

STAFF RECOMMENDATION



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NCPC File No. 7233

DUNBAR SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL SCHOOL BUILDING REPLACEMENT

1301 New Jersey Avenue, NW
Washington, DC

Submitted by the District of Columbia Office of Public Education Facilities Modernization

August 25, 2011

Abstract

The District of Columbia Office of Public Education Facilities Modernization has submitted preliminary and final site and building plans for a new Dunbar Senior High School located at 1301 New Jersey Avenue NW, Washington, DC. The new facility would replace the existing six-story school. The new school will be a four-story, 264,000 gross square foot facility and will house up to 1,110 students and approximately 150 faculty and staff. The building will have a four-story academic wing and a three-story administrative wing which will contain the gym, a theater, a pool, and a media center. The design of the building and site layout allow for the re-opening of O Street, NW, a historic street of the L'Enfant Plan.

Commission Action Requested by Applicant

Approval of preliminary and final site and building plans pursuant to 40 U.S.C. § 8722(b)(1) and (e)

Executive Director's Recommendation

The Commission:

Approves the preliminary and final site and building plans for Dunbar Senior High School located at 1301 New Jersey Avenue, NW, Washington DC, as shown on NCPC Map File No. 31.20(38.00)43403.

Notes that with the construction of the new school building a portion of O Street, NW will be re-opened.

Notes that the District of Columbia State Historic Preservation Officer has requested that if funding cannot be identified to open the remaining section of O Street, NW between 1st and 3rd

Streets, NW within one year of the Commission's approval, all relevant parties consult to identify possible solutions.

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PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Site

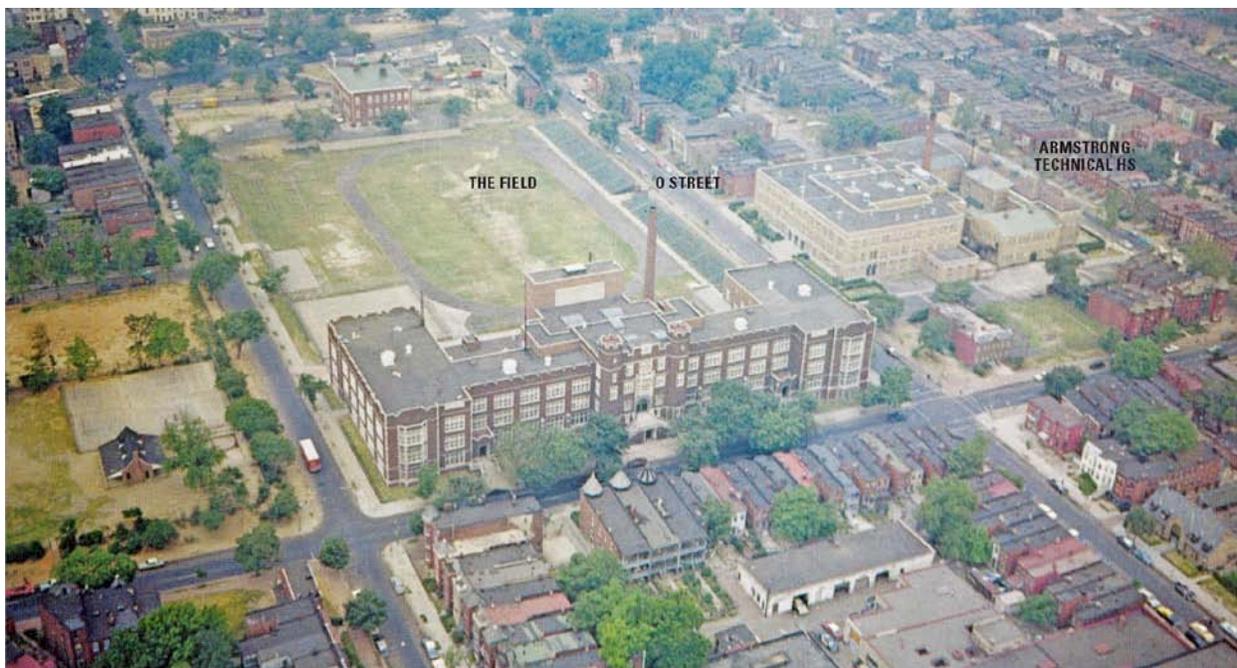
Dunbar Senior High School is located at 1301 New Jersey Avenue in Northwest, Washington, DC. The site is bound by New Jersey Avenue, NW on the west, P Street, NW on the north, 1st Street, NW on the east, and N Street, NW on the south. The existing building fronts on New Jersey Avenue and was built on top of the O Street right-of-way in 1977. The O Street right-of-way was closed in order for the existing school to be built. The track and athletic field are located adjacent to N Street in the southeastern portion of the site. The former Armstrong Manual Training School (currently a DC charter school) is located northeast of the site and the Dunbar Recreation Center is located to the southeast of the site. The site is primarily surrounded by residential properties consisting of rowhomes and flats.



