

**Department of Community Planning and Economic Development – Planning Division**  
Demolition of a Historic Resource  
BZH-26451

**Proposal:** Demolition

**Applicant:** Minneapolis Public Schools (Mark W. Bollinger), 612-668-0285

**Address of Property:** 5034 Oliver Avenue North, Shingle Creek Elementary School

**Planning Staff:** Aaron Hanauer, Senior City Planner, 612-673-2494

**Date Application Deemed Complete:** May 22, 2012

**Public Hearing:** July 24, 2012

**Appeal Period Expiration:** August 3, 2012

**Ward:** 4

**Neighborhood Organization:** Shingle Creek

**ATTACHMENTS**

- A. CPED Attachments
  - Zoning Context Map
  - Minneapolis Public Schools, 1883-1962
  - Aerials
  - Historic Images
  - Minneapolis Public Schools Closed School Properties Report (2008)
- B. Materials Submitted by Applicant
  - Application
  - Neighborhood and City Council Letters
  - Shingle Creek School Pending Repairs
  - District Operations Center Reports
  - Site Plan, Elevation, and Floor Plan
  - Aerial
  - Photo Key
  - Survey, Elevations, and Aerial
  - Photo Key and Photos
  - Determination of Eligibility for Heritage Preservation Designation
- C. Public Comments
  - Letter from Shingle Creek Neighborhood Association

## A. BACKGROUND

Per 599.460, a wrecking permit application can be approved administratively if the building or structure is not considered a historic resource. If the property is considered a historic resource because it is believed that it meets at least one of the seven local designation criteria, a proposed demolition would require a Demolition of Historic Resource application.

CPED-Planning informed the Minneapolis Public Schools in February 2010 that a demolition of Shingle Creek Elementary School would require a Demolition of Historic Resource application. The Applicant submitted a Demolition of Historic Resource application and a comprehensive historic analysis that recommends that Shingle Creek Elementary School is not eligible for heritage designation under Criterion 1 or 4.

## B. DESCRIPTION

The Shingle Creek Elementary School is located in the Shingle Creek Neighborhood, which provides the northwest boundary for the City of Minneapolis. The parcel covers a city block (53,466 square feet) bounded by Oliver Avenue North on the west and 50<sup>th</sup> Avenue North on the south. Shingle Creek and green space owned by the Minneapolis Park Board provides the north and east boundaries of the subject parcel.

The one-story brick school was built in 1958 and designed in the Cluster Plan. *The Cluster Plan* can be described as a collection of small schoolhouses linked by enclosed hallways. The cluster plan was more appealing compared to the campus plan in harsh climates because of the protection against the elements with the enclosed hallways. Like the campus plan, the cluster plan offers easy expansion possibilities. It can also reflect the organization of a school by subject, grade level, or “houses.”<sup>1</sup>

Shingle Creek Elementary School contains 23 classrooms. The main building consists of administrative offices entered at the main (west) entrance, Corridors branching from the administrative core at the north, east and south provide access to classroom clusters. Two pods of three classrooms each are at the north and east; three pods with three classrooms each are at the south. The building is framed in structural steel. The exterior walls have variegated brown brick. The main entrance at the west is sheltered by a curved aluminum canopy supported by four flared steel posts. Windows are fixed, aluminum units (ca. 1997) and are placed at the corner and end bay of each classroom. Two rows of divided, dark aluminum panels are above the strips of windows.<sup>2</sup>

Most of the dwellings in the surrounding area are one-story or one and one-half story single family homes built after World War II.

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<sup>1</sup> Graves, Ben E. and Pearson, Clifford A. *School Ways: The Planning and Design of America's Schools*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1993.

<sup>2</sup> Landscape Research LLC. *Determination of Eligibility for Heritage Preservation Designation: Shingle Creek Elementary School*. Minneapolis Public Schools: July 2011.

### **C. PROPOSED CHANGES**

Minneapolis Public Schools is proposing to demolish Shingle Creek Elementary School; there are no plans for future development at this time. In the interim, the site would become green space as an extension of the adjacent park.

The building was closed in 2007. The Determination of Eligibility report states that United Properties marketed the property, but received no proposals. In 2010, the Minneapolis Public Schools (MPS) prepared the building for demolition. This included the removal of asbestos, mechanical elements, duct work, and ceilings.

