

**TESTIMONY OF THE CAPITOL HILL RESTORATION SOCIETY
BEFORE THE DC HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD
On the Proposed Car Barn at Spingarn High School
April 4, 2013**

My name is Shauna Holmes, and I'm testifying on behalf of the Capitol Hill Restoration Society's Historic Preservation Committee. Because siting this facility on Spingarn's campus will wipe out so much open green space, we appreciate efforts made since last fall to somewhat reduce these inroads. For instance, framing the car barn with green on Benning and 26th Street provides a buffer of vegetation on the corner and in front of the building. Replacing stained concrete between the "yard tracks" alongside the car barn with "turf block", which is somewhat pervious and will sustain some grass, should provide an overall sense of a lawn. Replacing concrete sidewalk between the tracks entering the car barn with permeable pavers should help make the surface more porous. However, we would prefer to see turf block here as well if it's at all feasible to retain a more extensive appearance of green lawn.

Also, to preserve the green space which has been part of the east setting of the historic Langston Terrace Dwellings, the lawn and berms that slope down from Langston Terrace to the Car Barn site should be carefully landscaped to retain that historic viewshed to the fullest extent possible. Even this, though, would not mitigate the fact that the new facility and parking areas will largely wipe out Spingarn's grounds between it and Benning Road, erasing the character of the school's setting atop a rise over a green campus.

While we recognize that these designs are improvements over what you saw November 1, they still leave much to be desired and do not, in our view, respond sufficiently to the Board's November comments nor comport fully with the Car Barn System Design Guidelines. For instance, the Board requested a more civic appearance, and the design guidelines state that the car barn "should promote a vision for progressive...civic presence." "Civic", though, does not have to mean bland and pedestrian, and we were surprised and disappointed with how ordinary these options are. Rather than being "of their time", or "of the highest aesthetic quality" called for in the design guidelines, they are instead evocations of fairly pedestrian, tired mid-20th-century architecture that can be seen in post offices, libraries, and schools throughout the country.

As a member of the Board said four months ago, DC has wonderful historic car barns that managed to fit functional architecture into communities, and our testimony then called for this new car barn to match those exemplary architectural standards. We do not consider these current proposals to be exemplary, or "of the highest aesthetic quality," or to measure up to their predecessors. Members of the Board also said that the design should be more sympathetic with Spingarn and the other schools on this campus, and one cited a DDOT survey which found that 2/3 of people in the community want the car barn to look like the schools. Our previous testimony called for the new car barn to be respectful of and compatible with Spingarn's style, design, and materials so it would look like it belongs on the educational campus, rather than being thrust upon it. However, besides the use of red brick and an alignment with Spingarn that is likely to be indiscernible from Benning Road, we still see little in

these designs that is sympathetic with or respectful of Spingarn and its companion schools.

*[From Benning Road, the car barn will obscure the historic high school with a new structure that is neither compatible with nor subordinate to Spingarn, which now dominates the view. When we studied the plans, they seemed to offer a choice between “inappropriate” and “also inappropriate” – a taller, undistinguished, vertically-oriented structure hiding Spingarn with a full three stories, or a structure with a smaller, set-back third level that might hide slightly less of Spingarn. For all the emphasis placed on a civic option vs. a podium option, neither evokes the school in any substantive way, and deciding between them should not be the choice today. The civic option is civic only insofar that it resembles many unexceptional civic buildings that can be found all over the U.S., and its very tall vertical windows are unlike Spingarn’s individually punched window openings. The podium option at least echoes the horizontality of Spingarn and has a light base like the school that helps to visually break up its height, but its fenestration with off-set windows is totally unlike that of the school’s. I also want to note that we see nothing in Scheme 2’s clerestory windows that’s at all evocative of Spingarn’s hipped roof form.]

*[We understand that trying to design what’s basically an industrial-type structure that needs to be compatible with and reflect aspects of a Colonial Revival scholastic building is a huge challenge. However, in choosing to locate the car barn on an academic campus, DDOT took on this challenge and needs to do more to rise to it. We recommend taking a fresh look at Spingarn for architectural clues, motifs, rhythms, and elements and then finding creative ways to integrate more of them into the design so the car barn will look like it belongs here. Of all the elevations shown, we found the two proposed north façades to come the closest to being compatible, and we suggest they might provide another starting point for bringing the other facades more into harmony with Spingarn.]

To conclude, we recommend that HPRB ask to review the design and landscaping again after additional revisions, since the design in particular has quite a ways to go before it will be adequately compatible. Also, the current renderings do not show the full scope of the overhead wires and their associated connections, nor do they show any means of mitigating or softening the brick box housing the power substation.

*These two paragraphs were not delivered because the time limit expired.