Existing site plan of Dunbar Senior High School

Background

In 1917, the first school opened on the site. The building was designed in a Collegiate Gothic style, similar to Eastern and Cardozo Senior High Schools. The 1917 building was a four-story brick building that fronted 1st Street, between N and O Streets.



The original school constructed in 1917 fronted on 1st Street NW between O Street NW and N Street NW

In 1973, the Commission approved the final site and building plans for the Dunbar Senior High School replacement facility and subsequently recommended favorably on the closing of O Street. The closing of O Street allowed for the school to be built over the vacated right-of-way. This is the school that currently occupies the site, and is a six-story, 330,000 square foot facility designed to accommodate 2,400 students.

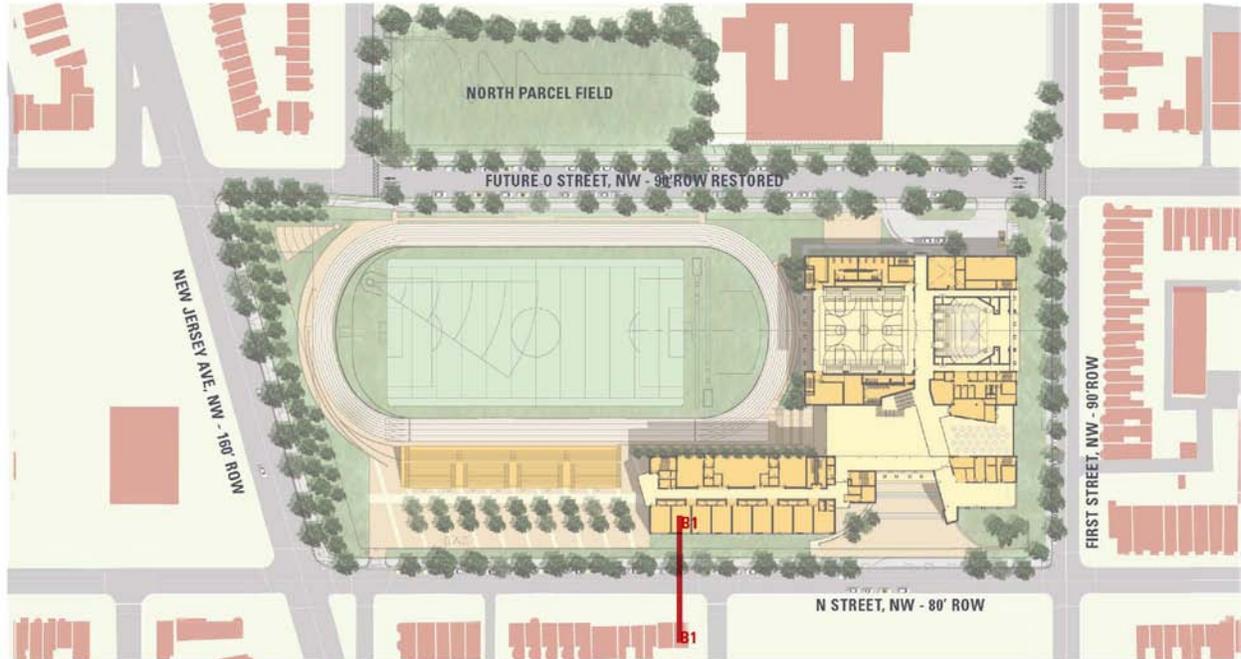


The existing Dunbar Senior High School was built over the O Street NW right-of-way in 1977

Proposal