### **D. NECESSITY OF DEMOLITION**

The Minneapolis Code of Ordinances, Title 23, Heritage Preservation, Chapter 599 Heritage Preservation Regulations states that before approving the demolition of a property determined to be an historic resource, the Commission shall make findings that the demolition is necessary to correct an unsafe or dangerous condition on the property, or that there are no reasonable alternatives to the demolition. In determining whether reasonable alternatives exist, the commission shall consider, but not be limited to the significance of the property, the integrity of the property and the economic value or usefulness of the existing structure, including its current use, costs of renovation and feasible alternative uses. The commission may delay a final decision for up to one hundred-eighty (180) days to allow parties interested in preserving the historic resource a reasonable opportunity to act to protect it.

#### **D1. SIGNIFICANCE**

The subject property is a historic resource and is a candidate for possible local historic designation as a City of Minneapolis landmark based on an analysis of the local criteria.

The property was identified in the following reports as being potentially eligible for local and/National Register Historic sites:

- North Minneapolis: Minneapolis Historic Context Study (1998);
- Minneapolis Public Schools Historic Context Study (2005);
- Historic Resources Inventory: Historic Resources in the Camden Area (2011).

Please note the 2005 Minneapolis Public Schools Context Study did not evaluate public schools for designation: <http://bit.ly/NjSt5i>. However the conclusion of the report states “The schools’ planning and design characteristics, and each property’s relationship to the creation of the Minneapolis public school plan should be among chief evaluation considerations.” Designation Criterion 1 (association with significant events or periods that exemplify broad patterns of cultural, political, economic or social history) and Designation Criterion 4 (distinctive characteristics of an architectural or engineering type or style, or method of construction) were recommended as the most relevant designation criteria.”

The study also concludes that “the collection of post-World-War II schools that reflect new architectural ideas after the dissolution of the Bureau of Buildings should also be evaluated.”

**Criteria #1: The property is associated with significant events or with periods that exemplify broad patterns of cultural, political, economic or social history.**

Shingle Creek Elementary School is associated with periods that exemplify broad patterns of cultural, economic, and social history. It illustrates the development pattern of Minneapolis after World War II. North Minneapolis experienced a substantial development spurt after World War II, when the northern edges of the city were filled up with postwar ramblers and bungalows for families with young children. People moved to the North Side to attain the American dream of a single-family house with a yard, surrounded by neighbors who shared common interests and beliefs.”<sup>3</sup> Shingle Creek Elementary School was one of six public elementary schools built in Minneapolis between 1949 and 1962 to satisfy the growing populations after World War II.<sup>4</sup>

Shingle Creek Elementary School may also be significant for its social history. The 1998 North Minneapolis Historic Context Study states that. “Each of the ethnic, racial, and religious groups who built their community on Minneapolis’ North Side has a rich history that is integral to understanding the cultural story of this section of the city.”

Shingle Creek Elementary School played a role with Minneapolis’ desegregation efforts in the Minneapolis Public School system in the 1960s. In 1967, during the Civil Rights efforts nationwide, the Minneapolis School Board passed a racial transfer policy to help integrate students and “help end de facto segregation in the public schools”. Shingle Creek Elementary School was on the receiving end of the largest transfer of students in Minneapolis from a “racially unbalanced” school and the only group being provided transportation at public expense.<sup>5</sup> It included 27 black and Indian students transferring from Willard Elementary School, which had a heavy nonwhite enrollment at the time.<sup>6</sup> The policy was described by the Tribune as “hotly contested.” Church leaders helped support this desegregation effort by working to improve relations with those opposing the effort, publicly supporting the racial transfer policy, and providing lunchtime meals for the students, at a time when schools did not have a lunch program.<sup>7</sup> The significance of this effort and others in race relations should be analyzed in greater detail for their historic significance.

**Criteria #2: The property is associated with the lives of significant persons or groups.**

In a cursory review of students and faculty, Shingle Creek Elementary School in and of itself is not known to be associated with significant persons or groups that best captures that individual or group’s importance.

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<sup>3</sup> Borchert, John R. et. Al. *Legacy of Minneapolis: Preservation Amid Change*. Bloomington, MN. Voyageur Press, 1984.

<sup>4</sup> Landscape Research LLC. *Minneapolis Public Schools Historic Context Study*. Minneapolis Heritage Preservation Commission: April 2005.

