The City of Seattle

Landmarks Preservation Board

Mailing Address: PO Box 94649 Seattle WA 98124-4649
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REPORT ON DESIGNATION LPB 263/02

Name and Address of Property: **Cooper Elementary School**
4408 Delridge Way SW

Legal Description: *See attached legal description*

At the public meeting held on August 21, 2002, the City of Seattle's Landmarks Preservation Board voted to approve designation of Cooper Elementary School as a Seattle Landmark based upon satisfaction of the following standards for designation of SMC 25. 12.350:

(B) It is associated in a significant way with the life of a person important in the history of the city, state or nation

(D) It embodies the distinctive visible characteristics of an architectural style, or period, or of a method of construction.

(F) Because of its prominence of spatial location, contrasts of siting, age, or scale, it is an easily identifiable visual feature of its neighborhood or the city and contributes to the distinctive quality or identity of such neighborhood or city.

DESCRIPTION

Context:
Cooper Elementary School is an approximately 52,000 square foot building located on a long site running north-south, parallel to Delridge Way Southwest in West Seattle. The 2.52 acre lot is bounded by West Genesee Street on the north, 23rd Avenue Southwest on the east, and West Oregon Street on the south. The site is located on the west side of Puget Ridge, the north-south running ridge which is closest to downtown Seattle. Delridge Way, which bounds the site to the west, is the main thoroughfare on the east side of West Seattle. Across Delridge Way are Delridge Community Center and playfields, as well as Southwest Youth and Family Services. To the northwest of the site is a residential neighborhood with a number of houses built at the turn of the century and including infill structures from various periods. A second residential neighborhood to the southwest has housing built over the past eighty years.

The hill to the east side of the school is sparsely built and heavily wooded, with a retaining wall supporting the slope at the northern end. The site has been leveled so that the school building sits a few feet above street level, behind a retaining wall. Open areas to the north, south, and east are primarily paved with asphalt, with a few scattered deciduous trees which probably date to the period before the school was built. The main entrance to Cooper is from the west, accessible by a series of concrete stairs running parallel to the street.

Views of the school are primarily from Delridge Way SW and the Community Center campus across the street, although it is visible from a considerable distance from the west. As a result of the location of the Cooper School along the major arterial of Delridge Way, and the lack of neighboring buildings of a similar scale and architectural character, the building is well-known and considered to be an informal landmark in the Delridge neighborhood.

Physical Description:
Cooper Elementary School is one of six brick schools designed by Edgar Blair after the sale of one-half million dollars in bonds in 1917. All of the schools are designed in the Renaissance Revival style (often popularly called American Renaissance), with rectangular forms, hipped roofs, and a minimum of architectural detailing. These schools have simple and straightforward design features which express their internal spatial organization. Cooper is similar in plan to Madrona Elementary School, and both schools had identical massing and elevations prior to renovation. Madrona was recently demolished. The current Cooper building consists of the original 1917 structure and a 1929 addition by Floyd Naramore which is compatible in style to the original structure.

The 1917 section of the present Cooper building is a three-story rectangle. In 1929 the building was extended to the south, almost doubling its size, and a one-story wing with a gymnasium and an auditorium was built south of the extension. The building is organized as a double-loaded corridor, with stairwells in the corners on the opposite side from the entry. A one-story brick wing, which includes a boiler room and playcourts, extends perpendicularly east of the main block. Cooper was originally designed as an addition to a 1907 wood frame building which was located to the northeast of the 1917 structure, and which has since been demolished. The floors are concrete and the walls of the 1917 section are brick and the 1929 section is concrete with brick veneer.

<u>Original Section:</u>
The exterior of the original section is red brick set in a common bond, with headers every sixth course. Single color, decorative brick bonding patterns are almost exclusively the only architectural ornamentation, with the exception of the entry, which has three flush diamonds articulated from grey pressed brick. The entry is centered on the symmetrical west elevation of the original section, facing Delridge Way. A semi-circular arched projecting brick entry portal leads to the main entry hall on the second floor through paneled and glazed entry doors.

