

# MASTER PLAN DESIGN GUIDELINES

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Site aerial, circa 1930

## PROJECT BACKGROUND

### SITE SIGNIFICANCE

The site of the McMillan Slow Sand Filtration Plant is significant to Washington, DC, as a unique historic landmark and a major public asset. The site occupies a key location within the extended boundaries of the City of Washington as envisioned in the McMillan Commission’s Plan of 1901, and it exemplifies the influence of the City Beautiful Movement on public works at the turn of the twentieth century.

### SITE HISTORY

The McMillan Site is a 24.69-acre parcel that was once part of the larger 92-acre McMillan Reservoir and Filtration Plant complex. The property is within the McMillan Park Reservoir Historic Landmark, which was listed in the District of Columbia Inventory of Historic Sites in 1991.

Constructed between 1902 and 1905, the McMillan Slow Sand Filtration Plant was the first large-scale water purification facility in Washington, DC. Although utilitarian in purpose, the complex was designed to be enjoyed by the public as a visual landmark, and its various buildings and structures are consistent with the ideals of the City Beautiful Movement.

Between 1907 and 1911, Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. was retained to develop a landscape design to transform the larger reservoir and filtration plant site into a public park, beautifying the grounds with plantings and pedestrian paths. Open space for active recreation was located adjacent to the reservoir, and a perimeter pedestrian path was located on the site of the filtration plant.

The McMillan Site was enjoyed as a park until the 1940s, when it was permanently closed to the public during World War II. Operation of the filtration plant ended after the property was sold by the federal government to the city in 1986.

Since the sale of the property, the McMillan Site has been the subject of numerous studies and development proposals. Community members, historians, landscape architects, urban planners, engineers, and developers have spent years studying the site and determining its existing conditions and future potential.

### SITE CONTEXT

Since the opening of the filtration plant in 1905, the site’s context has evolved to include various neighborhoods, institutions, landscapes, and infrastructure, but the site itself remains a distinct and unique “island” within the city. As the city has grown up around McMillan, the site has become increasingly visible as a key convergence (or separator) of varied and diverse communities.

The dual role of the site as an individual landmark and urban nexus has informed the master planning approach for redevelopment.

### MASTER PLAN

The Master Plan for the McMillan Site culminates years of study and community outreach. In 2006, the District of Columbia issued a request for proposals with the goal of attracting a developer to partner with the city government in the creation and implementation of a Master Plan. Vision McMillan Partners (VMP) was selected to lead the effort and has since engaged a team of design and planning professionals to work with the community throughout the process. VMP has coordinated with the McMillan Advisory Group\* and conducted a series of workshops and outreach activities to ensure that plans for future use and redevelopment embody the community’s vision for the property.

