
**HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD
STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION**

Property Address:	3100 Macomb Street, NW	X	Agenda
Landmark:	Tregaron (the Causeway)		Consent Calendar
Meeting Date:	March 24, 2016	X	Concept Review
H.P.A. Number:	16-053	X	Alteration
Staff Reviewer:	Steve Callcott	X	New Construction
			Demolition
			Subdivision

The Washington International School (WIS) seeks conceptual design review for construction of a two-story science and technology classroom building on its Tregaron campus in Cleveland Park. The project would also result in alterations to two non-contributing buildings (the gym and the library) and involve site and landscape work. The architectural plans have been prepared by Ziger/Snead Architects and the landscape plans by Michael Vergason Landscape Architects

Property History and Description

Tregaron is a 21 acre country estate built in 1912 by Ohio financier James Parmelee. The mansion, dependency buildings and grounds were designed by Charles Adams Platt, the country's premier architect of country houses. The formal and woodland gardens were designed and implemented over a two decade period by Ellen Biddle Shipman, one of the foremost landscape architects of the early 20th century who often worked in partnership with Platt.

Platt's site plan was developed to respect the topography and mature trees, with minimal disturbance to grades and taking advantage of existing views. The plan maintained a sense of privacy to the estate, with only selective removal of trees to enhance the views and to reinforce the distinction between open pastures and dense woodlands. The placement of the mansion and dependencies was based on Beaux-Arts planning and design principles, sited at the top of the hill and with buildings aligned in axial relationships to each other. The symmetry, balance and axes exemplified in the English Georgian Revival mansion control the relationship between the house and its surrounding grounds, including the reciprocal vistas, the formal and informal gardens, and the axis along which the greenhouse, gardener's cottage, carriage house and other buildings are organized.

Both Platt and Shipman's work reinforced that gardens and landscape features closer to the house should be more formal in character and become increasingly informal and naturalistic farther from the house. The planting plans developed by Shipman enhanced the naturalistic character with the understory below the tree canopy planted with flowering trees, shrubs, ground covers and flowering bulbs. Shipman's woodland work at Tregaron has come to be understood as a notable example of a "wild garden," a seemingly natural but actually carefully enhanced composition of naturalistic plantings and man-made features.

The estate was sold to diplomat Joseph Davies and his wife Marjorie Merriweather Post in 1941. The Davies' most significant contribution to the property was the construction of the dacha, a

Russian folk cottage obtained when Davies served as ambassador to the Soviet Union, regrettably placed in the center of the formal walled garden.

The property was designated as a DC landmark in 1979 and included within the boundaries of the Cleveland Park Historic District as a contributing property in 1987. In 1980, the site was purchased jointly by the Tregaron Limited Partnership (TLP) and WIS, and divided into two lots. The school, which had leased the buildings on the site since 1972, purchased approximately 6 acres, with an entrance off Macomb Street. The school's property includes the hilltop and all of the landmark's historic structures -- the mansion, stable, greenhouse, gardener's cottage, and dacha. TLP retained ownership of the surrounding fields and woodland with the goal of developing it for residences but repeated efforts to that end were met with strong resistance by the community, led by the non-profit Friends of Tregaron (FOT), for their failure to respect the character of the site.

After years of wrangling over development proposals, a legal agreement was reached in 2006 between TLP, WIS and FOT. The agreement provided for the creation of a non-profit Tregaron Conservancy, with a board comprised of community and WIS representatives. TLP transferred approximately 10 acres of the woodlands to the Conservancy to restore according to the vision established by Platt and Shipman for public enjoyment. Three acres were transferred to WIS, largely on the south side of the house and which allowed expansion of their athletic field, but which otherwise would remain open space. TLP was given approval to build two houses along Macomb Street (since completed), a single house on the open portion of Kingle (not yet constructed), and several houses on the closed portion of Kingle Road (which has since been abandoned since the city permanently closed the street to traffic; this land has since been donated to the Conservancy).

