

**9. COA-060187-2019**

PUBLIC HEARING DATE

September 24<sup>th</sup>, 2019

PROPERTY ADDRESS

813 N. 28<sup>th</sup> Street

DISTRICT

Church Hill North

Commission of  
Architectural Review

STAFF REPORT



APPLICANT

City of Richmond Public Schools

STAFF CONTACT

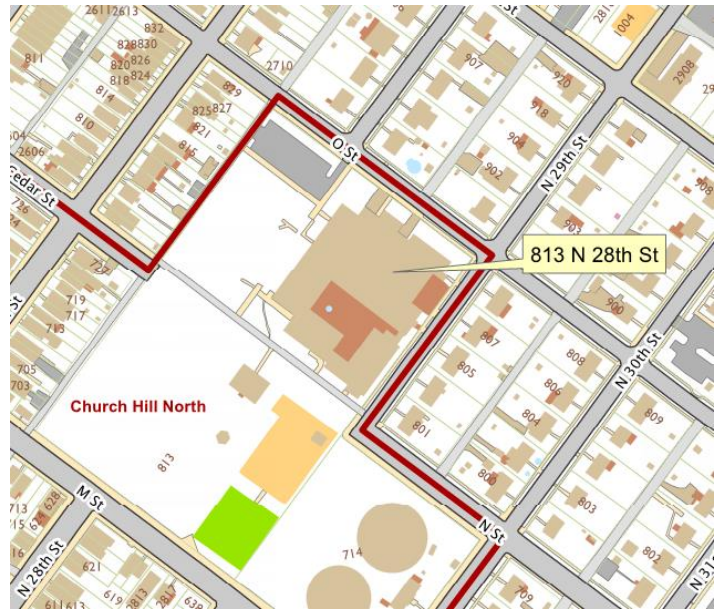
C. Jones

**PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

**Demolish an existing school building.**

**PROJECT DETAILS**

- The applicant requests permission to demolish the ca. 1922-1979 George Mason Elementary School.
- The applicant proposes to install tennis and basketball courts, athletic fields, and play areas on the cleared site.



The City of Richmond assumes no liability either for any errors, omissions, or inaccuracies in the information provided regardless of the cause of such or for any decision made, action taken, or action not taken by the user in reliance upon any maps or information provided herein.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

**DEFER**

**PREVIOUS REVIEWS**

The Commission has not previously reviewed the demolition of the existing George Mason Elementary School. The Commission approved the construction of a new elementary school on the site along the M Street frontage at the February 26<sup>th</sup>, 2019 monthly meeting.

**STAFF COMMENTS**

- The applicant consider all feasible alternatives to the demolition of the 1922 section, including an appropriate new use and rehabilitation, relocation of the structure to a compatible site, or re-sale of the property to an individual committed to suitable rehabilitation or relocation.

**STAFF ANALYSIS**

*According to Sec. 30-930.7(d) of the Historic Preservation Ordinance: The commission of architectural review shall not issue a certificate of appropriateness for demolition of any building or structure within an old and historic district unless the applicant can show that there are no feasible alternatives to demolition. The demolition of historic buildings and elements in old and historic districts is strongly discouraged. The demolition of any building deemed by the commission to not be a part of the historic character of an old and historic district shall be permitted. The demolition of any building that has deteriorated beyond the point of being feasibly rehabilitated is permissible, where the applicant can satisfy the commission as to the infeasibility of rehabilitation. The*

---

commission may adopt additional demolition standards for the review of certificates of appropriateness applications to supplement these standards.

---

*Under the provisions of Sec. 32-930.7., the Commission shall approve requests for demolition when:*

---

1) *There are no feasible alternatives to the proposed demolition. "Feasible alternatives" include an appropriate new use and rehabilitation, relocation of the structure to a compatible site or re-sale of the property to an individual committed to suitable rehabilitation or relocation.*

In order to rehabilitate the building, extensive asbestos and lead paint remediation would be necessary. Additional upgrades to the heating, electric, and plumbing systems would also be needed to bring the building to current code requirements and address ADA compliance issues.

Staff acknowledges the challenges to the rehabilitation of the building. However, staff finds that the applicant has not explored feasible alternatives to the demolition of the 1922 section. Staff recommends the applicant consider all feasible alternatives to the demolition of the 1922 section, including an appropriate new use and rehabilitation, relocation of the structure to a compatible site, or re-sale of the property to an individual committed to suitable rehabilitation or relocation.

---

2) *A building or structure is deemed not to be a contributing part of the historic character of an Old and Historic District.*

The building is located within the Church Hill North City and Old Historic District. When the boundaries of the Church Hill North City and Old District were determined, they specifically included this school in acknowledgement of its significance to the neighborhood. Staff finds the building contributes to the historic character of the Old and Historic District as it was constructed during the period of significance, reflects the areas of significance for the District, and is in keeping with the general architectural styles of the historic buildings in the District.