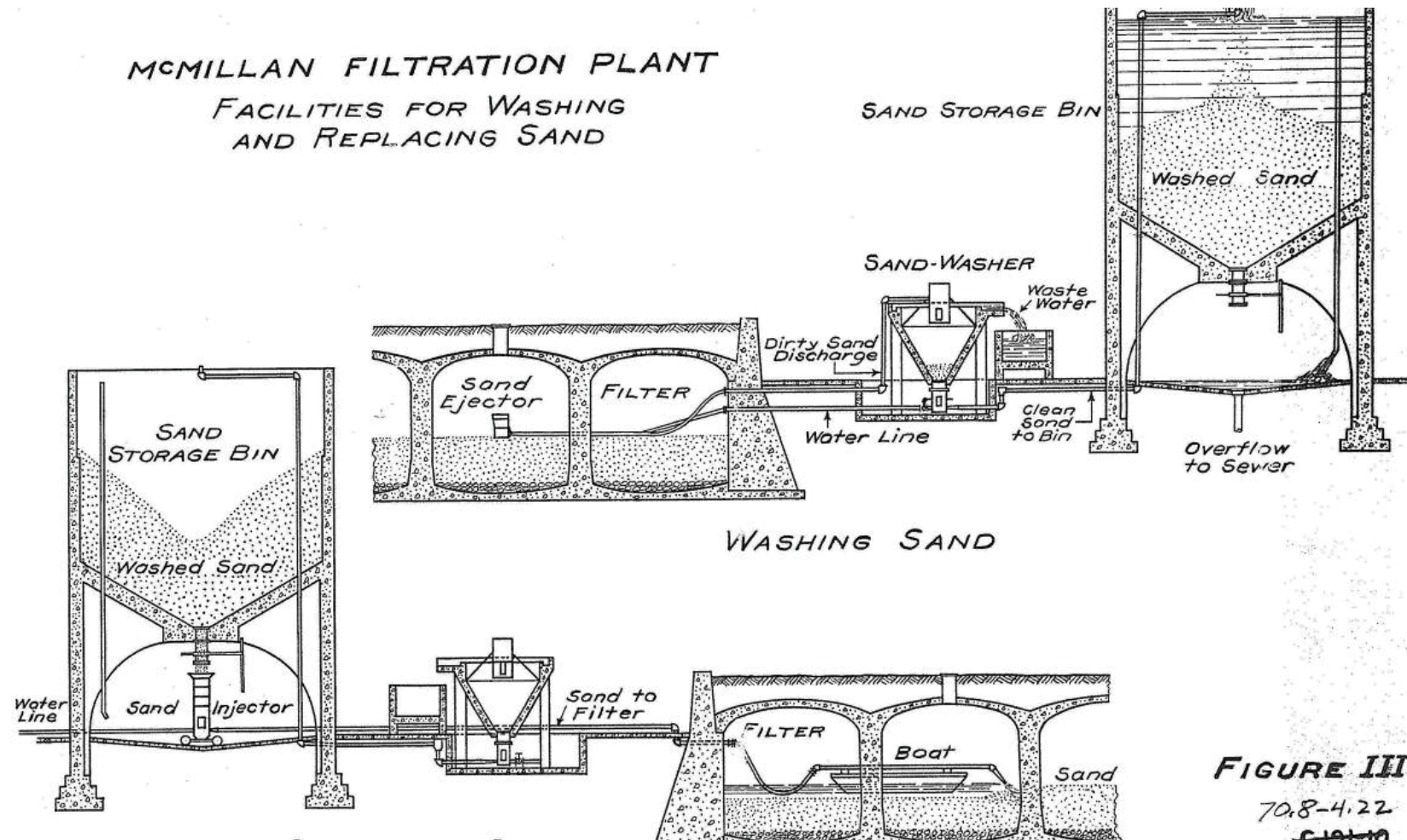
The Master Plan seeks to balance economic development with public benefit, historic preservation, and community amenities. The redevelopment will incorporate residential, office, and retail uses and a series of passive and active open spaces to support diverse recreational programming. The redevelopment will not only enhance the life of existing and new neighborhood residents, but also serve the various medical and educational institutions that play important roles in this area of the city.

The Master Plan incorporates approximately two million square feet of development and a holistic preservation strategy that will protect and enhance McMillan as a historically and culturally significant landmark in the city.

\* McMillan Advisory Group (MAG) is a group comprised of citizen stakeholders, including members of civic associations, ANCs, and other community leaders from Wards 1 and 5.



**MCMILLAN FILTRATION PLANT**  
FACILITIES FOR WASHING  
AND REPLACING SAND



Sand washing process, archival drawing, date unknown



McMillan Site, existing condition

**DESIGN GUIDELINES**

The opportunity is rare in our era to preserve and enhance a unique urban place in our nation's capital and to return a long-neglected landmark to the community. The Design Guidelines will direct the implementation of the Master Plan to ensure that this effort fulfills the potential promised by this site.

The Design Guidelines:

- Provide a framework for design that reflects community and stakeholder feedback, which was collected in a collaborative process throughout the initial phases of the project.
- Coordinate the design efforts of many architects, landscape architects, and engineers to produce a cohesive whole that is both unified and diverse.
- Ensure that all design efforts reflect and enhance the history of this important site.
- Provide clear strategies for creating a unique place that will be beautiful, memorable, urban, diverse, and inclusive.

Without being overly prescriptive about how the built environment should look in terms of style, the Design Guidelines provide strategies and direction for preservation, architecture, landscape, and urban design that will achieve a unified whole—a strong sense of place at McMillan.

These guidelines are intended to help create an urban place that will not only itself function as a new community, but will also integrate with its neighboring communities. Further, this new community will enhance the city as a whole, providing a highly visible example of creative reclamation of an abandoned site.

What is now an inaccessible void in the heart of the city will become a vital, interesting, and unique urban place. These Design Guidelines will ensure that the vision becomes reality.