<sup>5</sup> Howell, Deborah. “Clergyman Back Race Transfers in Schools.” *Minneapolis Star*, November 1, 1967.

<sup>6</sup> Watson, Catherine. “Shingle Creek Asks About Transfer Plan.” *Minneapolis Tribune*, November 8, 1967.

<sup>7</sup> Watson, Catherine. “Shingle Creek Pupils May Eat at Church.” *Minneapolis Tribune*, November 2, 1967.

**Criteria #3: The property contains or is associated with distinctive elements of city or neighborhood identity.**

Shingle Creek Elementary School is associated with distinctive elements of the neighborhood identity and is an important part of the fabric of North Minneapolis. As John Borchert points out in *Legacy of Minneapolis*, “There are few monumental structures on the Northside except for churches and schools.” The Shingle Creek Elementary School is likely the most recognized building in the neighborhood. In addition, the school was named Shingle Creek Elementary to reinforce the relationship with the neighboring creek.<sup>8</sup>

Currently, there are no historic landmarks nor historic districts in the Camden Community nor the Shingle Creek Neighborhood.

**Criteria #4: The property embodies the distinctive characteristics of an architectural or engineering type or style, or method of construction.**

Shingle Creek Elementary School embodies the distinctive characteristics of the cluster plan design, which is the only school in Minneapolis designed in this style (1958). The cluster plan is a variation on the campus plan and can be described as a collection of small intimate schoolhouses linked by enclosed hallways for protection in harsh climates.<sup>9</sup>

In 1954, the cluster design was “regarded by experts as a forerunner of schools of the future” and won a national architecture award with the completion of Heathcote Elementary School in Scarsdale, New York in 1953.<sup>10</sup> Heathcote was designed by Lawrence B. Perkins, of Perkins and Will Architectural Firm. The benefits of the school design were the separation of children by age group, the feeling of closeness to and connection with nature (similar to the location decision of Shingle Creek Elementary near the creek and park land), and economical construction costs, which were less than a traditional school of equal size.<sup>11</sup>

The 1963 planning report of the Shingle Creek Elementary School commissioned by Minneapolis Public Schools states, “Shingle Creek Elementary School is an outstanding elementary school plan located on an adequate site. The building condition and construction is excellent.”

**Criteria #5: The property exemplifies a landscape design or development pattern distinguished by innovation, rarity, uniqueness or quality of design or detail.**

Shingle Creek Elementary exemplifies a landscape design distinguished by uniqueness. In the 1950s, school planners collaborated with city planners and the park board to site four schools, including Shingle Creek Elementary. Shingle Creek Elementary was the “city’s first campus

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<sup>8</sup> Landscape Research LLC. *Determination of Eligibility for Heritage Preservation Designation*. Minneapolis Public Schools: July 2011.

<sup>9</sup> Graves, Ben E. and Pearson, Clifford A. *School Ways: The Planning and Design of America’s Schools*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1993.

<sup>10</sup> Life Magazine. Clusters of Classrooms: A New, Sprawling Design Foreshadows Schools of the Future. November 15, 1954, pp 73-77.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid*

type public school to be erected on school-park property.” The campus allowed for greater interactions with nature both from viewing from classrooms and experiencing it first-hand. The grounds of the school are linked with Shingle Creek via a path and bridge and blend into Creekview Park, which is part of Shingle Creek Park. To reinforce the strong relationship between the adjacent uses, the school was named after the creek.<sup>12</sup>

**Criteria #6: The property exemplifies works of master builders, engineers, designers, artists, craftsmen or architects.**

The property may exemplify a work of a master designer(s). Shingle Creek Elementary School was designed by the architectural firm Shifflet, Backstrom, Hutchinson and Dickey Architects. In the beginning of his career, Glynne Shifflet worked as a designer and draftsman for Cass Gilbert in New York. Notable work of Shifflet (1907-1971) includes the Church of Visitation (Danvers, 1931), Phi Chi Fraternity (Minneapolis, 1931), and the Northern Pump Company (Fridley, 1939-1940). In 1949, he was listed in the *Who's Who in the Midwest* in 1949.<sup>13 14</sup>

