

6 March 2017

MEETING NOTES

RE: STRATFORD HISTORIC COMMITTEE MEETING #2
STRATFORD MIDDLE SCHOOL
ARLINGTON, VIRGINIA
31406600



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

Meeting Date & Time: 21 February 2017, 7:00-9:00 PM
Location: H-B Woodlawn Library

Attendees:

Historic Committee

Susan Cunningham
Saundra Green
Michael Jones
Joan Lawrence
Avis Robinson

Staff

Jeffrey Chambers – APS Director of Design and Construction
Ben Burgin – APS Assistant Director, Design & Construction
Bill Herring – APS Project Manager, Design & Construction (Project Point of Contact)
Theresa Flynn – APS Library Supervisor
Cynthia Liccese-Torres – Historic Preservation

Design Team

Carl Elefante – Quinn Evans Architects
Devon Hogan – Quinn Evans Architects
Michael Mercadante – Main Street Design
Tevere MacFayden – Main Street Design

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This was the second 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 the digital collection of records regarding the desegregation of Arlington Public Schools, 'Project DAPS' (www.projectdaps.org), to be launched by the Arlington Public Library on February 25, 2017.
- b. Committee members are curious about how memorabilia would be handled.
 - i. APS notes that the artifacts would be owned by the Center for Local History (at Central Library) and could be loaned if the desire is to house them within a facility, such as the Stratford School.
 - ii. APS notes that some challenges would be the cooperation between various agencies and that some memorabilia must be stored in controlled environments to be maintained.
 - iii. APS notes that there is an attic at Stratford, and expects to find some interesting artifacts once it is unpacked.
- c. APS notes that financial donations can be received to support this initiative provided they follow APS [PIP 40-1.20.11 External Funding – Private Funding for Building and Grounds Improvement](#).
- d. APS shares a letter to the committee from HALRB member and former Stratford student John Peck.
- e. APS confirms the next meeting will take place on March 21st.

2. INTRODUCTION OF EXHIBIT DESIGNER

- a. QEA introduces Main Street Design, who was the unanimous choice by the committee to serve as the interpretative planners for the Stratford School.
- b. Main Street Design presents their qualifications and experience through their portfolio, which includes:
 - i. Zoo exhibits
 - ii. Visitor centers
 - iii. Nature centers
 - iv. Traveling exhibits
- c. Main Street Design highlights after their presentation that a great opportunity in providing a design for a middle school is that the students are at a point in their lives that is developmentally unlike anything they've experienced before, or will experience afterwards.

3. PRESENTATION OF HISTORICAL HIGHLIGHTS OF THE STRATFORD SCHOOL

- a. Historic Preservation (HPP) presents the historical and cultural significance, as well as the architectural significance, of the Stratford School.
 - i. The property was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2004 as an outstanding example of the International style by a famous local architect (Rhees Evans Burket Sr).
 - ii. Rhees Burket implemented a design that was much more ambitious than any of his other work in regards to its programming, massing, and materials. The school was very progressive for its time - its design accommodated highly specialized functions such as labs, arts, a library, gymnasium and cafeteria.



- b. Stratford is a direct result of the growth of the District of Columbia post World War II, especially Arlington which had several new schools built.
- c. The property was the site of a significant local, state and national event.
 - i. Stratford reflects how the desegregation of the state of Virginia advanced. Resistance to the ruling of Brown v. Education was very widespread in Virginia.
 - ii. Virginia was the most sued state for massive resistance, which closed schools in most Virginia cities, but not Arlington.
 - iii. Segregated schools in Arlington included Hoffman-Boston, which was an all black school. Yorktown High School was the last school to integrate.
 - iv. In September of 1957, there was an integration attempt at the Stratford School that was met with massive resistance and ultimately unsuccessful. That same week students were fighting to integrate Little Rock High School in Arkansas.
 - v. Although Stratford was successfully integrated on Feb. 2nd, 1959 it would be years before the rest of the state would follow Stratford's example.

