's Agent, as it results in the removal of property historically associated with the landmark.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Board make the following findings:

- 1) The redevelopment plans should fully incorporate the findings of the preservation plan, including but not limited to historically appropriate replacement windows on the primary elevations, restoration of masonry, and a finish treatment that restores the building to its mid-20th century appearance;*
- 2) Find the general height and mass of the new construction to be compatible with the landmark and its context, and that it continue to be refined as recommended above;*
- 3) Recommend to the Mayor's Agent that the lot consolidation subdivision is compatible with the character of the landmark, pending any design revisions sought by the Board to ensure a compatible relationship between the landmark and new construction.*