**MISSION**

Vision McMillan Partners (VMP) is charged with the following mission:

*Preserve and enhance McMillan's unique sense of place.*

**VISION**

When complete, the 21st-century McMillan site will be a cohesive and distinctive mixed-use neighborhood that reflects the site's unique aesthetic, character, and history in its architecture and public space.

The redeveloped McMillan site will be clearly identifiable inside and out while at the same time connected to its surrounding neighborhoods.

Visitors and residents will be able to experience and learn about the site's critical role in public health and water filtration in the early 20th century. They will also be able to engage in healthy activities via expansive recreation opportunities, including a pool, splash fountain, play fields, and places for exercise.

These Design Guidelines will guide the development process toward fulfilling the vision—creating an urban place that gives new life to this landmark and extends the legacy of the McMillan Sand Filtration Site.

**OBJECTIVES**

Five objectives form the foundation of the Design Guidelines. Each objective is expanded with principles, strategies, and precedents in the sections that follow.



## DESIGN GUIDELINES

## OBJECTIVE ONE

Preserve the site as a distinct landmark, creating a cohesive built environment.



This objective addresses:

- a. External Experience
- b. Internal Experience
- c. The "Plinth"
- d. Edges
- e. Entryways
- f. Streetscape

## A. EXTERNAL EXPERIENCE

At street level, on foot, bicycle or in a vehicle, the viewer should acquire a sense of *the unique totality of the place*, signaled by key distinguishing elements including preserved historic structures, topography, plant material, lighting, and streetscape.

## B. INTERNAL EXPERIENCE

Inside the site, the viewer should experience *a consistent and unique environment* supported by the elements of the place: historic structures, new buildings, and landscape features, as well as pathways, lighting, signage, streetscape, and public art. The environment should be cohesive yet diverse. Views through and from the site should be preserved and enhanced, with special consideration for the view south to the Capitol.

## C. THE "PLINTH"

The constructed plain or plinth—a series of flat, grass-covered surfaces that cover the roof structure of the underground filter beds—is a defining element of this landmark. *The plinth should be memorialized in the site design* to retain the unique sense of place it created. The site design should incorporate contiguous sections spanning the length and/or width of the site at the 170-foot elevation of the historic plinth.

## D. EDGES

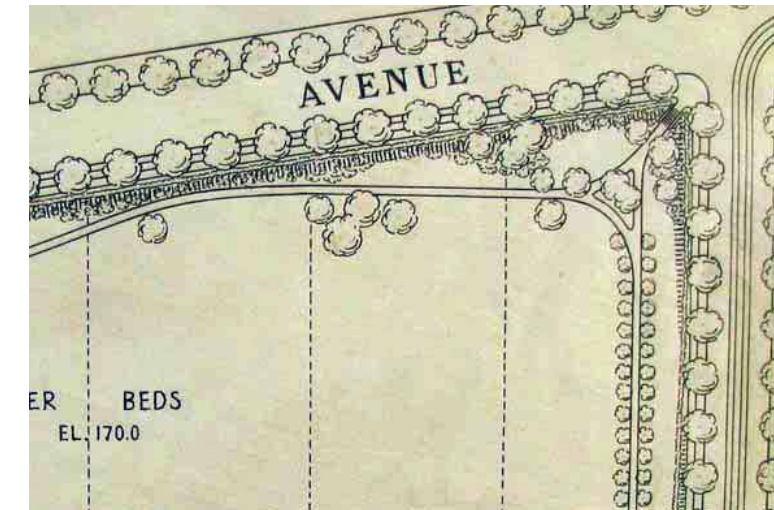
The site's perimeter should retain *a clear and distinctive edge that visually communicates a sense of the place as a whole* and sets it apart from the surroundings. The re-creation of the Olmsted Walk and its associated landscape should clearly define the perimeter. The constructed "berms" that currently edge the site, both "positive" (sloping up from the street) and "negative" (sloping down from the street), should be conceptually integrated and/or referenced in the new site design, without compromising pedestrian and vehicular access, views, and public safety.

## E. ENTRYWAYS

Major entrance points should welcome people arriving at the site. These entryways should have a consistent and celebratory character, and should be scaled appropriately for the site and immediate context. When entering the site through these entryways, a sense of threshold and arrival at a unique place should be experienced.