The District of Columbia Office of Public Education Facilities Modernization (OPEFM) is proposing to demolish the existing Dunbar Senior High School and rebuild a school on the site. The new building will be built on the east side of the site along 1st Street between N Street and

the former O Street right-of-way. This orientation is based on the siting of the 1917 school building that was demolished in the 1970s. The new building will be approximately 264,000 square feet and will house 1,110 students and approximately 150 faculty and staff. A four-story academic wing and a three-story commons were designed in reference to the mass and scale of the 1917 school and will provide classrooms, labs, gym, theater, pool, media center, and administrative space. Also in reference to the 1917 school, the major programmatic components of the new school are organized around a central place or Armory.

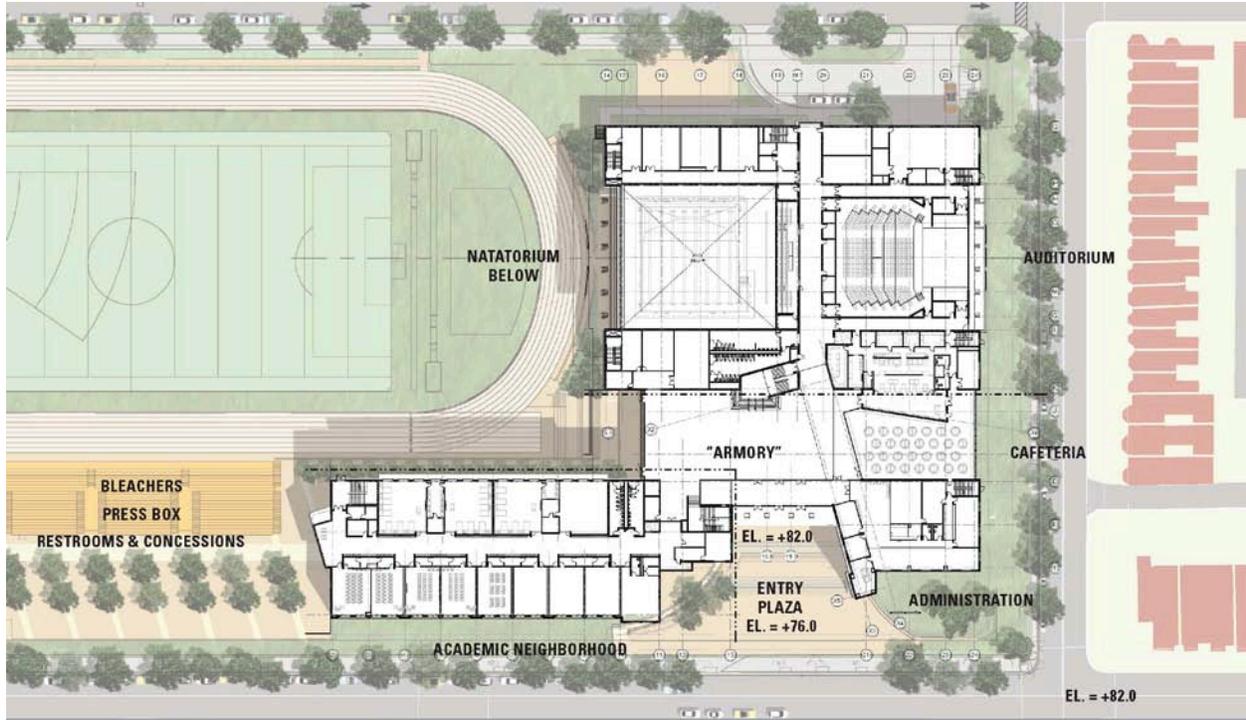


Site Plan for proposed Dunbar Senior High School indicating the opening of O Street NW

