
**WOODROW WILSON SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL
MODERNIZATION**

3950 Chesapeake Street, NW
Washington, DC

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

Delegated Action of the Executive Director

April 30, 2010

Pursuant to delegations of authority adopted by the Commission on October 3, 1996 and 40 U.S.C. § 8722(b)(1), I approve the preliminary and final site and building plans for the modernization of Woodrow Wilson Senior High School in Washington, DC, as shown on NCPC Map File No. 73.00(38.00)42845.

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The District of Columbia Office of Public Education Facilities Modernization has requested approval of preliminary and final site and building plans for the modernization of Woodrow Wilson High School, including the renovation of the school buildings (approximately 242,000 square feet) and the construction of approximately 71,000 additional square feet. The renovated Wilson Aquatic Center has already reopened.

Wilson High School is the largest public high school in the District of Columbia and is a prominent landmark in Tenleytown and Ward 3. Recently designated by the District of Columbia Historic Preservation Review Board to the D.C. Inventory of Historic Sites and nominated for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, the school was designed and built from 1932 to 1935. Prominent Washington architects of the era contributed to the school: Albert Harris, the Municipal Architect; Frederick V. Murphy, the founder of Catholic University's Department of Architecture; Edward W. Donn, a restoration architect formerly of Wood, Donn, and Deming; and Nathan C. Wyeth, Harris's successor as Municipal Architect. The U.S. Commission of Fine Arts played a significant role in the site planning and design of the school, encouraging the five-part Palladian plan enjoying a return to popularity during the Colonial Revival era, as well as architectural features characteristic of the style such as brick facades laid in Flemish bond, prominent round-arched windows, hipped roofs, and a cupola.

The school was built in a rapidly suburbanizing part of the District and to alleviate school overcrowding in more-developed parts of the city, especially at Western High School in

Georgetown (now Duke Ellington School for the Arts). The excellence of the design and construction indicate the commitment on the part of the federal government and city leaders to high-quality public buildings in the nation's capital, even during the Great Depression.

The goals for the current renovation include revitalizing the underutilized interior courtyard of the main academic block, improving the appearance and function of the 1970s gymnasium, improving the school's cafeteria, and providing additional facilities to achieve state-of-the-art athletics and arts complexes. The campus's buildings will be reprogrammed for updated and expanded uses, and the central building will be redesigned with a glass-roofed atrium and a recognizable new entrance on the "rear" façade facing the corner of Fort Drive and Chesapeake Street, NW. The entire campus will be made more accessible, with building corridors on three levels rather than a single level. The exterior walls of the curving, arcaded corridors will be preserved with compatible new construction above and behind them to provide additional circulation and accessibility. New performing and visual arts spaces, new sports and gymnasium facilities, and new gathering and dining spaces will enhance both the function and appearance of the school campus in its entirety, without sacrificing its historic character and exterior architectural features. Construction is scheduled to be completed in time for the fall 2012 school year.

The final plans have been reviewed and approved by the District of Columbia Historic Preservation Review Board and by the Commission of Fine Arts. The proposal is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan, especially the Historic Preservation and Features Element. Fort Reno is located across Chesapeake Street, NW from Wilson High School; its historic character will not be affected by the proposed modernization. The project was coordinated by all agencies attending the April 14, 2010 Coordinating Committee meeting. As the school's location is not in the Central Area, the Commission's role is advisory and therefore does not include an independent responsibility to carry out the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act and the National Historic Preservation Act.

I commend the District of Columbia Office of Public Education Facilities Modernization for a thoughtful proposal to modernize Woodrow Wilson Senior High School while preserving its landmark architectural character.

Marcel C. Acosta
Executive Director