## F. STREETSCAPE

Streetscape is one of the most effective ways to create a cohesive urban environment. The streetscape at McMillan should set this place apart from its surroundings, celebrating its unique character. Elements of streetscape design include: sidewalks, crosswalks, and street paving; trees, tree boxes, and other bio-retention basins; street lamps, furniture, and trash cans. The design of these elements should be informed by the site's historic conditions.



Detail, Olmsted, Jr. plan, circa 1911



Corner stair, existing condition

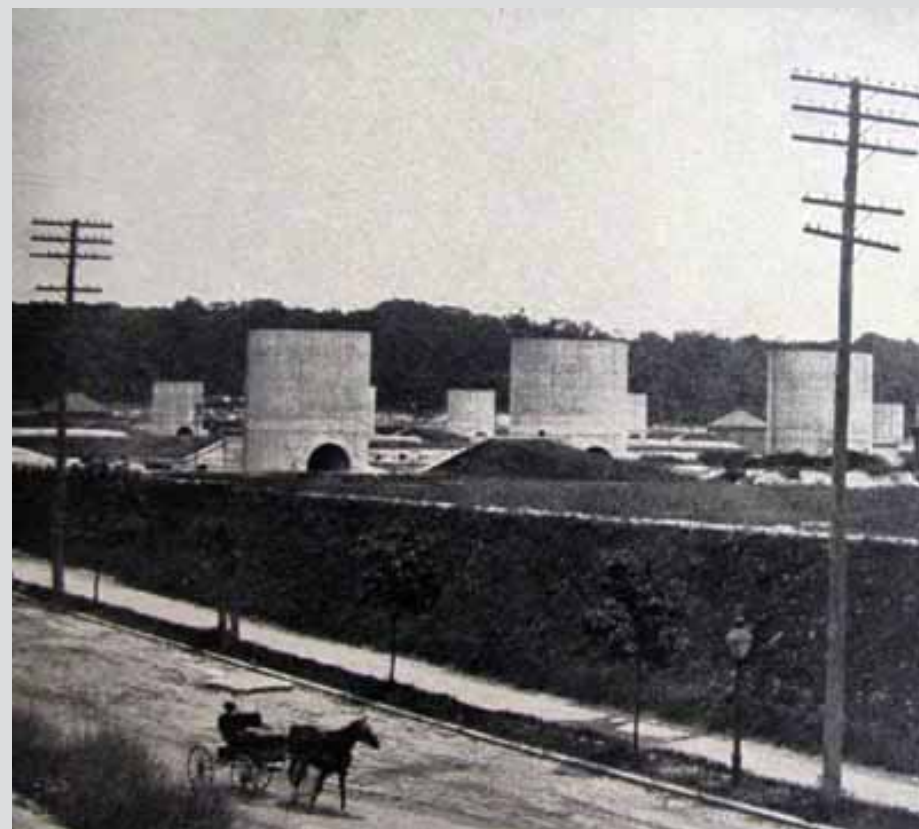


Perimeter path, circa 1946



OBJECTIVE TWO

Preserve and celebrate the historic significance of the site.



This objective addresses:

- a. People
- b. Place
- c. Purpose

A. PEOPLE

Honor the landmark's association with Senator James McMillan and landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr.

B. PLACE

Tell the story of the McMillan Sand Filtration Site through interpretive programming. *Reveal and interpret the site's character, history, and function* in the context of the city's growth in the early twentieth century.

C. PURPOSE

Incorporate the *theme of water* throughout the site, considering the act of filtering water and the role of sand in the process.

