Re: Towson High School Section 106 Comments

Dear Ms. Daileader:

Thank you for allowing the Baltimore County Department of Planning, Historic Preservation Section, to comment on the above mentioned project.

As a Final Landmark, the structure is subject to Article 32, Title 7, of the Baltimore County Code, which requires a design review by the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) for any exterior alterations, including demolition and additions, through the Historic Review process. The LPC review Historic review proposals and determine if the work is, or is NOT consistent with the County’s Historic Preservation Design Guidelines. These guidelines are derived from the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Historic Rehabilitation. If a project is found to follow our guidelines, the LPC vote to issue a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA).

From the options presented at the Consultant’s Party meeting on September 22, 2022, options A and B, have the potential to meet our guidelines. Overall, I think Option B is the best of both worlds, retains the majority of the architecturally significant and prominent portions of the 1947 structure with an addition that satisfies the existing space and learning deficits. This option or a variant of this option will most likely be supported by the LPC.

The general location of the new addition in Option B, set behind the historic structure, allows the historic structure it to be the primary focus an addition appears to be consistent with Interior’s Standards for Historic Rehabilitation and the County’s Historic Preservation Design Guidelines for new additions. Keeping the entire 1947 ‘L’ portion, maintains the prominent primary elevation and retains the structure’s architectural significance, while allowing for a sensitive addition to be tucked behind. The structure still maintains its architectural integrity to meet the criteria for which it was originally landmarked for.
Options C and D do not follow our guidelines or Article 32, Title 7, of the Baltimore County Code. The complete demolition in Option D, is not permissible. The selective demolition in Option C removes too much of the original structure and creates a large disconnect from the main entrance and the theater portions. They are become two separate entities -- to the point that the school will no longer have enough integrity or architectural significance to meet the criteria for which the school was originally landmarked for. The 1947 portions become subordinate to and overpowered by, the new addition. At this point, it no longer feels like an addition, it’s a new school that is incorporating portions of the old.

Furthermore, Option C doesn’t adhere to the Secretary’s Standards for Historic Rehabilitation and the County’s Guidelines for new additions. The massing, location, and general scale is not compatible to the portion of the historic structure that remains. A new addition should be designed to be subordinate to the historic building; it should not compete in size, scale or design with the historic structure. Both the Standards and County guidelines call for constructing new additions on a secondary side or rear elevations. Option C creates an addition that has greater visibility on the primary elevation and has a scale that overpowers the 1947 school entrance.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment on the project. I am here to answer any questions about the LPC and the Historic Review Process.

Should you have any questions please call me at 410-887-7926 or by email at, cmerritt@baltimorecountymd.gov

Sincerely,

Caitlin E. Merritt
Chief of Preservation Services