---

3) *The Commission deems that a building or structure has deteriorated beyond the point of feasible rehabilitation.*

The applicant has indicated that in order to rehabilitate the school building, including the 1922 section, substantial exterior and interior work would be required. If the later additions to the 1922 building were to be demolished, portions of the exterior walls of the 1922 building would need to be rebuilt. On the north elevation, this would include the majority of the exterior wall. On the south elevation, one bay each of brick and windows would need to be rebuilt. On the rear, the west elevation, it appears that the lower two stories on the southern-most bays would need to be reconstructed.

The interior of the building reflects a traditional educational facility with a double-loaded corridor, classrooms, and end staircases. The applicant has indicated that the interior has asbestos and lead paint. Staff has observed substantial cracking in the interior including floors, walls, and ceilings, and general deterioration.

---

---

*In addition to the above criteria, the Commission has the authority to consider four other factors in arriving at decisions involving proposed demolitions:*

---

1) *The historic and architectural value of a building.*

Historic Richmond provided the following research and analysis to staff. The full version of this information can be found here:

<https://www.historicrichmond.com/property/george-mason-school/>. The oldest section of the existing school dates to 1922 when a 12-classroom building was built to alleviate overcrowding in the original 1881 frame building and 1887 brick building on the site. The 1922 building is a reconstruction of an 1873 building which originally housed Richmond High School, later John Smith School, at 805 East Marshall Street. Construction drawings for the 1922 building on the site indicate that the materials, such as the bricks and windows, from the John Smith School were used for the construction of the 1922 George Mason School. The drawings also indicate that Charles M. Robinson, architect to Richmond Public Schools from 1909-1930, oversaw the new school construction. Staff finds that the 1922 section is potentially significant for its association with early twentieth century educational trends in the City of Richmond and with Charles Robinson, a noted architect of education buildings in Richmond. Staff also finds it is potentially significant as a representative example of late-nineteenth century educational architecture.

The first expansion of the school occurred in 1936 when a 14-room wing was added. In 1951, a 12-classroom wing was constructed. The original 1881 frame building was demolished in 1974 and the 1887 brick building was demolished in 1979 for the construction of the Marsh Wing. Staff finds that the 1936-1979 additions do not possess historic or architectural significance.

---

2) *The effect that demolition will have on the surrounding neighborhood.*

The demolition of the entire school complex will remove a physical reminder of the historical development of the area and the public school system.

---

3) *The type and quality of the project that will replace the demolished building.*

The proposed new use of the site is basketball and tennis courts, play areas, and an athletic field for use by the students of the new school and members of the surrounding community.

---

4) *The historic preservation goals outlined in the Master Plan and Downtown Plan.*

The 2000 Master Plan does not address schools in the East Planning District but does recognize the contribution of historic and architectural resources to the character of the community.

---

**FIGURES**



Figure 1. George Mason Elementary School, ca. 1922 section.



Figure 2. George Mason Elementary School, ca. 1936 section.



Figure 3. George Mason Elementary School, ca. 1956 addition.



Figure 4. George Mason Elementary School, ca. 1956 addition.



Figure 5. George Mason Elementary School, ca. 1979 addition.



Figure 6. George Mason Elementary, ca. 1922 and 1979 sections.

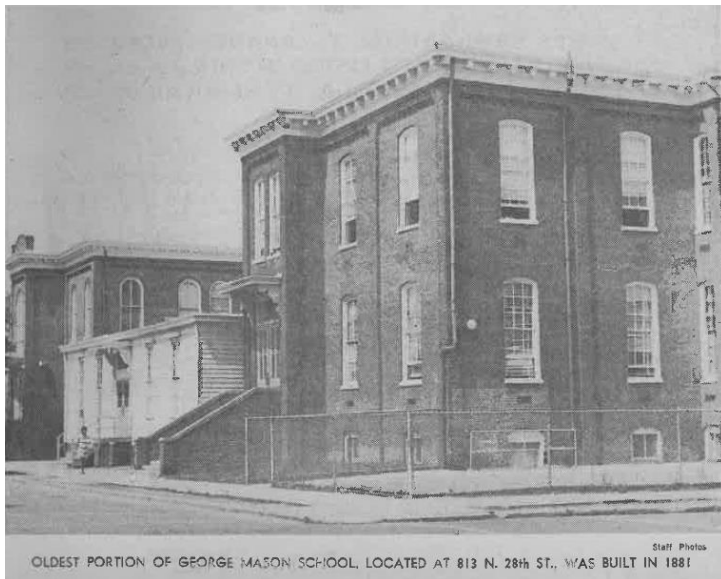


Figure 7. Original George Mason Elementary School at right in foreground, the 1881 frame section in the middle, and the current (1922) section in background. Courtesy: Historic Richmond.