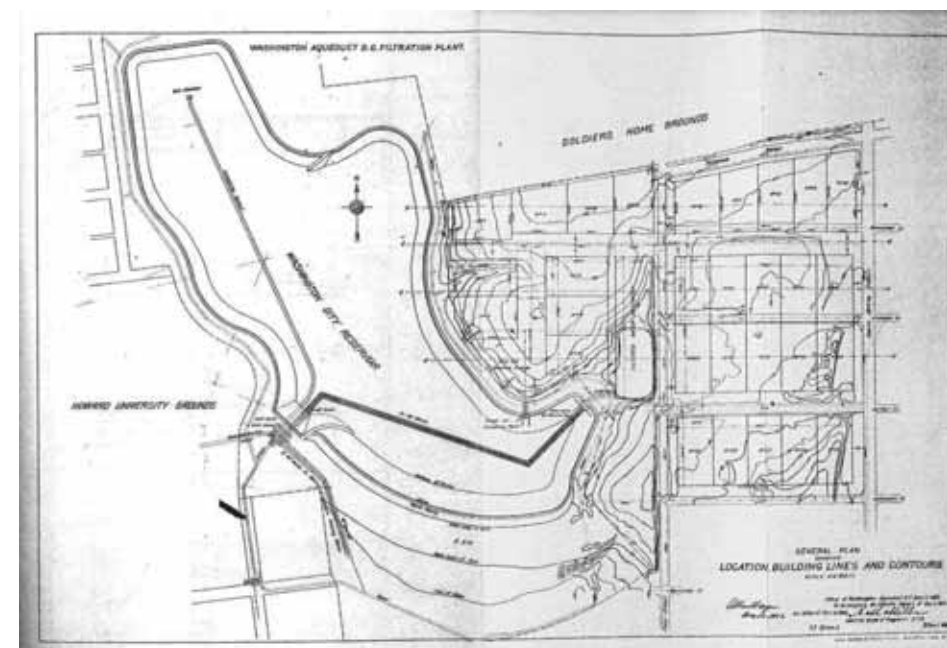
- i. Create distinctive water elements throughout the site that can be actively and passively experienced; and
- ii. Create a state-of-the-art stormwater management system on site to capture, retain, and reuse stormwater as extensively as possible, exposing the mechanics of water filtration in the stormwater management system, and incorporating bio-retention systems into the landscape design.



Sen. James McMillan



Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr.



Overall site plan for reservoir and filtration plan, circa 1902



PRECEDENT: Paddington Reservoir Gardens, Sydney (Tonkin Zulaikha Greer Architects)



# DESIGN GUIDELINES

## OBJECTIVE THREE

Preserve, restore, and adapt the site's characteristic historic resources. Retain sufficient historic integrity of the landmark to convey its significance to the history of public works, water purification, and landscape architecture.



This objective addresses:

- a. Built Resources
- b. Landscape Resources

## A. BUILT RESOURCES

Preserve and allow for future adaptive reuse of existing above- and below-ground historic built resources. Ensure that the treatment of retained historic resources is consistent with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties. Integrate these resources into the site design and program.

- i. Retain below-ground spaces sufficiently sized to preserve the expansiveness and distinctive repetitive structure of the *filter beds*. Where appropriate, associated portals and entrance ramps should be retained as primary access points to underground space.
- ii. Preserve and adapt both *service courts* and the buildings within them.
- iii. *Manholes and manhole covers* associated with preserved filter beds should be preserved with any necessary modifications for public safety. Manhole covers associated with demolished filter beds should be adaptively reused on the site.
- iv. Relocate and restore *the historic McMillan Fountain* in a publicly accessible, highly visible location on the site.

## B. LANDSCAPE RESOURCES

Integrate preservation and adaptive reuse of historic resources into the design of open spaces.

- i. Preserve the site's clear *tripartite organization and trapezoidal footprint*. The site design should use simple geometries that relate to the original site layout.
- ii. Convey a sense of the *unique man-made topography of the landmark*. Physical and/or interpretive evidence of the site's defining topographic features (underground filter beds, service court level, raised plain/plinth) should be provided at key locations.
- iii. Recall aspects of Olmsted, Jr.'s *original landscape design* in the landscape and park design for the site.
  - 1. Incorporate a perimeter pedestrian path that recreates or interprets the historic "Olmsted Walk."
  - 2. Reconstruct corner stairs where appropriate.
  - 3. Incorporate Olmsted's original planting lists in the landscape palette for the site. Substitute native, pest-resistant, and/or drought-resistant species where appropriate.



Filter bed ramp, existing condition



Manhole opening, existing condition



Perimeter walk and "plinth," circa 1910



Select trees from Olmsted's plan



OBJECTIVE FOUR

Create a cohesive and accessible urban community that connects to the surrounding neighborhoods.



This objective addresses:

- a. Permeability
- b. Approachability
- c. Walkability
- d. Land Use & Building Massing

A. PERMEABILITY

Increase access to and permeability of the site by adding through streets and paths.

B. APPROACHABILITY

Use edges, streetscape, and public spaces to form a *distinct and memorable place that is inviting, not walled-off or exclusive*, in character.