The main entrance to the school would be from N Street and lead directly to the Armory. A brick tower element at the corner of the brick and glass façade of the administration wing would define the entrance to the Armory. This area of the building and its amenities will be accessible to the public after school hours. The entry off of N Street would provide access to the academic classrooms.



The design of the new Dunbar Senior High School entry plaza off of N Street NW references the tower elements of the original 1917 school



First floor plan of the new Dunbar Senior High School is organized around a central Armory

The section of the school along 1st Street NW would contain functions other than classroom space. The first floor would contain the Armory, cafeteria, auditorium, and administrative space. The natatorium would be located in the basement and the second floor would be open to below with the exception of the gym.

The academic wing or classroom space would be aligned along the N Street section of the building and occupy a little less than half the block. Primarily brick and glass with stone accents along the windows and ground floor, the four-story building would house 14 labs and 36 classrooms. This section of the building would be approximately 65 feet tall. In order to accommodate this building height the District of Columbia Office of Planning proposed and the Zoning Commission has taken a proposed action to approve an amendment to the zoning map of the District of Columbia that would change the zoning from R-4 to R-5-B.



Rendering of proposed new Dunbar Senior High School with academic wing to the left along N Street NW, the entry plaza at the center, and the administrative wing to the right with the tower on the corner

Along with the building, the existing stadium will be replaced by an artificial turf field on axis with the new gymnasium. This field will accommodate soccer, football, and track and field events. A rubberized track would encircle the field and an Athletic Entry Plaza directly west of the academic wing and adjacent to N Street would provide access to the field. Bleachers accommodating 2,000 people would be installed south of the track and a press box would sit atop the bleachers, with restrooms and concessions below. Behind the western portion of the track, a low retaining wall up to 30 inches in height would be constructed to mitigate the grade difference between New Jersey Avenue and the track. A natural grass field will be located to the north of O Street.



Rendering of proposed field and track from O and 3rd Streets NW

New landscaping will be installed throughout the site including street trees along all public roads at the site's boundaries. Trees will be placed along New Jersey Avenue and the northeast corner of the athletic field along O Street. Grass areas would cover the eastern, western, and southern borders of the site. An eight-foot wrought iron fence would be installed and run along N Street from the western edge of the academic wing to approximately the 3rd Street NW right-of-way and connect to the northwest corner of the site near New Jersey Avenue and O Street. The fence would continue down the length of O Street and end at the Armory. Entrances would be located at N Street, O Street near the intersection of 3rd Street and near the eastern portion of the track, and near the Armory. Similar wrought iron fencing would surround the natural grass field located north of O Street.

By demolishing the 1977 school and re-orienting the building as it was placed in 1917 on the site, there is an opportunity to reopen O Street NW. The current project identifies that a section of O Street between 1st and 3rd Streets will be reopened to vehicular and pedestrian traffic. Primarily this section of O Street will be used to provide access to the back of the high school with a drop off that will be shared with the charter school housed within the former Armstrong High School. The re-establishment of this section of O Street will provide a functional and visual connection of a L'Enfant Street that was previously disrupted by the construction of the school in the 1970s. In addition, an opportunity to reopen the remaining section of O Street for vehicular and pedestrian traffic will be executed when funding is identified. The District of Columbia

Office of Planning (DCOP), District Department of Transportation (DDOT), and OPEFM will work together to identify funds and coordinate the opening of the remainder of O Street.

