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

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Landmark/District: **Walter Reed Army Medical Center Historic District** (x) Agenda  
Address: **6825 16<sup>th</sup> Street NW**

Meeting Date: **November 17, 2016** (x) Alteration  
Case Number: **17-048**

Staff Reviewer: **Tim Dennée** (x) Permit

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The applicant, tenant District of Columbia International Charter School (with Perkins Eastman DC, architects), requests review of a permit application to construct stormwater-retention features, or “rain gardens,” in front of Building 11, Delano Hall, constructed in the 1930s.

As the Board will recall from February and April reviews of a concept application, the school is to occupy this building and site, constructing a gym addition and play fields at the rear of the building, and making various other alterations.

When permit drawings for the entire project were routed to the Historic Preservation Office, the site plan showed rain gardens in front of the building. These features had not been included in the concept drawings, but similar features at the *rear* of the building had drawn expressions of concern from the Board, with a request that those be carefully designed and reviewed at the permit level. Further, reviewing an initial draft of campus landscape design guidelines in July, the Board similarly expressed concern about the potential for any unsightly stormwater-retention features. As a consequence, the HPO refers these new features to the Board for a recommendation.

The site plans depict five features, four of which are more than one foot deep, and the fifth more than half a foot. Their area would total nearly 26,000 square feet. They would be located along the frontage of the wings that flank the building’s central pavilion, filling the space between the building’s face and the lead walk that runs roughly parallel. Accompanying photographs indicate the intention to fashion these depressions into rain gardens with a variety of plants.

**Evaluation**

Rain gardens directly in front of this building would not be compatible with the landscape character of the Walter Reed Army Medical Center Historic District.

Until recently, Walter Reed was a military installation. Its central function as an Army general hospital influenced the design of its grounds as therapeutic landscapes, as well as functional spaces. We have no evidence that Delano Hall ever received quite the same attention to landscape design as did some other portions of the campus. Its site was likely not as elaborate as was the rear of the Red Cross building or the environs of Building 1, let alone the Rose Garden. Yet, it was an important facility, quarters for the Army Nurse Corps. There is some

photographic evidence of informal features such as ivy-covered walls. But there were more formal elements. Delano Hall, its front yard and driveway have an axial relationship to the ellipse in Main Drive. The front yard that we have inherited exhibits the basic features of the landscapes in front of most of the historic hospital buildings: a lawn bounded by a street and street trees, bisected by a walk or surrounding a circular drive, and featuring foundation plantings and occasional ornamental trees. Most of today's randomness of trees is the result of neglect of replanting those that had lined these paved features in the 1940s.

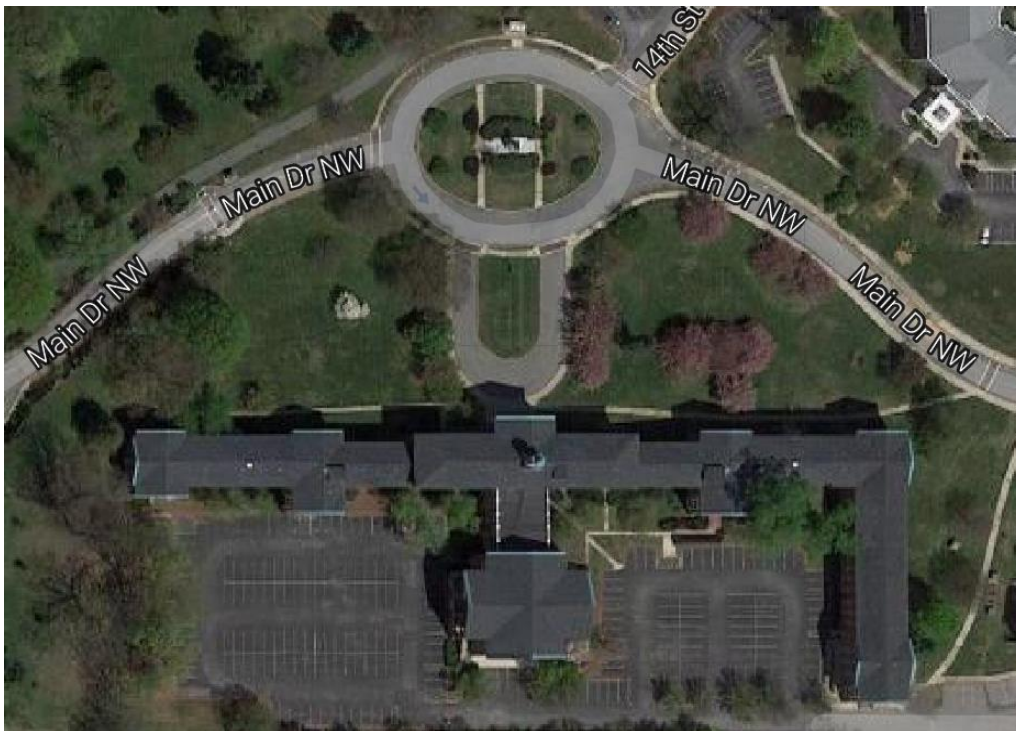
Landscape plans for each historic building and for the campus as a whole should build upon the historic landscape features. Beyond the depressions that they require, rain gardens are too informal for the context of most front yards, especially formally planned ones. Draft design guidelines for the campus, first reviewed by the Board in July, recommend that,

The general character and features of this cohesive visual space related to Building 11 should be retained to the extent possible as development proceeds. New distinctive landscape elements that draw attention from this basic organization and character should be avoided. Historic documents indicate a relatively open lawn ground plan, which should be retained, while turf species may be diverse.<sup>1</sup>

Alternative locations for the proposed rain gardens, alternative means for dealing with the runoff, such as a cistern, or a waiver from the requirements should be explored.

### **Recommendation**

*HPO recommends that the Board recommend against a permit for the proposed stormwater features as incompatible with the character of the property and the historic district and thus contrary to the purposes of the preservation law.*



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<sup>1</sup> *The Parks at Walter Reed Master Plan Implementation: Preservation and New Design Guidelines*, p. 47.