C. WALKABILITY

Develop a *superior pedestrian environment* with public parks and open spaces, great streets with retail, a grocery store, and restaurants, and access to multiple transit modes.

D. LAND USE & BUILDING MASSING

Select and locate land uses to promote an *economically thriving, diverse, and safe mixed-use urban community*. Relate building massing to the surrounding neighborhoods.



PRECEDENT: City Garden, St. Louis (Nelson Byrd Woltz)



PRECEDENT: City Garden, St. Louis (Nelson Byrd Woltz)



PRECEDENT: Thriving mixed-use streets, Washington, DC



## DESIGN GUIDELINES

## OBJECTIVE FIVE

Design landscape and architecture that reinforces McMillan's unique sense of place and complements historic resources.



This objective addresses:

- a. Respect for Historic Elements
- b. Cohesion
- c. Water & Health
- d. Industry
- e. Repurposing Found Materials

## A. RESPECT FOR HISTORIC ELEMENTS

Give historic resources pride of place through respectful and compatible new landscape and architecture.

- i. *The service courts comprise the iconic urban framework of the site. All new landscape and architecture adjacent to the service courts should reinforce their role as character-defining urban corridors.*
- ii. *The cylindrical sand storage bins are the iconic above-ground structures of the site. The forms, proportions, materials, and colors of new buildings should be distinct from but complementary to the sand storage bins.*
- iii. *The regulator houses and filter bed portals, characterized by their human scale, varied materials, and fine architectural details, contrast with and complement the monolithic sand storage bins. New architecture on the ground/base levels facing the service courts should likewise relate to the human scale and provide visual contrast with the sand bins.*
- iv. *Restored, adapted, or recreated filter beds should retain and enhance the unique spatial character and repetitive structure of the below-grade cells.*

## B. COHESION

Create a sense of cohesion in the design of landscape and architecture.

- i. New landscape and architecture should be *additions that enhance the landmark*. As such, they should reference the site's history and heighten the experience of the site.
- ii. Landscape and architecture should reinforce the site's *unified identity along the perimeter*.
- iii. Landscape and architecture should employ *a consistent and limited palette* of forms, geometries, rhythms, materials, and colors that relates to the site's historic resources.
  - a. *Paving patterns, materials, and colors, lighting, street furniture, and other streetscape elements should reference and, where appropriate, replicate the historic site palette. Clear visual distinction should be made between restored/recreated historic elements (service courts, the Olmsted walk, corner stairs) and new elements (gardens, parks, open spaces, paths, and streets that did not exist in the original plan).*
  - b. *Overall building forms and geometries should be rational and straightforward to reflect the site's logical organization and the historic structures' formal simplicity. Pronounced eaves, gables, cornices, and other similar projecting architectural features are discouraged. However, systematic layering and variation of façade elements is appropriate and encouraged.*

## C. WATER &amp; HEALTH

Where appropriate, incorporate the theme of water capture and filtration in new buildings, as functional and/or aesthetic design elements.

## D. INDUSTRY

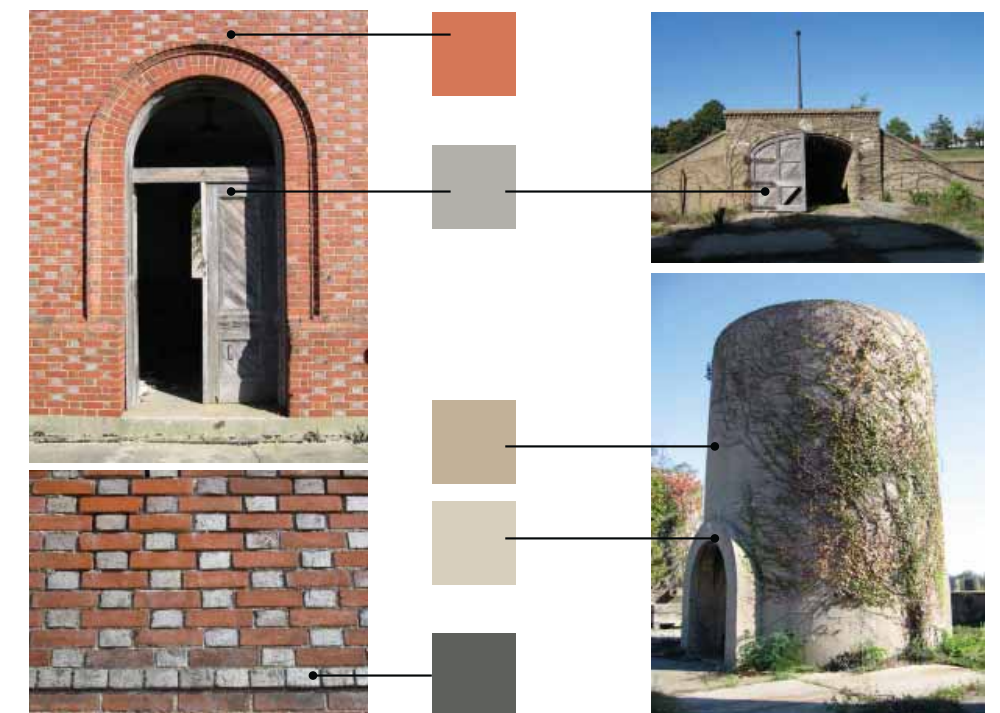
Integrate materials that recall the industrial nature of historic resources on the site.