PROJECT ANALYSIS

Executive Summary

Staff finds the proposed building and site plans to be compatible with the surrounding area with regard to scale, massing, materials, and details. The re-opening of a portion of O Street, NW meets the policies in the Preservation and Historic Features Element of the *Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital* in that it will reestablish part of a historic L'Enfant Plan street. In addition, the new design and site layout allow for the building to be used by the community while school is not in session, thereby allowing for a mix of uses and events on the site.

O Street NW and Zoning Regulations

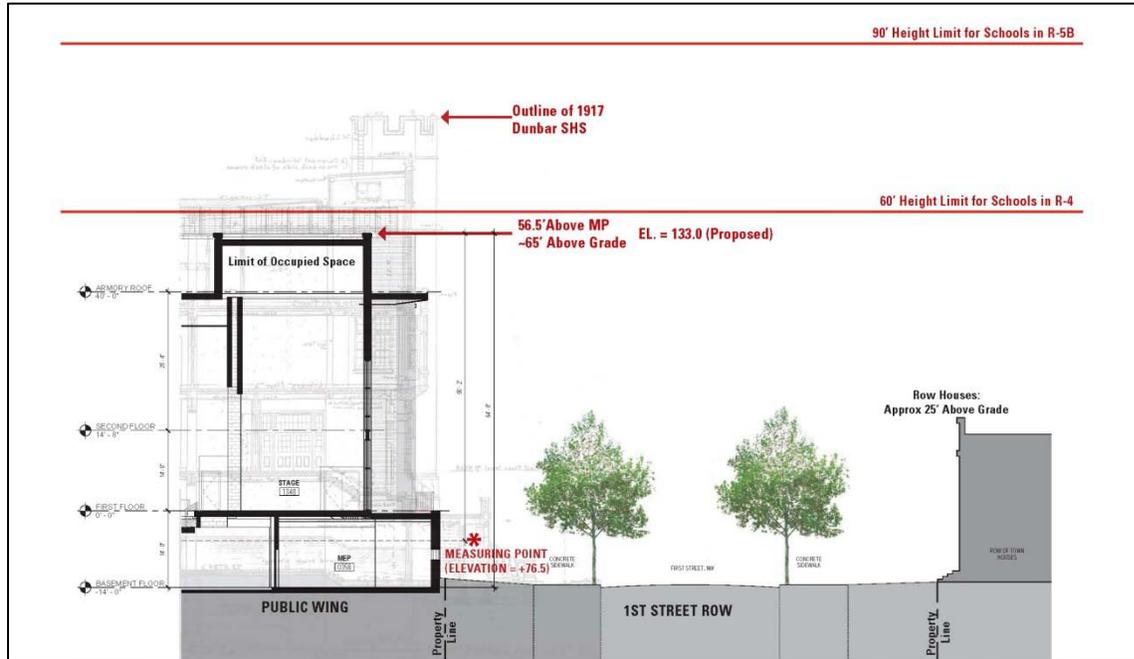
The new Dunbar Senior High School will allow for O Street NW to be re-opened to vehicular and pedestrian traffic. This is a significant improvement over the existing conditions and will help restore a street that is a part of the historic L'Enfant Plan. While funding still needs to be identified in order to re-construct the entire section of O Street between 1st and 3rd Streets, all parties including DCOP, DDOT, and OPEFM are committed to opening the street and restoring the city grid. In addition, the District of Columbia State Historic Preservation Officer requested that if no resolution to opening the remaining section of O Street is identified within one year of the Commission's approval, all relevant parties (DCOP, DDOT, OPEFM, NCPC, and DC SHPO) shall consult to identify possible solutions.