Cultural Landscape Report

A cornerstone of the 2006 agreement was a cultural landscape report, prepared by Heritage Landscapes, that was developed as a requirement established by the HPRB as a condition for the consideration of any development at Tregaron. The report provides a detailed historical and existing conditions analysis of the property and its component parts, and sets forth an integrated plan for the stabilization, rehabilitation and maintenance of the entire estate. The plan was codified in the legal agreement between the property owners, acknowledged by the Board as the central guiding document for the future management of the property, and found by the Mayor's Agent to be "a key component of the Applicant's special merit case."¹

Chapter 6 of the report identifies the specific landscape areas and preservation recommendations for their management. The Macomb Entry and Woodland Slope is one of those areas [this section of the CLP report is attached below], and its boundaries are defined as extending to the crest of the hill

¹ The procedural history of the agreement, the HPRB's multiple reviews, and the Mayor's Agent's review is a long one. While the Board was supportive of the agreement and overall solution for the property, it determined that the subdivision of the property, and the TLP houses and the playing field projects associated with the subdivision, were "inherently inconsistent with the original unified character of the property" and therefore not consistent with the preservation act. The Mayor's Agent found that the proposal met the definition of special merit, concluding that the landscape rehabilitation plan and the management of a substantial portion of the property by a conservancy dedicated to the "rehabilitation, stewardship, interpretation and to ensuring public access to the site," would constitute an "unusual and substantial historic preservation accomplishment with clear benefits to the public."

“adjacent to the relatively intensive hilltop development of WIS and the residences along Macomb Street.” While the report acknowledges that this area can be considered for development, it only identifies the area extending from and continuous with the existing Macomb streetscape as a potentially compatible place for development: “A small portion of the area closest to existing homes is suitable for additional houses that fit with the character of the neighborhood. These homes would be screened by using evergreen and deciduous plants from the entrance drive.” It does not identify the top of the wooded hillside as an appropriate location for additional development.

Review of New Construction at Tregaron

Since the property was designated, the Board has reviewed several proposals for new construction on the WIS portion of the property, including for a new classroom building (1988), a gym and classroom building (1999), a library and performing arts building (2006) and a playing field (2007). While all of these projects except for the playing field were reviewed by the Board prior to the development of the cultural landscape plan, each building was ultimately found compatible by meeting design principles that are consistent with the more detailed analysis and preservation approaches established in 2006 landscape plan. The construction projects were all organized along the axis of historic service buildings in the zone where construction was intended by Platt, they had very limited or no visibility from the mansion or the neighborhood, they did not intrude on areas that were originally landscape zones, they were designed in a manner that broke down their mass, and they used materials and an architectural vocabulary that clearly related to the historic buildings on the estate.

Of the school’s projects, the playing field proved to be the most difficult to accommodate, and was the subject of several redesigns and reviews. Despite being substantially lowered in elevation, the field was found to visually intrude on the pond valley, change the open character of the south lawn, and introduce a large artificial man-made element into what was a naturalistic landscape.²

Proposal

The current proposal calls for construction of a two-story 34,000 square foot classroom building above a one-story below-grade garage. The primary mass of the building would be located to the north of the gymnasium and west of the carriage house; a one-story element would extend in front of the gym and connect to the library with minimal alterations to those buildings. The new building would be clad in a contemporary vocabulary of vertical metal and glass panels of varying widths and finishes yet to be fully developed.

The scope of work also includes substantial site alterations. These include: converting the parking area between the gym and the carriage house into a pedestrian plaza; removing paving in the service court between the mansion’s kitchen wing and the walled formal garden and replacing it with landscape and a small drive for loading; rehabilitating the driveway from Macomb Street to expose its original cobbled stone gutters and to improve pedestrian access; redesigning the area at the

² While maintaining concerns about its lack of compatibility and impact on the pond valley, the playing field was ultimately approved by the Board on the understanding that it was approved as part of the overall agreement and the Mayor’s Agent finding of special merit.

Macomb Street pedestrian entrance as a woodland garden; improving the hillside path up to the campus; and enhanced tree plantings on the north hillside below the new building.