## E. REPURPOSING FOUND MATERIALS

Integrate materials found on site or resulting from demolition into new components of the landscape and architecture.



Grids, existing



Material and color palette, existing



## A. COHESION GUIDELINES

There are four architectural types that make up the McMillan project. A public community center, row houses, mixed use medical office buildings, and mixed use multi-family buildings. It is a stated goal to have all these building types look like they belong together, while at the same time keeping the project in total looking like a place apart from the rest of the city. The buildings need to both look right together and to draw a distinct difference with the architecture that surrounds them - to keep McMillan looking like the unique and special precinct it has always been.

- i. *There must be a unified palette that all the buildings adhere to*
- ii. *The materials used by the architects will express a sense of both the raw qualities found in the sand bins and filtration beds with the refined qualities found in the regulator house.*
- iii. *The color and orientation of the building fenestration will be similar. Dark frames oriented vertically is strongly suggested.*
- iv. *All buildings will employ simple geometries and massing strategies.*
- v. *The row houses will be composed as single facades along the length of each grouping.*
- vi. *The North Service Court will have the following guidelines that are specific to it:*
  - a. *Each building will have a podium expressed similarly to the other buildings that will employ a concrete color that recalls the historic North Service Court wall.*
  - b. *Each building will set back off this podium between 15 and 30 feet, and have a usable terrace level. Plantings overhanging this wall are encouraged.*
  - c. *The podium will have a canted wall as the original service court wall employed. A superficial pattern recalling the silos is also encouraged.*
  - d. *Storefronts design guidelines will be provided in the following section.*

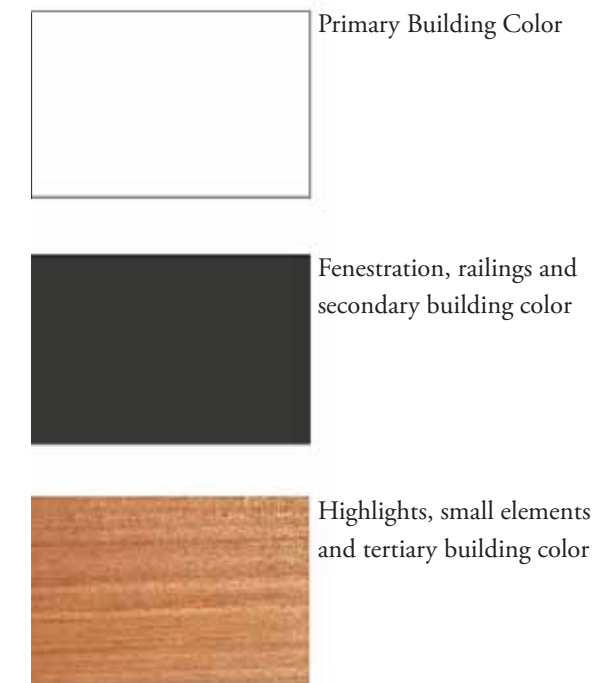


## B. INFLUENTIAL IMAGES

These images served as sources of design ideas for the McMillan architectural cohesion guidelines.