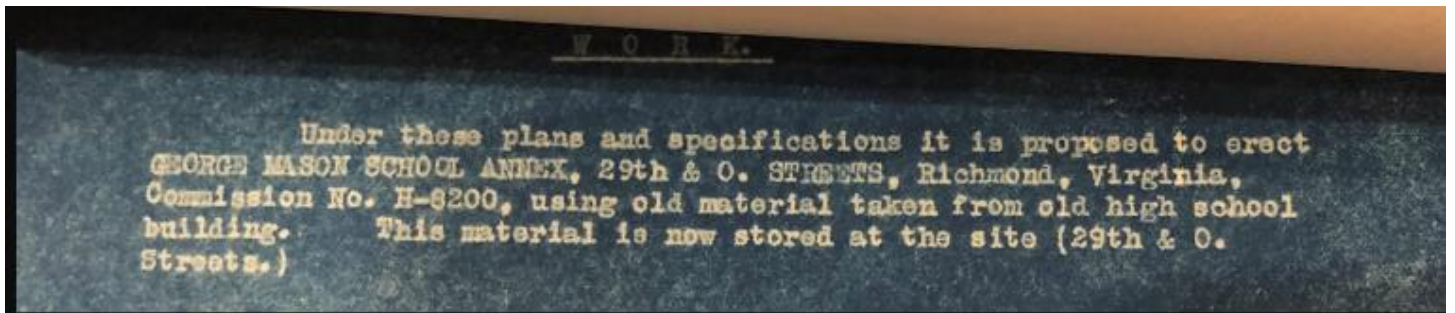


Figure 8. Specifications for the George Mason School, 1922. Courtesy: Historic Richmond.

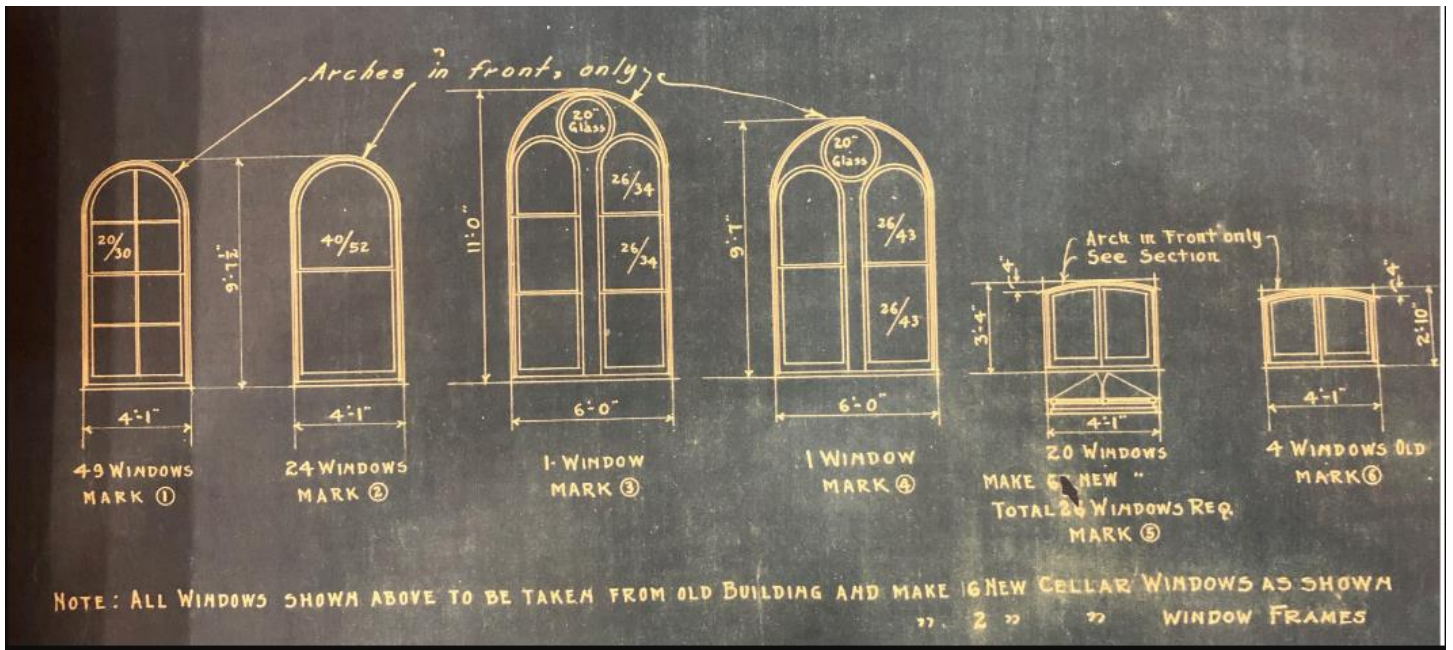


Figure 9. Window drawings for the George Mason Elementary School, 1922. Courtesy: Historic Richmond.



Figure 10. Cracking terrazzo floors, 1922 section.



Figure 11. Non-ADA compliant bathroom corridors and spaces, ca. 1922 section. .



Figure 12. Extensive water damage observed on the ceilings.



Figure 13. Damage to walls, ca. 1922 section.



Figure 14. Current heating system, ca. 1922 section.



Figure 15. Outdated mechanical systems, ca. 1922 section.