

Riley, Kate

From: Chloe Reichel <[REDACTED]>
Sent: Sunday, February 2, 2020 10:16 AM
To: Riley, Kate; City Manager
Subject: Comment: Tobin Montessori and Vassal Lane Upper School project

Dear City Manager DePasquale, School Committee members, and Perkins-Eastman collaborators,

I am a neighbor and art historian writing to voice my concerns about the Tobin Montessori and Vassal Lane Upper School project.

The Tobin Montessori and Vassal Lane Upper School was designed by the Italian modernist architect Pietro Belluschi, who served as dean of the MIT School of Architecture from 1951 to 1965. Belluschi is regarded as a leading modernist architect, and in 1972 received the American Institute of Architects' highest award, the AIA Gold Medal. He later received the National Medal of Arts from the National Endowment for the Arts for his lifetime achievements.

Belluschi's school is an under-appreciated and historically and architecturally significant example of brutalist architecture. One need only view the school around sunset to appreciate its geometries, materiality, and design.

I have attended the past two community meetings about the school's future and am concerned about the blatant disregard for the significance of the building.

At the November 13, 2019 meeting, I asked a representative from Perkins-Eastman whether thought had been given to the value of preserving the architecturally significant building.

At the time, one design afforded the option to renovate the existing building and add on to it, while the other two designs involved a complete tear-down. However, the renovation/addition option did not appear to be a serious contender both in its framing during the presentation and in its formal design.

Prior to the January 16, 2020 meeting, on the project's website, I saw that my comment merited the following non-response: "Yes. We are aware that the building was designed by Pietro Belluschi," which fails to engage with the matter at hand of whether or not thought is being given to preserving this significant building, or, at the very least, honoring the architectural legacy in the new designs.

At the January 16, 2020 meeting, the renovation/addition option was, tellingly, replaced with another full tear-down design. This new design, however, largely imitated the siting and footprint of the extant building, and seemed to be the favored option by the audience. Perhaps this is also telling of the wisdom and value of Belluschi's original design.

I ask, once again, that some thought be given to honoring the architectural legacy of the school as this design process continues.

Sincerely,
Chloe Reichel
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