Evaluation

The proposed landscape improvements would provide valuable enhancements to the landmark. While it was never fully realized according to Shipman's design, converting the Macomb entrance into an extension of the woodland garden is generally consistent with that plan and her design philosophy. The alterations to the driveway and court adjacent to the mansion are restorative in nature, and the redesign of the parking area on the service drive as a pedestrian plaza would be an aesthetic and safety improvement.

While laudable for what it proposes, the scope of work doesn't address the more significant, and significantly compromised, area just south of the service court wall. The restoration of the groves on the south lawn – a commitment made by WIS as part of the approvals for increased enrollment and the playing field construction in 2007 – is, for a variety of reasons, only now being seriously pursued by the school.³ However, neither the current plan nor that proposed for the grove restoration address the large fence-enclosed condenser farm on the south side of the mansion, a haphazard arrangement of barbeque equipment, a pavilion structure, a storage shed and picnic tables, an ill-defined circulation pattern, and ground conditions that include random paving stones, mulch, and eroded and compacted soils. These unresolved issues should be addressed before finalizing any plans for the service court area, which may be a more appropriate place for some of these uses outside of the south view shed of the mansion.

In evaluating the new construction according to the principles cited in previous reviews and the cultural landscape report, the new building would have minimal visual impact from many vantage points inside the property. It would have no visibility from the mansion, and only be glimpsed at the visual terminus of the service road in the same view shed with the historic dependency buildings. While quite different in architectural character and materials, the building as it would face the new plaza would be generally compatible in size and height with the carriage house that it would face, and with further refinement of the surface skin, its scale and relationship with the more traditionally styled buildings around it could result in a clearly differentiated but compatible relationship.

However, as currently developed and rendered, the impact of the proposal as seen from the north – both inside and outside the property along Macomb Street – appears daunting and alien to the domestic scale of buildings within the landmark and in the Cleveland Park Historic District. At 215 feet in length and with only minor breaks in plane and mass, the building's most public face would be significantly larger than the mansion, any other building on the estate, any building along Macomb Street, and (other than on the Cathedral Close) within Cleveland Park. As proposed, this size of building with such prominent visibility is not compatible with the landmark or the historic district.

This incompatibility of size is exacerbated by the building extending beyond the crest of the hill into the woodland hillside. As originally sited, the dependencies along the service drive were pulled in away from the edge of the hill, greatly diminishing their visual impact from within the

³ Invasive plant removal has begun and planting plans have been developed for a promised implementation starting this spring. Construction plans for the reconstruction of garden stairs have been prepared but have not yet been received by HPO for permit approval.

property and from Macomb Street. This is an important characteristic in conveying that the property is a country house surrounded by woodlands. This design principle was cited by the Board in the review of the gymnasium project, which required that its footprint be reduced and pulled further south away from the hillside edge to minimize its visibility. The same principle was at the core of the Board’s concerns about the playing field and its intrusion into the pond valley. The woodland hillside, as evaluated in the cultural landscape report and based on past precedent established by the Board, is not a compatible location for new development.

Finally, while it is an intriguing idea to explore a design vocabulary that attempts to dematerialize and blend a new structure into the landscape, rather than using the traditional language of the other buildings, it is questionable whether this will ever be effective when used on such a large scale, on such a long unrelieved wall plane, and when the building is sited so prominently at the crest of the hill. This type of approach would be more effective and compatible if used on a far smaller structure, on a building with substantially greater variations in mass, height and wall plane, and in an area that is not so prominently visible from within and outside the landmark.

Recommendations

The HPO recommends that the Review Board find the conceptual proposal incompatible with the character of the landmark, and that if new construction continues to be pursued at this general location, it should be substantially reduced in length, broken up in mass, and pulled out of and off the woodland hillside.

6 – MACOMB ENTRY & WOODLAND SLOPE

6a. Macomb Entry & Woodland Slope History & Character

The Macomb Street entry was the northern “front door” of the Tregaron landscape. This frontage formed the edge where the estate met the historic residential neighborhood of Cleveland Park. With the 19th century suburbanization of many large Cleveland Park summer home tracts, a new eclectic community came to embrace the Twin Oaks Estate and The Causeway, later to be named Tregaron. Around 1912 shortly after the development of the remainder of the Tregaron, the Macomb entry was constructed to provide a continuous circuit through the property. The graceful curves of the entrance drive reflected the sinuous alignment of the southern entrance and Causeway Bridge as it leads up toward the hilltop and mansion. At this time Ellen Biddle

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Shipman prepared plans for shaping the small, level space around the entrance and the surrounding slopes. The plans, however, were not carried out in full. A few decades later, aerial photographs revealed that entrance plantings with residential character were thriving in the mottled shade of the surrounding woodland canopy. Beyond the perimeter fence, tall evergreens and loose clusters of deciduous shrubs created a border along the entrance drive.