Arthur Dickey (1928-2001) was an up-and-coming architect at the time when Shingle Creek Elementary School was completed in 1958. Dickey received his bachelor's degree in architecture in 1952 from the University of Nebraska. A winner of a number of architectural awards, Dickey went on to start his own firm in 1962. Over his career he designed over 300 homes, 20 fire stations, and several National Guard armories. He also oversaw renovation work of the Governor's residence in Saint Paul.<sup>15</sup> The Applicant's Determination of Eligibility report also credits Dickey for the design of the following schools: Faribault School (1951), Orono High School (1951), Minnehaha Academy gymnasium, Minneapolis (1948), Holy Cross School, Minneapolis (1950), St. Kevin's School, Minneapolis (1952), St. John's School, Hopkins (1951) and St. John's School, Excelsior (1952).

Arthur Dickey's 2001 Star Tribune obituary states that he “didn't add a lot of extravagant ornamentation to his work. He preferred simple, innovative designs” Built with only a few exterior flourishes, this straightforward design is illustrated with the design of the Shingle Creek Elementary School.

**Criteria #7: The property has yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.**

No prehistory or history is known to be on the site of the Shingle Creek Elementary School.

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<sup>12</sup> Landscape Research LLC. *Determination of Eligibility for Heritage Preservation Designation*. Minneapolis Public Schools: July 2011.

<sup>13</sup> Lathrop, Alan K. *Minnesota Architects: A Biographical Dictionary*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010.

<sup>14</sup> The University of Michigan. *Who's Who In the Midwest*. Marquis, A.N. Marquis, 1949.

<sup>15</sup> Kumar, Kavita. “Obituary: Arthur Dickey, 72, Architect.” StarTribune, January 25, 2001.

## D2. UNSAFE OR DANGEROUS CONDITION

The Applicant has not provided documentation showing that the proposed demolition is to eliminate an unsafe or dangerous condition. The Applicant provides documentation of two vandalism reports in July 2011.

## D3. REASONABLE ALTERNATIVES TO DEMOLITION

Minneapolis Public Schools (MPS) does not provide an alternative to demolition; however, alternatives exist as an educational facility or another adaptive reuse.

Shingle Creek Elementary School was closed after the 2006-2007 school year. The Determination of Eligibility report states that MPS retained the services of United Properties to market the property in 2008, but did not receive offers or development plans and prepared the school for demolition in 2010.

The extent of Minneapolis Public School's efforts to reuse the facility is unknown at this time. In 2008, MPS commissioned a report, *Minneapolis Public Schools Closed School Properties* to help develop a strategic plan for the redevelopment of the closed school properties. There were three reuse options recommended for Shingle Creek Elementary School:

1. Charter School
2. Resource Center
3. Land Swap with the Park

During a meeting with the neighborhood on November 10, 2007, residents expressed reuse opportunities/interests:

- Youth related functions
  - Youth leadership academy
  - Camden Youth Engagement Project
  - Fitness Center for youth-open gym
- Community Center
  - Adult and children's daycare
  - Assisted living facility
  - Senior activity center
  - Art space and music education
  - Office space for neighborhood organization
  - Use as a park building

The report's final recommendation was a District Swap with Minneapolis Park Board for Park Development. The report states, "**The Shingle Creek Property is located on a great site that could be used after modifications to the building as Park and Recreation space.** A swap of the Shingle Creek property with the Minneapolis Park Board in exchange for land adjacent to Olson School would provide for future growth of MPS at that site, if needed. The community supports this concept."

No documentation was provided for the Demolition of Historic Resource application that the reuse of the school building as a park and recreational space or other community supported programming was analyzed.

#### **D4. INTEGRITY**

The National Register traditionally recognizes a property's integrity through seven aspects or qualities: location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. The school's integrity of materials has been compromised with alterations; however its overall integrity is still good.

*Location:* Shingle Creek Elementary School retains its integrity of location. The school was completed in 1958 at its current location.

*Design:* The original design of Shingle Creek Elementary remains intact. Although the school has had some exterior alterations, the current building design resembles the appearance of the school when it was completed in 1958. In addition, the original site design is still intact with the parking and play areas resembling the original.

*Setting:* The setting of Shingle Creek Elementary School remains intact. The surrounding residential properties provide context to the mid-century modern design of the school. *Legacy of Minneapolis* states "Except for one or two senior citizen high rises, this part of the city has experienced almost no redevelopment to cause the original structures to disappear."