The first floor of the building has a concrete base, with brick veneer set in a running bond to a concrete water table. The west elevation has brick piers defining a five-seven-five bay rhythm and extending to a corbelled brick course below the third floor windows. Most windows in the building are paired hinged eight-light wood sash casements with four-light transoms above and brick rowlock sills. The first floor has eight-over-eight double-hung wood sash windows.

The east elevation has a brick chimney centrally located, which has been rebuilt with a modified chimney cap above the eaves. On either side of the chimney are a bank of five windows and smaller hinged casement windows which light the interior bathrooms and stairwells. The two sets of raised, paneled and glazed double entry doors that open out into covered playcourts have been altered. The boiler room and playcourt section of the building is one story, with a flat roof and flashed concrete coping. The 1929 additions included the expansion of the playcourts. The north elevation is brick veneer, with paired double-hung windows which light the interior central corridor. The south elevation was demolished when the building was extended to the south in 1929. The building interior has original stairs, hard wood floors, arched doorways, chalkboards, and built-in cabinetry and wood trim.

1929 Additions:
There were three sections added in 1929: the main building was extended to the south, a one story wing was added to the south of the extension, and the playcourts were extended to the east. Floyd Naramore, the architect for the additions, was able to respond sympathetically to the existing building with his design, continuing the rhythm of the existing bays and replicating the brick details.

In the extension to the main building, Naramore was able to match the existing materials, including the bracketed hipped roof, the concrete water table, and the red face brick. The windows are different from the original hinged casement style used by Blair. The addition has eight-over-eight double-hung wood sash windows with four-light transoms above, which are quite similar in proportion and glazing pattern to the original building. The first floor windows are taller than the first floor windows of the original section, with twelve-over-twelve double-hung wood sashes. The bay rhythm of the west elevation is five-two-five, with a centered projecting brick entry portal at grade, similar in character to the original entry portal, but with a cast stone architectural sign with the school's name mounted flush above. The east elevation is divided into three bays of five double-hung windows with transoms. The south elevation has transomed double-hung windows centrally located to light the corridor.

The one-story addition to the south houses the gymnasium and auditorium. It has a flat roof with a brick parapet and a concrete base. The east and west elevations have wide brick piers, similar in character to the original building, separating pairs of tall eight-over-twelve double-hung wood sash windows with eight-light transoms above. The south elevation has a central arched entry portal, framing a pair of paneled and glazed entry doors, and flanked on either side by flush brick panels. The building interior has original stairs, floors, chalkboards, and built-in cabinetry.

Condition:
The 1929 additions to the building are the only significant alterations to the original building during its lifetime. The additions by Floyd Naramore integrate sensitively with the character of the original building. The most apparent exterior change is the rebuilt brick chimney, with modified chimney cap.

The building is in fair condition, requiring cleaning of moss, organic material, and efflorescence from all elevations. Some spalling of the brick has occurred, and the joints have been partially repointed with mortar that is visibly different than the original. In addition, there has been some visible patching of the concrete base and water table. Both the new mortar and concrete patching

would most likely be less noticeable if the building were cleaned. The wood window sashes need repainting. A mortar crack is visible between the 1917 and 1929 building sections on the west elevation.

The condition of the interior of the building is fairly good, with a few areas of water damage from previous leaks. Ceilings are typically 13.5 feet, although the gymnasium and performance hall have a ceiling height of 17.5 feet. The custom cabinetry, trim, and hardwood floors are generally in good to fair condition. Walls are painted plaster. Ceilings are laminated acoustic tile with fluorescent light fixtures in some areas, with period ceiling finishes and fixtures remaining in other areas. The corridors have built-in metal lockers with wood crown molding at 9 feet above the floor, some of which is painted and some of which is a dark stained glossy finish. Limited seismic improvements were done in 1979, as well as the addition of sprinklers and fire doors in the corridors. Improvements to the building will need to include removing or encapsulating existing asbestos and lead paint.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Historical Context:

The area west of Pigeon Point in West Seattle was settled beginning in 1885 with the establishment of a sawmill and was called Humphreys Settlement. The Pacific Steel Company moved its mill there from Lake City in 1905, and the location was renamed Youngstown, after the hometown of the head of the mill William Pigott. The Mill Company built houses for the workers and a one-room school, which stood on the tideflats and was reached by walking over pilings. When 70 students arrived for the opening, a second room was added and another teacher hired.