Today, the Macomb frontage area consists of level turf, a steep ravine, and a wooded slope along the sides of the entry drive. Referenced as Landscape Unit 6, it includes the remaining historic Japanese maple trees and a small wooded area to the south that frames the Tregaron entry, abuts the TLP lots to the north, and the wooded slopes and hillside up to the WIS facilities to the east. The drive skirts the ravine and creek as it climbs towards the hilltop and WIS. The roadside frontage of Tregaron interfaces with the domestic landscapes of the Queen Anne, Shingle, Classical Revival, and Mission homes along Macomb Street. The entry area reflects a degree of disturbance although some historical landscape features persist. Recent work by the local sewer authority has significantly disrupted soils, grades and the stream source arrangement between the drive and the street. Remaining historic built elements in this area include the entry drive, partially obscured cobblestone gutters, and several stone retaining walls on the downhill side between this landscape unit and the adjacent woodland. The frontage fence does not appear to be original. Contemporary stone and wood steps snake down the steep hillside for pedestrian access to the far corner of WIS. However, the eroding path dangerously drops walkers onto the entrance drive without a dedicated route to reach Macomb Street.

The current woodland overstory of the area is characterized by a mixture of American beech and red, white, and chestnut oaks. A small number of tulip trees are also present. A range of remnant ornamental species characterizes the entryway including rhododendron, flowering dogwood, Japanese maple, euonymus shrubs, Japanese andromeda, barberry, and leucothoe. The framing Japanese maple trees at the entry are the green-leaved form and are relatively old but may be from either the Parmelee or Davies-Post ownership periods. With the exception of numerous rhododendron, individual plants and small groups populate the area rather than large stands. Most of these are ground plane plants including pachysandra, English ivy, and Christmas fern. Little regeneration of canopy trees is present in the understory. Invasive species found on the wooded slopes of the area include ornamental groundcovers such as English ivy and pachysandra.

6b. Macomb Entry & Woodland Slope Preservation Approach

The mission of the Tregaron Conservancy for this area is to draw on historical antecedents and recapture the beauty and dignity of the Macomb entrance and drive. The area is a principal entryway for the school. A clean and simple approach to this area is recommended in order to bring together both sides of the drive to form a more visually apparent entry. Circulation should be enhanced to preserve historic retaining wall features and allow pedestrians to access the hilltop. Today a confusing combination of older trees and volunteer species on the wooded hillside obscure the impression of passage into the historic landscape of the estate. This situation should be amended; however, precise historic designs cannot be restored. Although Ellen Biddle Shipman created garden designs for the area no strong evidence exists that they were carried out. The designs suggest a clear intent to develop a more formal entryway stretching from the street

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along the drive by using selected plantings including undulating drifts of perennial plants, shrubs, and small trees. This design concept should be followed in a rehabilitation treatment.

The entry area can be framed with more intensive plantings with reference to the Shipman plans. The heavy application of shrubs complemented with small trees and smaller perennial plants dominate Shipman's designs for this area. Plans call for a shrub border to be planted along Macomb Street frontage. A separate drawing also calls for shrubs to be planted along sections of the entrance drive. Upon entering the estate, a small garden is shown adjacent to the drive as a special feature. These historic design plans are housed in the Shipman Archive at the Cornell University Library and can be consulted to inspire the specific planting palette and spatial arrangement for the entrance drive and Macomb frontage.

The wooded hillside lies between the drive and the newer WIS facilities. Treatment of this area should begin with removal of invasive plants and hazardous trees and removal of the winding wooden staircase. Following these actions, a dedicated pedestrian pathway would also be developed to allow students to safely use the entrance drive for access to the hilltop. With new circulation established for pedestrians, the hillside could be replanted as a backdrop for the entry experience.