4. OPEN DISCUSSION

- a. The committee notes that it is very important to highlight that Arlington took a long time to integrate, and that Virginia overall resisted integration.
 - i. There was a long time when it was impossible to sell homes to persons of color in Arlington.
 - ii. The Nazi party was very strong in Arlington in the past as well. George Lincoln Rockwell, the founder of the American Nazi party, was an Arlington resident, and the party was prevalent in Clarendon. Additionally, the Ku Klux Klan held cross burnings in Ballston. These stories are important to tell.
- b. Awareness of the local history of Arlington varies greatly. Some longtime Arlington residents with interest in history are aware, however many are not and the number grows as older generation residents are pushed out, pass on, or become outnumbered by incoming residents from other regions who don't care. The history is not being respected.
 - i. Arlington Public Schools are now teaching local history.
 - ii. The interest by the county in relocating Arlington's Fire Station No. 8, or Hall's Hill Volunteer Fire Department, which was historically established as the only African American volunteer firefighter company during segregation, also raises awareness.
- c. The committee notes that immigration is also an important factor of Arlington's history after desegregation. There have been waves of immigrant communities that have joined Arlington and contributed to its growth during the 70's and 80's, serving as an evolution of the story of integration and Arlington.
- d. The committee sees the interpretation as not just highlighting a singular event, but that the integration of Stratford served as a catalyst. It is agreed that it is important to put everything in context, in terms of how Arlington struggled to get to that point in time, and what transpired afterwards to lead the county to where it is today.
- e. Members of the committee recount how Stratford was a 'bubble', but every day they had to return to the racism that they were unfortunately accustomed to at home. A comparison was made to school life and home life being "two different worlds."
 - i. African American students had to be prepared on how to act, what to say, what to eat, what not to eat, etc. when integrating Stratford. For some, it was a strange feeling for them to go to class, and not be able to participate in any extracurricular activities, for their safety.



- ii. Extracurricular activities were made available for African American students at other schools; however the former students compare attending Stratford similar to going to work. Everything that happened at the school was left at school.
- iii. Noted that while North Arlington was dealing with segregation in its own way, such as the wall separating the African-American community of Halls Hill from the white communities, South Arlington had its own set of issues, particularly in the Nauck neighborhood with Hoffman Boston and the integration of Wakefield High.
- iv. Committee notes that while black churches played a big role as a support system, Catholic schools grew in response to integration.
- v. Members of the committee who were raised in South Arlington today note the courage the first students had to have in order to integrate Stratford, and the direct effect it has had on everyone in the room, specifically those of color who were able to graduate from what were once all white schools.
- vi. The committee notes that the progress is ongoing.
- f. Committee notes that 2020 marks the centennial of the renaming of what's known today as Arlington county from what was previously known as Alexandria county. This marks an opportunity to tie in the Stratford commemoration work.
- g. Committee agrees that while the commemorative exhibit should be designed as a learning experience for all, it should absolutely convey and evoke emotion from the students.
 - i. Design should convey human experience and emotional connections that embody persistence, risk taking, confronting human inadequacies, belonging, reaching, and hope.
 - ii. Design should reach multiple audiences, including students, local community, and even the nation.
 - iii. Design should illustrate how far we've come as a country, whether we've come far enough, and how far we have to go. Highlight what people did and had to go through to make progress happen.
 - iv. The committee wants to see something powerful and purposeful that embodies what those students were up against. Something iconic and direct that resonates.
 - v. The committee agrees that it is important to educate the community on 'Why' (why this moment was necessary, and why Arlington rose to be the first place in the state of Virginia to integrate) and 'What' (fear, racism, etc).
- h. Main Street Design notes that the emotional connection can be bridged to all by highlighting that shared experience of the first students integrating Stratford, which can be similar to what middle school students feel today, albeit on a different scale.
 - i. The fear of belonging. To 'belong', you have to push people away.
 - ii. Today, it's not just race, but also beliefs and gender.
- i. APS notes that it is possible that Stratford's status as a state of the art school at the time could've been a factor in regards to why it was chosen as the first to integrate.
 - i. The zip code 22207 has traditionally had wealthy and educated folks, which may have also been a factor.
- j. HPP notes that they will check with the Center for Local History to see if there are any records of the white students' accounts during the period of integration to get their perspective.
 - i. Ideally, it would be great to get accounts of what it was like to go to school in Arlington now, and as far back as then.

5. NEXT STEPS

- a. QEA closes that the next step for the upcoming meeting on March 21st is finding the opportunities and techniques to convey the feelings discussed today that the committee wants to elicit.
- b. Advises that the committee members are ready for an interpretative design workshop at the next meeting.

END OF MEETING NOTES

