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

Landmark/District:	Randall School	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agenda
Address:	65 I Street, SW	<input type="checkbox"/> Consent Calendar
Meeting Date:	October 24, 2013	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Demolition/Alteration
H.P.A. Number:	13-341	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> New Construction
Date Received:	October 16, 2013	<input type="checkbox"/> Subdivision
Staff Reviewer:	David Maloney	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Conceptual Design

Owner TR SW 2 LLC, design architect Bing Thom Architects Inc., architect of record Beyer Blinder Belle Architects & Planners LLP, and landscape architect OEHME van Sweden & Associates, Inc., return to the Board for further conceptual review of the proposed redevelopment of the old Randall School property at First and I Streets, SW. The project would include a new museum of contemporary art, restaurant, and commercial/education facility in the historic school building, and a 12-story apartment building with about 550 units and underground parking.

The Board reviewed conceptual plans for the project on June 27, 2013, and voted to refer the project to the Mayor’s Agent for consideration of the required demolition permits, with support for the preservation benefits provided by the adaptive rehabilitation of the three main historic school blocks. The Board also recommended further study of the overhanging wings closest to the landmark, the treatment of the main school entrance, and other design concerns.

Project Revisions

The program of uses remains as previously described, but there have been several modifications of the design concept since the last Board meeting. These include:

- *Massing:* The large C-shaped apartment block has been shifted slightly north to increase its separation from the historic school building. This has been accomplished by adjusting the shape of the apartment modules and the width of the interstitial spaces.
- *Museum Addition:* The museum addition at the north of the central school block has been pulled closer to the school, enlarging the courtyard. This has been accomplished by eliminating the earlier hyphen between the school and addition, which contained an open stair and the service elevator.
- *Courtyard:* Other adjustments have been made to give greater openness to the courtyard. A break has been introduced into the upper module of the north apartment block, so that the entire composition is broken into two L-shaped wings. The soffits and large supporting columns for the overhanging wings behind the school have also been refined, with reference to various recent precedents.
- *Apartment Facades:* Refinement of the apartment façades includes the introduction of more glass in the upper three floors, particularly at the rounded corners, and what seems a

de-emphasis of the regular grid of vertically aligned thin mullions that gave an even background rhythm to the facades. The two lowest floors are now clad in a vertical pattern of terra cotta panels to distinguish them as a slightly different base.

- *Museum Entrance:* The alteration of the main school entrance has been restudied. The revision avoids the need for walls along the pair of access ramps by sloping the shallow front lawn panels down toward the entry. A glass canopy is also added above the new doors to mark the lower level entry and establish a datum line recalling the historic condition. Other modifications have been made to the front terraces throughout.
- *Side Wings:* The major interventions at the two school wings have been developed further. At the auditorium wing on the east, the proportions of the glass pavilion have been adjusted relative to the main block. On the west classroom wing, the large windows on the rear infill façade have been adjusted to the rhythm of the historic window pattern.

Evaluation and Recommendations

The revised concept responds to concerns raised by the Board by improving the setting for the historic school and refining the design of the major interventions in the historic fabric.

Massing: The additional analysis of the courtyard conditions (see page A03) is informative and has allowed for improvements that will make the courtyard a more open and inviting place. It has to be said that the massing revisions come at some cost to the formal clarity and elegance of the original geometric concept, but the concerns of practicality have been accomplished without undue violence to the design.

With respect to the school, the revised massing is an improvement, although the loss of the circulation space between the original structure and museum addition is an unfortunate consequence. This change results in a shift of the large service elevator into the historic building, and gives the impression of pushing the museum addition up against the school's north façade.

Museum Addition: Some further study might help alleviate this condition and further inform the development of the exterior architectural expression of the new museum wing. The freight elevator may be no more desirable in the new wing than in the historic building (it would invade the largest gallery), but as shown it cramps the floor plan and distorts the clarity of the pinwheeling layout that is a notable historic feature. The elevator might at least be shifted south to align with an internal wall, thus freeing up the entire rank of windows on the north side of the school.

As shown, the simple geometry of the new museum wing echoes the "Artfood" addition on the auditorium, but other possibilities should at least be explored. The service elevator could perhaps be moved out of both buildings altogether, possibly with the fire egress stair, to create a secondary element that might better shield the loading dock.

Apartment Facades: The patterning of the apartment façades should continue to be studied to ensure that it reinforces the underlying architectural concept. The addition of corner windows, for example, tends to counteract the uniform smoothness of the rounded corners which are a defining feature of the concept. The desirability of corner windows as an amenity for the upper-floor units is obvious, but if included they should be studied in more detail. As shown, the

introduction of the horizontal railings interrupts the verticality of the corners, and of course, the glass itself needs to be rounded rather than faceted for the effect to work.

Museum Entrance: The revised main entrance is clearly more sympathetic to the historic structure. The new entrance canopy could perhaps be a bit stronger in its visual impact and still not detract from the historic door surround (see for example page A25), but this is probably the most difficult design challenge of the building adaptation. As details develop further, one refinement could be to retain the historic transom and perhaps even the door jambs to give scale and detail to the upper opening (even though the proportions of the historic opening are slightly changed). In the ground plane, the warping of the shallow lawn down to the entrance both helps to solve a tricky design challenge and give needed openness at the main public entry.

Side Wings: The revisions do not incorporate the Board's recommendation to avoid or minimize alterations to the auditorium windows. The visual lengthening of the main entrance is mitigated by its value as a contemporary architectural statement announcing the museum on the street, but in comparison the elongation of the auditorium windows seems just an uncomfortable stretching of the historic design. To avoid altering the street façade, a different way to add light and a lower visual horizon inside the room could be to add large contemporary openings in the less prominent west wall of the auditorium. This could balance the large opening in the east wall, give a view to the attractive side façade of the main block, and make the narrow space between the two school blocks less forbidding. The potential impact of adding windows on the west wall can best be visualized in the aerial perspective in page H09. It might also be possible to widen the "Artfood" pavilion slightly to align with any west windows, and further increase the sense of openness.

The treatment of the front café patio in front of the auditorium could be adjusted as well. It is slightly higher and projects closer to the sidewalk than the dining patio at the west end of the building (it projects farther than shown previously). The terrace layouts show ample space for seating, so it seems reasonable to pull the terrace back to the same alignment, allowing a more generous landscape buffer between café and sidewalk.

Façade Restoration: The development of the concept design continues to show great sensitivity to the historic structures, both in external composition and internal layout. With the extensive demolition and the number of alterations, however, and particularly the main entrance alteration, some compensating preservation benefit would be appropriate in the context of the "special merit" designation being sought. Detailed façade restoration plans have not yet been submitted, but one substantial benefit would be a full façade restoration of the historic centerpiece of the school, the original main block designed by noted architects Marsh and Peter. The removal of the cornice balustrade is jarringly evident in the comparison of original, current, and proposed conditions (see pages H02 and H04), and the Historic Preservation Office recommends that this be included in the scope of the project.

The Historic Preservation Office recommends that the Board reaffirm its previous comments to the Mayor's Agent, and endorse the revised concept with the following additions:

- *The concept should be further developed to avoid the lowering of auditorium windows and include the restoration of the cornice balustrade on the center block; and*
- *Further consideration should be given to the treatment of the museum wing so as to reduce impacts on the historic building.*

