

10 April 2017

MEETING NOTES

RE: STRATFORD HISTORIC COMMITTEE MEETING #3
STRATFORD MIDDLE SCHOOL
ARLINGTON, VIRGINIA
31406600



2121 WARD PLACE, NW, 4TH FLOOR
WASHINGTON, DC 20037
202 298 6700

Meeting Date & Time: 21 March 2017, 7:00-9:00 PM
Location: H-B Woodlawn Teacher's Lounge

Attendees:

Historic Committee

Susan Cunningham
Saundra Green
Michael Jones
Joan Lawrence
Drew Costly (via phone)
Craig Syphax
Frank Wilson
Sharon Monde

Staff

Ben Burgin – APS Assistant Director, Design & Construction
Bill Herring – APS Project Manager, Design & Construction (Project Point of Contact)
Theresa Flynn – APS Library Supervisor
Rebecca Ballo – Historic Preservation

Design Team

Carl Elefante – Quinn Evans Architects
Devon Hogan – Quinn Evans Architects
Tevere MacFayden – Main Street Design
Lito Karatsoli-Chanikian – Main Street Design

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This was the third meeting of the Stratford Historic Committee. The Committee has been constituted by Arlington Public Schools to assist in the interpretation of the historic events that took place at Stratford.

Discussion points are summarized below. This summary presents Quinn Evans Architects' understanding of discussions, decisions, and recommended actions. We request that all attendees review these Meeting Notes and notify Quinn Evans with recommended revisions or questions within seven days of issuance.



1. INTRODUCTION

- a. APS notes that the project has received approval for the use permit and certificate of appropriateness, which are big milestones.
- b. Main Street Design (MSD) introduces the structure and goals for the workshop:
 - i. Review site and building interpretative opportunities.
 - ii. Review 'spirit images' depicting interpretative techniques that might be applicable to the Stratford project.
 - iii. Conduct a dot exercise for favored images and discuss to establish a foundation for MSD's concept design work.
- c. MSD notes the importance of engaging the Arlington community in determining which stories to tell and how to tell them. Interpretative experiences at Stratford need to be a true reflection of the community.

2. PRESENTATION OF SITE AND BUILDING INTERPRETATIVE OPPORTUNITIES

- a. MSD discusses the zones of interpretation opportunities throughout the school and overall campus plan.
- b. MSD notes that there is no large space that can be dedicated to the history of Stratford. With this, MSD explains that the intent is to spread the interpretation and not limit it to one space.
 - i. Workshop participants all agreed that MSD should explore potential opportunities throughout the school building and across the campus, rather than confining interpretation to a single area.
- c. APS representatives and committee members indicate that both vehicular and pedestrian access to the campus will come from multiple directions, arriving at the site in multiple locations, and that the new school's exterior circulation patterns cannot be accurately predicted at this time.
- d. All agreed that it is important to mark key access/egress points with interpretive elements that identify the site and explain its historical significance (i.e., this is not just another middle school.)
- e. A committee member notes that when he was a student at HB Woodlawn the gym was an important social gathering space, and one of the places that many non-students tended to pass through.
 - i. During discussion, others noted that use of the gym would be more controlled for middle school students at the new Stratford school, but all agreed that potential interpretive uses of this space should continue to be explored.
- f. Student-created artwork covering many walls in the current school is being exhaustively photo-documented to create a historical archive, but the actual artworks themselves will not be preserved. All new and renovated walls in the building will be painted.
- g. The committee discusses the possibility that school hallways might offer opportunities to connect with students as they move about the building. These elements would need to be simple and direct in terms of both their content and the methodologies employed.
- h. Committee members note that the lobby outside of the theater/performing arts wing is an important gathering space for students, families and members of the



community. The plaza outside that entrance will be an important access and egress zone when the new driveway is built.

- i. MSD notes that the interpretation at Stratford has to be engaging for and accessible to a wide range of audiences:
 - i. The immediate community of the school (students, faculty, staff, and families).
 - ii. The surrounding neighborhood residents of Arlington.
 - iii. Regional or national destination visitors drawn to the site by its historic importance.
- j. QEA notes that while MSD's analysis of interpretive opportunities has focused on common areas of the building, APS is also interested in creating educational programs that incorporate the historical events that occurred at the school.
 - i. For example, if changeable interpretive elements are installed at the school students and faculty might be responsible for developing new content and exhibits. The committee should consider the potential for direct curriculum linkages.