West Seattle residents voted to become part of Seattle in 1907, and the following year the West Seattle School District was incorporated into the Seattle School District, bringing with it Youngstown School. That same year, the district constructed a five room wood frame building on the land that is now the north playground of the present-day Cooper School. In 1917, Youngstown residents petitioned the school board for a new brick building to accommodate the rapid growth in the area. The new Youngstown School was one of six similar structures designed by Edgar Blair which were additions to older, wood-framed buildings. It reflected the current trends in school planning, with eight classrooms, a combined cafeteria-auditorium, and a home economics department.

Edgar Blair had been appointed school district architect in 1909, after working under the previous district architect, James Stephen. Blair was originally from Iowa and moved to New York City in 1897 to attend Columbia University and work at several large architecture firms, including the prestigious McKim, Mead and White. He moved from there to Baltimore, gaining additional experience in the firm of Baldwin and Pennington, and in 1902 he joined the Washington, D.C. firm of Mayre and Wright, designing the Atlanta Terminal Station and the prison in Richmond, Virginia, before opening his own practice in 1904. Shortly thereafter, in 1906, he moved to Seattle and began working in school design under Stephen.

Blair’s education and training left him well-grounded in the Beaux Arts tradition, which was reflected in the simple massing and classically correct details of his designs, and can be best

observed in his earlier high school designs. His design for Franklin High School (1912) reflects this style the most clearly, with its colonnaded temple-form, pavilion ends, symmetrical tri-partite elevation, use of classical orders and entablatures, and belt courses. Ballard High School (1915) is a more modest example of this style, relying on less expensive colored brick and brick bonding patterns to convey the building's design order. As a result of the war, Seattle's industrial growth brought many new families into the city, while construction budgets became tighter and building materials were needed for the war effort. In an effort to build cost effectively and efficiently, Youngstown School, like the other schools built in 1917, was almost free of architectural ornamentation, although it embodies the massing and classical order of the Renaissance Revival style. Blair's frustrations with the tight budgets for schools led to his resignation as school district architect in 1918, after which he designed Seattle's Montlake Bridge in 1924.

Youngstown School was built with the expectation that it would be large enough for many years, but the growth in the area's population after the outbreak of World War I necessitated building the second wing in only twelve years. This addition was designed by Blair's successor Floyd Naramore. Following passage of a 1929 bond issue, the overcrowded facility was expanded through the addition of six more classrooms, two libraries, a gymnasium, offices, and various specialty rooms for art, music and shop, reflecting a changing educational curriculum. In 1939, the school requested that the name be changed, to free itself from the community's earlier unsavory reputation. The first suggestion of naming the school after Catherine E. Blaine, Seattle's first schoolteacher, was rejected for fear that it would give the impression that it was a girl's school. Therefore, the name was official changed to honor Frank B. Cooper, who served as superintendent for the Seattle School Board between 1901 and 1921.

Floyd Naramore became the district's third architect in 1919 and instigated changes in building plans and elevation design. Naramore came to Seattle from Portland, Oregon, with a degree from M.I.T. and an impressive background in school architecture, and was published in a 1920 book on school design entitled *School Architecture: Principles and Practices*. Most of Naramore's designs during his twelve year tenure as district architect were given Georgian exteriors. However, he was sensitive when designing additions to existing schools, so that his addition to Cooper School reflects the style of the original building designed by Blair. He served as school district architect until 1932, when he went into private practice, continuing to design additions to many of the schools he had designed as district architect. He served as senior partner in the firm of Naramore, Bain, Brady, and Johanson (NBBJ), which has become one of the largest and most prominent architecture firms in Seattle.

During World War II, a population boom led to the construction of a wood addition north of the present building, which has since been demolished. In 1947, the Seattle School District's first black teacher, Thelma Dewitty, began her teaching career at Cooper. Attendance at the school was the largest in the 1960s, topping at 780 students, but began to decline in the 1970s. The School District closed the school in 1989 and has used the building most recently for storage.

