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

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Landmark/District: <b>Washington Heights/Adams School</b>	(x) Agenda
Address: <b>2020 19<sup>th</sup> Street, NW</b>	( ) Consent Calendar
Meeting Date: <b>TBD</b>	(x) New Construction
H.P.A. Number: <b>23-355</b>	(x) Alteration
	(x) Conceptual Design

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The District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) and Department of General Services (DGS) along with Studio MB Architects seek concept review for a modernization project for the John Quincy Adams School located at 2020 19<sup>th</sup> Street, NW in the Washington Heights Historic District. The work includes renovation of the historic school and construction of additions to create an accessible entrance along 19<sup>th</sup> Street and accommodate other program needs resulting from an anticipated increase in student population.

**Adams School**

Adams School is a contributing element of the Washington Heights Historic District. The building was designed by Municipal Architect Albert L. Harris, constructed in 1930 and is an excellent example of the Classical Revival architectural style. The school retains a high degree of integrity, most notably in that the entire “T-shaped” building remains intact as originally designed and constructed. No additions or significant modifications have altered Harris’ design for nearly a century although routine work such as window and door replacements and minor interior alterations have been carried out over time.

Much of the school’s grandeur stems from the high plinth upon which it is situated. This plinth, or “veranda” rises several feet up from grade on the south while being closer to grade on the north. The design requires one to look up towards the building from most perspectives and this affords the school a civic quality that is further emphasized by the building’s main entry sequence. Two formal stairways with decorative wrought iron railings and lampposts divide on either side of a central, decorative shell-capped niche and lead up to a double height recessed entry that features Ionic columns in antis and three sets of double doors topped by multi-light transoms and fanlights beyond.

The grandeur on the exterior extends well into the building as evidenced by the highly decorative, classically inspired plaster crown mouldings, brackets and trim, wall paneling, and marble wainscoting and floors of the main lobby. Decorative treatments are also used in portions of the ground floor’s main double-loaded corridor while other sections of the corridor which are partitioned off by multi-light transoms and sidelights feature similar treatments such as multi-colored terrazzo floors and trim and tile wainscoting.

Along with the main lobby and corridor, the original “gymnasium and assembly hall” is among the most decorative spaces in the school. This grand, double-height space retains its plaster ceilings, elaborate crown mouldings, rectangular proscenium with decorative plaster detailing and the original, wood-paneled base of the stage. The walls, which are partially tiled, feature rectangular windows in arched openings.

Although the school’s interiors are not formally designated, they are subject to review by the Historic Preservation Office (HPO) in accordance with Section 9b of the DC Historic Landmark and Historic District Protection Act and they, along with the school’s exterior character-defining features and a few other elements such as original skylights, have been identified as primary preservation zones/priorities.

### **Proposal**

The proposed modernization program consists primarily of the construction of four new elements – an entry pavilion, a library, a gymnasium and a large dormer addition. The entry pavilion will be inserted at grade on the south side of the school’s veranda so it can provide an accessible entrance. The library addition will sit atop the new entry pavilion and be set back to occupy open space on the south side of the school. The new gymnasium will be constructed behind the school south of the original gymnasium and assembly hall, and the new dormer addition will be introduced on the western portion of the school’s roof.

The modernization program will also modify classrooms, hallways, and other interior spaces, as needed, to meet current education specifications. Underutilized “found space” such as that which exists below the school’s veranda and existing cafeteria will be modified to provide additional room for expansion.

DCPS and DGS have determined that the proposed modernization fully meets their defined program needs and the anticipated increases in student population.

### **Evaluation**

The proposed modernization is compatible with the Washington Heights Historic District and the Adams School and is consistent with the DC Historic Landmark and Historic District Protection Act because it involves no significant demolition and, with the exception of the new entry pavilion and library addition, will not result in any visible alteration of historic conditions as seen from the immediately surrounding streets within the historic district. Moreover, the newly visible elements have been designed to integrate seamlessly with the original design intent.

The entry pavilion will “read” as a continuation of the school’s plinth/veranda because it will be co-planar and no taller than that important character-defining feature. The entry’s proposed design, which centers on a double height, framed and glazed void, draws from the historic double height recessed entry to help identify the pavilion as the school’s new primary entrance. Similarly, stepped planters that project slightly beyond the veranda’s eastern wall will be incorporated to mirror the projecting stairways to the north and a small window which will echo the historic central decorative niche will be introduced to further reinforce visual connections with the historic school.

The materials of the entry pavilion will consist of complimentary red cementitious panels, terracotta and pre-patinated copper which are all similar to the materials used to construct the original building.

Unlike the entry pavilion, the new library addition has been designed to recede somewhat by being glazed almost in its entirety and set back a respectful distance from the southeast corner of the historic building. The result will be a simple, yet elegant glass box that extends the veranda and does not visually compete with the historic school. To the contrary, the proposed design will physically connect directly to the existing building to allow its original southern elevation to remain partially visible, preserve views to and from the school, and incorporate the existing historic door surround on the south side as a key interior element.

The new gymnasium addition, which will be similar in volume and footprint to the original gymnasium and assembly hall, will be carefully inserted into the back of the site and clad in the same materials used for the other new additions. Several play spaces, parking, a soccer field and an outdoor classroom will also be accommodated behind the school.

Neither the gymnasium nor the new dormer addition, which will be limited to the rear of the school's roof and no higher than the existing ridge line, will be seen from the front of the school or from any other vantage point clearly visible from the surrounding streets.

The aforementioned primary preservation zones/priorities will be preserved and restored, including the lobby, first level corridor and at least one original skylight in one "representative" historic classroom. The original gymnasium and assembly hall, including its historic stage, will also be preserved and adapted to serve as the school's new dual purpose, "cafetorium."

While some relatively minor aspects of the proposed design require further exploration and refinement, most notably details of the entry pavilion and library and some aspects of the interior scope of work, the overall concept is sound and will result in well-designed modifications that will help ensure continued use of this important historic school for years to come.

### **Recommendation**

*HPO recommends that the Board approve the concept for the modernization of Adams School and delegate all remaining design review and permit review to HPO.*

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