*Materials:* The materials of Shingle Creek Elementary have been compromised with the replacement of windows. However, many of the schools that were evaluated in the 2005 *Minneapolis Public Schools Historic Context Study* have had their windows replaced.<sup>16</sup> A majority of the character defining features remain including the variegated brown brick, original window openings, and curved aluminum canopy to the main entrance.

*Workmanship:* Shingle Creek Elementary School retains the integrity of the original workmanship. The school was built in a straightforward design. Even though the building is not as ornate as other buildings, evidence of artisans' labor and skill in constructing the building still exist with the masonry, sills, and window openings.

*Feeling:* Shingle Creek Elementary School retains its integrity of feeling by having the original building and site design intact, a majority of the exterior building materials present, and a surrounding area of houses built at around the same time as the school. One is transported back to the late 1950s/early 1960s when viewing this area.

*Association:* With the neighboring buildings and landscape still extant, Shingle Creek Elementary School retains sufficient physical features to maintain its integrity of association.

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<sup>16</sup> Landscape Research LLC. *Minneapolis Public Schools Historic Context Study*. Minneapolis Heritage Preservation Commission: April 2005.

## **D5. ECONOMIC VALUE OR USEFULNESS OF THE EXISTING STRUCTURE**

The estimated market value of the Shingle Creek Elementary School building and land is \$6.9 million; the building was valued at \$5.6 million and the land at \$1.3 million.<sup>17</sup> The Applicant states that Shingle Creek Elementary School is in poor condition and needs an estimated \$2.8 million in repairs.

## **E. PUBLIC COMMENT**

Staff received a letter from the Shingle Creek Neighborhood Association in opposition to the demolition.

## **F. FINDINGS**

1. Shingle Creek Elementary School is a historic resource;
2. The property was identified as being potentially eligible for local and/National Register Historic sites in the North Minneapolis: Minneapolis Historic Context Study (1998); Minneapolis Public Schools Historic Context Study (2005); and the Historic Resources Inventory: Historic Resources in the Camden Area (2011);
3. Shingle Creek Elementary School illustrates the development pattern of Minneapolis after World War II;
4. Shingle Creek Elementary School may be significant for its social history. The elementary school played a visible role with Minneapolis' desegregation efforts in the Minneapolis Public School system in the 1960s;
5. Shingle Creek Elementary School is an important part of the fabric of North Minneapolis and the Shingle Creek neighborhood. The school is likely one of the most recognizable buildings in the neighborhood and community;
6. There are no historic landmarks in the Camden Community or Shingle Creek Neighborhood;
7. Shingle Creek Elementary School embodies the distinctive characteristics of the cluster plan design, which is the only school in Minneapolis designed in this style (1958);
8. Shingle Creek Elementary exemplifies a landscape design distinguished by uniqueness. The school was the city's first campus type public school to be erected on school-park property;
9. Shingle Creek Elementary may exemplify a work of a master designer(s). The school was designed by the architectural firm Shifflet, Backstrom, Hutchinson and Dickey Architects;
10. The Applicant has not provided documentation showing that the proposed demolition is to eliminate an unsafe or dangerous condition.
11. Alternatives to demolition exist and were recommended in a 2008 reuse report commissioned by Minneapolis Public Schools;
12. Shingle Creek Elementary School was closed after the 2006-2007 school year;
13. Shingle Creek Elementary School's integrity of materials has been compromised with the replacement of windows; however its overall integrity is still good;

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<sup>17</sup> City of Minneapolis Property Information, 1101 Nicollet Mall, Accessed April 2, 2012

14. The estimated market value of the Shingle Creek Elementary School building and land is \$6.9 million; the building was valued at \$5.6 million and the land at \$1.3 million;
15. Minneapolis Public Schools states that Shingle Creek Elementary School is in poor condition and needs an estimated \$2.8 million in repairs.
16. The Shingle Creek Neighborhood Association is in opposition to the demolition.

#### **G. STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

The Department of Community Planning and Economic Development – Planning Division recommends that the Heritage Preservation Commission adopt the above findings and **deny** the demolition of Shingle Creek Elementary School at 5000 Oliver Avenue North, establish interim protection; and direct the Planning Director to prepare or cause to be prepared a designation study.