- i. *Massing is simple and aligned with property lines*
- ii. *Simple charcoal & white color palette*
- iii. *Generally solid walls with vertical punched openings*
- iv. *Row houses are composed as single building elevations*

## C. COLOR PALETTE





## STOREFRONT DESIGN GUIDELINES

## STOREFRONT DESIGN GUIDELINES

In addition to the creation of a vibrant and vital retail environment, the storefronts along the North Service Corridor need to satisfy two very important conditions:

- The respectful preservation of the Genus Loci and sense of place that the McMillan site has today
- The preservation of the identity of the first and future retail tenants to locate along the North Service Court.



## A. INTRODUCTION

To ensure these conditions are met, a balance must be struck between the potentially competing interests.

- The need to express individual retail identities with the over-arching need to preserve the sense of McMillan's identity and expression along the North Service Court as a singular place.*
- There will be a common spatial and material expression on both the north and south sides of the street as well as guidelines for contrasting with those rules to meet these ends.*

## B. COLOR (specifics TBD with a color consultant)

- The "Zero Plane" **will match material, material expression and color on both sides of the street.** The color should be derived from the existing color palette of the McMillan site
- Fenestration color – Dark charcoal frames, bay windows, storefronts, etc. are encouraged, though a fair amount of design freedom shall be allowed in selecting the colors for storefront fenestration. A wide ranging palette will be suggested by the color consultant - specifics TBD
- Canopy colors shall be selected from the color consultant's palette
- Balconies, railings, etc shall be dark charcoal - Specifics TBD
- All color and material samples will be submitted to EEK for approval to ensure cohesion across all building types.

## C. THE ZERO PLANE

The "Zero Plane" is defined as the vertical surface that defines the edges of the North Service Court, and acts as the wall of the building base, defined in the general guidelines as being from 18'-20' in height. Storefronts can fit within an opening in the the base, stand out from the base, and in some instances span above an opening in the base.

- The zero plane must be legible on all sides of a given storefront
- Storefronts shall always leave a minimum of 3' of "zero plane" above the storefront so it reads across the top of all retail bays up and down the NSC.
- The storefronts may be confined to a single punched opening with the lines of

structure reading on either side, or may extend in front of structural bays to make varying sizes of frontage, and allowing more freedom to the storefront designer

- Storefronts may stand out from the zero plane up to 30".
- Storefronts may carve away from the zero plane to a desired depth, however some portion of the storefront must be flush with, or stand out from, the "zero plane".

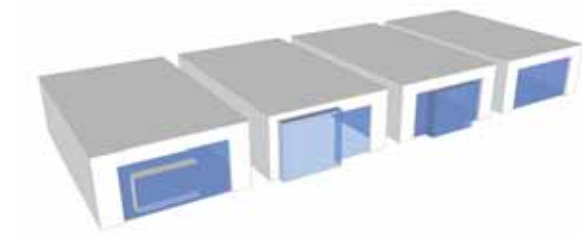




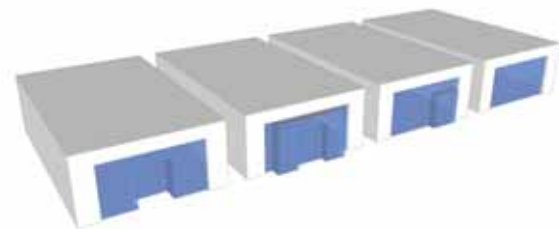
D. MASSING GUIDELINES

The storefronts along the North Service Court will adhere to these general massing guidelines:

- i. No storefront will be entirely suppressed into the mass of the Zero Plane - some part of the storefront must at least be flush with this plane.
- ii. The protrusion of the storefront shall be between 0" and 30" in depth
- iii. All storefront protrusions will be between 10' and 15' in height. Spanning above opening is also allowed.
- iv. Flush or recessed transoms, doors or louvers are allowed
- v. The Zero Plane will be between 18' and 20' in height, and must never be less than 4' along the top of the storefronts
- vi. There need be no relationship between the structure of the building and the glass of the storefront; there may be if one is desired



Possible storefront configurations



Possible storefront configurations



E. SIGNAGE GUIDELINES

Signage will conform to these general guidelines and fit within the ranges in the graphic provided:

- i. Signs may be placed on the glass of the storefront, the door, or the transom
- ii. Signs may be placed on a canopy, attached as pin letters or painted on the Zero Plane
- iii. Metal or wood blade signs may be used
- iv. Lights may be used within their designated zone
- v. Plastic back-lit signs are not allowed, large three dimensional objects are discouraged



Graphic Signage and Zero Plane Guidelines