Removal of undesirable woody plants should commence by using the "cut and paint" method as outlined in the Appendix. This cut and paint method is safe and effective because it focuses on the undesirable plants, kills roots through absorption into plant tissue, and limits any migration of herbicide into the broader landscape. Another method for the uprooting of small trees is the use of a Weed Wrench or similar tool.

Maintenance is also important for the long term success of renewal and recapture efforts. In order to reestablish the mixed hardwood forest of oak, beech, and tulip tree, a reliable watering system will need to be improvised for the slope. For minor watering a mobile watering system can be used with a water tank on a truck filled at a spigot. A gravity fed system is possible since the hilltop is accessible by vehicle. A hose connection also may be possible from the adjacent WIS facilities.

Woodland renewal would continue with the selective pruning and replanting of flowering dogwoods and broadleaf evergreen shrubs such as rhododendrons and azaleas. In order to maintain the character of the hillside into the future, a few areas would be planted with young oak and beech trees to eventually replace the existing mature trees. The invasive ground covers of English ivy and pachysandra should be replaced with other ground covers such as eastern teaberry and ferns.

Circulation concerns will be addressed in the rehabilitation treatment of the Macomb Entry area. The drive exhibits multiple layers of asphalt patching, over-paving and deterioration of cobble gutters, failure of drainage, and drive edge deterioration from erosion. After resolving drainage issues, the sections of original stone retaining walls to the east side of the drive require inspection and repair. This would entail cleaning and mortar repointing and selected stone resetting. In general Heritage Landscapes recommends milling the drive asphalt, repairing and

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reconstructing cobble gutters, cleaning and repairing original drains including pipes and outflows, and stabilizing and repairing stone walls as required. Improvements in pedestrian circulation would occur concurrently with the improvement in the gutter system. A new path would be constructed between Macomb Street and the hilltop along the edge of the drive. This path could be paved with brick to match the historic paving in locations on the hilltop. The path would also connect to trails on the other side of the drive near the meadow. A fork in the path will lead toward the new structures built by WIS.

This entrance area is adjacent to the relatively intensive hilltop development of WIS and the residences along Macomb Street. The unit can be considered for development extending from and contiguous with the existing Macomb streetscape. A small portion of the area closest to existing homes is suitable for additional houses that fit with the character of the neighborhood. These homes would be screened by using evergreen and deciduous plants from the entrance drive.

Creation of planting plans to screen adjacent homes, management of the wooded hillside, and removal of invasive plants and failing specimens can begin at anytime. Long term issues including irrigation and maintenance should be determined prior to carrying out new plantings in the area. Irrigation could be of the hose bib approach, as was used historically on the property—remnants of which are found today throughout the site. Since the Macomb entry is an important front door to the school and larger estate property, design decisions and maintenance responsibility should be discussed between the Tregaron Conservancy and WIS.

B. TREGARON LANDSCAPE PRESERVATION RECOMMENDATIONS SUMMARY

Several commonalities exist as the range of landscape preservation interventions is explored above. Remaining historic landscape features should be preserved, stabilized, repaired, with more extreme interventions of restoration and reconstruction applied to severely deteriorated and degraded features. Invasive species suppression and woodland management is also another critical piece in the recapture of the historic character and appearance of Tregaron. Initial work in the woodlands removing hazardous and felled trees has begun the process of greater access. While some efforts can be undertaken with volunteers, ongoing consistent work on landscape renewal will require either staff or contracted services. Opportunities to engage volunteers yield three aspects of potential volunteer efforts:

- Weed Team- Invasive Species suppression
- Trail Team- Trail upgrades and maintenance
- Planting Team- New trees, shrubs and herbaceous planting

The organization and effectiveness of ideal levels volunteer efforts and contractual efforts can be understood by relating the Tregaron landscape types to standard staffing levels. Based on management practices at other public institutions, including the Indianapolis Museum of Art, The New York Botanical Garden, and Heritage Landscapes experience, the following chart has