With the re-opening of O Street, the site will not be able to satisfy the minimum off-street parking and loading requirements as required under the District of Columbia Zoning Regulations. The number of parking spaces available once O Street is re-opened will be approximately 54 spaces with the possibility of an additional 11 spaces. DCOP has proposed and the Zoning Commission has taken a proposed action to approve a variance for the reduction in the required number of off-street parking spaces. Staff is supportive of this variance as the site is within a 15 minute walk of two Metrorail stations and within a ½ mile of 15 Metrobus stops. In addition, the parking requirement is largely driven by the size of the gymnasium, which would not be utilized at full capacity on a regular basis. The reduction in off-street parking also allows for a reduction in impervious surfaces on the site and the school will gain an auxiliary playing field.

Along with the opening of O Street, the design and site layout for the new school also allows for the viewshed along 3rd Street to be re-opened. This view was blocked in the 1970s when the existing school was built. No trees will be planted in this viewshed and this will contribute to improving upon the views and vistas that were a critical component of the L'Enfant Plan.

Furthermore, DCOP also proposed and the Zoning Commission has taken a proposed action to approve an amendment to the zoning map of the District of Columbia that would change the zoning from R-4 to R-5-B. An R-4 zone allows for a school height of 60 feet while an R-5-B zone allows for a school height of 90 feet. Due to industry standards to have a classroom ceiling height of 11 to 12 feet, each floor of the new school is approximately 14.8 feet, causing the

academic wing of the building to have an occupied space height of 65 feet above grade. Staff evaluated the height against the Height of Buildings Act and given the width of N Street, NW (80 feet) and 1st Street, NW (90 feet) the proposed building height would conform to the Act's requirements.



The new Dunbar Senior High School will be 65 feet at its tallest point and within the limits allowed by the R-5-B zone

CONFORMANCE

Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital

Staff has determined that the proposed project is not inconsistent with the *Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital*. The removal of the existing building from the O Street, NW right-of-way and the opening of the street conforms to the goals and policies of the Preservation and Historic Features Element. The project also conforms to the goals and policies of the Park and Open Space and the Federal Environment Elements.

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

Due to the project's location within the Central Area, NCPC has approval authority and therefore, NCPC has an independent responsibility to satisfy the requirements of NEPA. OPEFM completed an Environmental Impact Screening Form (EISF) and the District of Columbia Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs issued a letter on July 13, 2011 stating the proposed project is not likely to have a substantial environmental impact, and submission of an Environmental Impact Statement is not required. Therefore, based on a review of the information provided by OPEFM, staff has determined that the proposed action meets the criteria of NCPC's Categorical Exclusion 8(C)8.

National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA)

Due to NCPC's approval role over the project, NCPC has independent review responsibilities under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. NCPC completed consultation with the District of Columbia State Historic Preservation Officer (DC SHPO) and determined the proposed project would have no adverse effects to historic properties. The DC SHPO concurred with this determination provided that trees which were originally proposed for planting in the 3rd Street viewshed south of O Street be eliminated. These trees have been eliminated from the project. In addition, the DC SHPO expressed concern regarding the reopening of O Street as only a portion of the street will be reopened when the project is implemented with the remaining section to be opened when funding is identified. The DC SHPO recommended that if funding cannot be identified within one year that all relevant parties (OPEFM, the District of Columbia Office of Planning, the District Department of Transportation, and NCPC) consult with the DC SHPO to identify possible solutions.

CONSULTATION

Coordinating Committee

The Coordinating Committee reviewed the proposal on April 13, 2011 and June 15, 2011, and forwarded the proposal to the Commission with the statement that the project has been coordinated with all participating agencies. The participating agencies were NCPC; the General Services Administration; the National Park Service; the District of Columbia Office of Planning; and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority.

Commission of Fine Arts

At its June 16, 2011 meeting, the Commission of Fine Arts (CFA) reviewed and approved the revised concept design for new Dunbar Senior High School. CFA supported the re-opening of O Street NW and the addition of an auxiliary field on the north side of the site. CFA also recommended consideration of solar shading on the building particularly on the south-facing media center which may make extensive use of computer screens.