Significance:
Cooper Elementary School is one of six brick-faced elementary schools designed by Edgar Blair in the Renaissance Revival style and built between 1917 and 1919. The designs for Cooper and the recently demolished Madrona Elementary School are nearly identical, with both intended to expand the capacity of existing wood frame school buildings. The other four schools built during this period

are “border” buildings, built along the lot line of their sites, with a narrower, single-loaded corridor plan. Cooper and Madrona Schools are essentially double-loaded corridor versions of the border schools and as such are unique among the collection of Blair-designed elementary schools. Of the six Blair buildings, Cooper is the only sole occupant of its site. At Allen, Seward, and Latona Schools, the 1917 buildings are attached to older school buildings. Lowell was expanded in 1960 and the Blair design is the historic section in a less historic building ensemble. Cooper’s “twin” school, Madrona, has been demolished, which makes Cooper much more unique. Cooper was expanded with a 1929 addition by Floyd Naramore which responds sympathetically to the original section, matching form, style, and rhythm and extending the building along the street edge.

It meets three of the six designation criteria for landmark preservation status: #2, #4 and #6.

2) *“It is associated in a significant way with the life of a person important in the history of the city, state or nation.”*
Cooper School was the location for the appointment of the first African-American teacher hired by the Seattle Public Schools, Thelma Dewitty (1912-1977). She began her teaching position in September 1947, after pressure on her behalf from the Seattle Urban League, NAACP, the Civic Unity Committee, and Christian Friends for Racial Equality. Dewitty had been a teacher in Corpus Christi, Texas for 14 years. She was attending graduate school at the University of Washington and writing a mathematics book for children during the summer of 1947. She had come to Seattle to be with her husband and did not plan to stay if she could not secure a teaching position. Although Seattle was known for racial tolerance, Dewitty’s appointment was newsworthy and generated some conflict. When she was hired at Cooper, other teachers were informed that a black teacher would be joining them and were given the option to transfer. One parent requested that her child be removed from Dewitty’s class, although that request was denied by the principal. After teaching at Cooper, Dewitty continued her career in several Seattle schools before her retirement in 1973 and was known for her civic involvement. She was the president of the Seattle chapter of the NAACP in the late 1950s and also served on the State Board Against Discrimination and the Board of Theater Supervisors for Seattle and King County.

4) *“It embodies the distinctive visible characteristics of an architectural style, or period, or of a method of construction.”*
Like the other elementary schools designed by Seattle School District architect Edgar Blair that were built at the same time, Cooper School is a simplified version of an Renaissance Revival style public building, a style based on the classical principles taught at the Ecole de Beaux Arts in Paris. Edgar Blair was an architect very familiar with these principles, having worked for the well-known Beaux Arts firm McKim, Meade, and White, as well as other large firms on the east coast. Blair’s high school designs reflect this style most closely, but the elementary school designs show an evolution towards this style, away from the more picturesque designs of his predecessor, James Stephen. These buildings are brick construction, with linear plans and specialized rooms.

6) *“Because of its prominence of spatial location, contrasts of siting, age, or scale, it is an easily identifiable visual feature of its neighborhood or the city and contributes to the distinctive quality or identity of such neighborhood or the city.”*
Cooper School sits at the west edge of its lot and is raised above the street level, which gives it commanding views of the Delridge Community Center and playfields, as well as the neighborhood

beyond. It is located on Delridge Way SW, the primary arterial serving this area of West Seattle, and is visible from blocks away to the west, as well as from a considerable distance along Delridge Way from the north and south. As a result of the location of the Cooper School along Delridge Way, and the lack of neighboring buildings of a similar scale and architectural character, the building is well-known and considered to be an informal landmark in the Delridge neighborhood. The Delridge Neighborhood Plan, adopted into the City of Seattle Comprehensive Plan in 1999, calls for the preservation of the building as a community historical and cultural resource.

The features of the Landmark to be preserved, include:

- The exterior of the 1917 building and the 1929 additions
- The site, excluding the pedestrian bridge

Issued: August 27, 2002

Karen Gordon
City Historic Preservation Officer

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