



Milwaukee Historic Preservation Commission Staff Report

LIVING WITH HISTORY

HPC meeting date: 8/5/2024
Staff reviewer: Andrew Stern

Ald. Coggs
CCF # 240363

Property	1555 N. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Dr.	Golda Meir School
Owner/Applicant	Milwaukee Public Schools 1124 N. 11 th St. Milwaukee, WI 53233	Craig Eide 2625 S. Greeley St, Suite 203 Milwaukee, WI 53207

Proposal

The applicant is proposing to remove fire escape #3 from the west side of the building and infill of a third floor exterior door with masonry to match the existing wall construction.

Full demolition proposal includes:

1. Infill of existing 3'x8.5' exterior door M.O. on the third floor with masonry to match existing wall construction and interior finishes.
2. Removal of exterior lights at 3rd floor fire escape landing.
3. Brick infill and tuckpointing at removed fire escape utilizing cream city brick to match existing.
4. Removal of fire escape structure including anchors, handrails and brackets.
5. Painting of new masonry infill to match existing building color and finish.
6. Touchup painting of existing masonry at removed fire escape connection points.

Staff comments

Fire escape #3 is the only original fire escape on the building, dating to 1890. The other two fire escapes on the building are replacements. Fire escape #3 is located on the west (rear) façade of the building, tucked in the northwest corner behind a five-story brick chimney stack. The fire escape is constructed of steel and has been painted. The fire escape terminates onto the roof of the one-story boiler room. The boiler room roof does not have access to the ground or into the building and is topped with barbed wire security fencing. Thus, there is no safe way to egress to the ground using this fire escape.

An engineering inspection report conducted by Integrated Structural Engineering, LLC from 2020 concluded that fire escapes #1 and #2 had minor maintenance issues and were otherwise safe but recommended fire escape #3 should not be used until critical repairs had been made or that the escape abandoned. The third floor of the school has sufficient egress even without fire escape #3. SPS 378.01 Exits, (2) states in part "in every non-fire-resistive building more than 2 stories in height, at least one exit shall be a fire escape." There are currently three enclosed stairways and three fire escapes from the third floor.

The preservation guidelines for Golda Meir School under Section X.B.2 Wood/Metal specify to "retain original material, whenever possible. Avoid removing architectural features that are essential to maintaining the building's character and appearance." Guidelines also specify to "repair or replace deteriorated material with new material that duplicates the old as closely as possible." None of the recommendations in the engineering report indicate that that fire escape #3 is in immediate danger of structural failure or is improperly secured to the building. The vast majority of the findings and recommendations in the report that apply to fire escape #3 also apply to the other two escapes. These recommendations consist of general maintenance such as cleaning and removing corrosion, repainting the escapes, spot re-welding, spot tuck pointing of masonry, and spot replacement of damaged steel.

Staff recognizes that this fire escape may no longer be necessary from a code standpoint and that repair would be required to make it functional. However, consideration should be given to the fact that this is the last remaining original fire escape to the building. If no longer needed, staff recommends fire escape be retained, with minimal repairs and priming/painting made to stabilize the structure. Signage and/or a physical barrier could be installed to the top and bottom of the structure indicating it non-functional and should not be used. The third floor door could be permanently closed, though the opening and door retained.

In addition to being locally designated, the building is also on the National Register of Historic Places and is a National Historic Landmark. National Historic Landmark is the highest honor available to a building from the federal government and the Commission should take extra care with such a building. This proposal will also require review and consultation with the Wisconsin State Historic Preservation Office over any adverse effects removal of the fire escape would have on the integrity of the building. Staff has made the applicant aware of their responsibility to submit this project to SHPO.

Recommendation Recommend HPC Denial

Conditions

Previous HPC action

Previous Council action