3. PRESENTATION AND REVIEW OF SPIRIT IMAGES

- a. MSD presents inspiration images at the exterior, and notes that the examples shown express words which can be important, and the technique of creating a dynamic experience based on the approach or visitors position relative to the exhibit.
- b. A committee member notes that existing exterior play structures at Stratford will be eliminated after renovation, and believes that interpretive play opportunities associated with core themes would be well received by the neighborhood.
- c. The committee and APS notes that brightly colored modular furnishings are being planned for the new Stratford school library.
- d. A committee member suggests a digital display or some other mechanism that would enable Stratford students to contribute content to interpretive displays on an ongoing basis.
 - i. Could possibly incorporate information from the Arlington DAPS project, which is being utilized within the student commons.
- e. The committee endorses the concept of developing something "monumental" to identify the Stratford site but responded less positively to some of the specific examples presented, such as a column of stacked glowing cubes.
 - i. Committee comments suggest that this approach was not aesthetically pleasing and didn't seem to offer any direct connection to project themes.
 - ii. In general, images that had installations utilizing a "rainbow" of bright primary colors were not viewed favorably. Participants described these as reminding them of a less mature palette and worried that they would not be well received by middle school students.
- f. The committee members note that the palette of the original school building is quite muted, both interior and exterior, and suggested that MSD explore a palette of grays, browns, creams and tans, bounded by black and white, that references (in an abstract manner) the natural range of human skin tones.
 - i. The intentional use of brighter colors and hues for contrast and as highlights is acceptable.
- g. The committee responded negatively overall to installations that seemed too angular, "cold", or "brutal." Although the content of the Stratford exhibits will necessarily incorporate difficult and painful ideas, the committee believes that the exhibits themselves should feel warm and approachable.
- h. The committee likes the idea of integrating messages into surfaces – paving, floors, seating, walls, etc. – and distributing them around the building and site, sometimes in unexpected locations.



- i. Several spirit images depicting large-scale simple graphical presentations of direct questions or messages (“Do good things,” “What example did you set today?”) were generally well received by workshop participants.
- j. The committee liked the concept of using the new central stair core as an interpretive feature experience, including both the stairwell volume and adjacent walls and the stairs themselves.
 - i. However, the specific example shown was felt to be too busy and brightly colored.
- k. A spirit image showing a stairwell filled by a large-scale mobile whose individual facets formed composite portraits of people’s faces was well-received by the committee, more so than the more abstract examples.
- l. The committee responds favorably to the idea of a Storycorps-style oral history project and feels that this could be an important part of the Stratford interpretation.
 - i. MSD noted that these kinds of initiatives require significant ongoing programmatic and operational support.
- m. Several members of the committee note the importance of making project themes and content meaningful for younger audiences – the future student body at Stratford.
 - i. Michael Jones and his companions were 12 years old in 1959. This interpretation has to work effectively for that age group.
- n. The committee discusses the challenges inherent in honoring the richness and complexity of the school’s history while also making that information accessible and engaging for new and younger audiences who do not have any personal connection to it.
- o. Committee members feel strongly that MSD needs to preserve and interpret historic views of the original building, even in the context of a dramatically transformed site.
 - i. The committee is concerned about placing too many new objects within these historic viewsheds, cluttering up the views.
- p. The committee responds unfavorably to examples that showed figures cut out of steel sheets. The committee notes that the Stratford story is all about presence and inclusion, so the use of negative space in that way felt inappropriate.
 - i. The committee likes images of glazing treatments (etching, films, tinting) that create visible images but retain views through the glass.
- q. The committee likes images of clusters of freestanding interpretive elements (graphics, display cases) but cautioned about making the environment too “busy.”
- r. The committee generally responds favorably to the idea of incorporating mirrors and reflections into the interpretive design, causing viewers to “see themselves in the story.”
- s. The committee likes environmental graphics and examples that integrate interpretive messaging with directional or wayfinding signage.
- t. The committee agrees that all interpretive elements need to be designed and fabricated for high durability to ensure low maintenance operation is required.
- u. The committee members felt very strongly that the primary obligation of the Stratford interpretation is to tell the story of the integration of Stratford Junior High School, to make sure that anyone who encounters this project, even at a superficial level, will be aware of the story and its significance. This view is universally endorsed by all present.

4. NEXT STEPS

- a. MSD will develop specific design concepts for Stratford's interpretive experiences for presentation at the next Historic Committee meeting on April 18th. These will identify proposed interpretive locations within the building and on the site and will describe and illustrate proposed treatments of or installation at those locations.
- b. The project team notes that the intent is to have a clear design that at the end of this process the committee feels expresses the specific content and spirit of the content for this space.
 - i. The project team clarifies that the committee is making the recommendation to the School Board for what this interpretation should be, at the School Board's request. The committee's input will greatly influence the School Board's decision.



END OF MEETING NOTES