

27 August 2025

Alex M. Smith
Director of the Philadelphia Art Commission
Philadelphia City Planning Commission
City of Philadelphia

RE: McPherson Square Library Renovations and Park Improvements | Phase 2
601 E Indiana Ave, Philadelphia, PA 19134
Request for Art Commission Review

Dear Mr. Smith:

We respectfully request to be included on the Art Commission agenda for Wednesday September 10 2025, regarding renovations and improvements to the McPherson Square Library and park, located at the address referenced above.

McPherson Square Library, a branch location of the Free Library of Philadelphia system, sits prominently at the middle of its namesake park, McPherson Square. Located on Kensington Ave roughly halfway between the Sommerset and Allegheny Septa stations, the park is approximately one square block in dimension; beyond the park is the rowhome-dense Kensington neighborhood. The building itself is an original Carnegie Library, constructed as a single-story masonry structure in 1917, with classical detailing including terracotta cornice and a copper dome with oculus. Undergoing only minor renovations over its one-hundred-plus year lifespan, the building maintains much of its original character. The library is locally listed on Philadelphia's Register of Historic Places (*Carnegie Library Thematic Historic District*, designated 7/9/2021).

We understand that the construction budget for the project (library and park) is approximately \$12,000,000. The project is being administered by the Philadelphia Capital Program Office (CPO) – it is also a Rebuild project. Project user groups include both the Free Library of Philadelphia (FLP) and Philadelphia Parks and Recreation (PPR). The proposed project is a continuation of work currently underway (Phase 1) which mainly focuses on roof replacement, dome repair, and stormwater improvements.

Under this proposed Phase 2 renovation, main improvements to the library include: a new ADA accessible ramp at the front of the building; new ADA LULA elevator to connect the two floors; new ADA accessible restrooms on both floors of the library; new finishes throughout; new windows and doors throughout; upgrades and fixes to the exterior façade; substantial layout changes to the lower level to make better use of space; new windows to allow light to the lower level; and new mechanical, electrical, lighting, and plumbing systems throughout. The proposed work for the park include: extensive full-depth paving replacement for a number of paths; new concrete paving for both front terraces; relocated parking with new fencing; new concrete paving and plaza at the existing side door to make for a more welcoming entry; planting of new trees and shrubs; new playground, including play equipment, safety surface, and site furnishings; and additional stormwater management improvements, including a new below-ground retention basin.

The project is currently in design, with the Design Development phase set to wrap up mid-September. We've previewed the project with the Philadelphia Historic Commission at the administrative level. We've also presented the project to the Design Excellence committee. Additionally, this project will include a Percent for Art installation. This process has been started – see attached Letter of Intent from Marguerite Anglin, Public Art Director with Creative Philadelphia.

We plan to share drawings, renderings, and information on the proposed renovations and improvements in our forthcoming Art Commission presentation, with advance copy being delivered to the Art Commission on Wednesday September 3 2025. We look forward to your review.

Respectfully submitted,
SMP ARCHITECTS



Andrew Bilyeu, RA
Architect

August 8, 2025



Alex Smith
Katherine Liss
The Philadelphia Art Commission
One Parkway, 1515 Arch Street, 13th Floor
Philadelphia, PA 19102

Re: Letter of Intent for Percent for Art at McPherson Library and Park

Dear Alex and Katherine,

Creative Philadelphia would like to inform the Philadelphia Art Commission of our intent to administer Percent for Art funds triggered by the McPherson Library and Park Rebuild project, located at 601 E. Indiana Ave in the Kensington section of North Philadelphia. Estimated at \$21,700,000, the capital project consists of ADA upgrades, new mechanical, electrical, plumbing, and security systems, interior improvements, and basement level renovations in the library, as well as site improvements consisting of re-paving all paths, new benches, bike racks, plantings, new playground equipment and safety surfaces.

The timeline and scope for the administration of Percent for Art funds is still being determined in collaboration with Creative Philadelphia, Rebuild and Capital Program Office (CPO). Below is an overview of our anticipated understanding and approach for this project:

- The Percent for Art opportunity for the McPherson Library and Park will create a beautiful and enduring work of public art that is permanent, site-specific, and reflects the culture, values and diversity of the City of Philadelphia. The Art budget will be at least 1% of the total project budget in keeping with the City's Percent for Art guidelines.
- A project specific Percent for Art Committee will be formed to advise the selection of the artist and the art proposal and will include representatives from: the Design team; McPherson Library and Park staff, community representatives, elected officials, and Creative Philadelphia.
- The Artist will be selected through an open Call for Artists process. Stakeholder involvement will be a critical component, and artist teams will be encouraged to align their proposal with feedback and input from members of the public. Public engagement will occur in virtual and/or in-person meetings, and through online public surveys. The Committee will review all proposals and the community's feedback to select one winning finalist artist or artist team.
- Creative Philadelphia will provide oversight for the Percent for Art process from concept to installation and will work with the artist and project team to ensure the technical details for the artwork are coordinated with the site.

- Once the winning artist is selected and the artwork has been developed, Creative Philadelphia will initiate a separate review process with the Philadelphia Art Commission for approving the artwork.

We look forward to working with the Rebuild and Capital Program Office project team and all stakeholders to realize a beautiful, site-specific public artwork that will be a long-lasting contribution to the McPherson Library and Park, and will enhance the City's renowned collection of public art. Should you require any additional information please do not hesitate to call me at 215.686.4596.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Marguerite Anglin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized initial "M" and a long, sweeping underline.

Marguerite Anglin, RA, NOMA
Public Art Director
Creative Philadelphia
City of Philadelphia



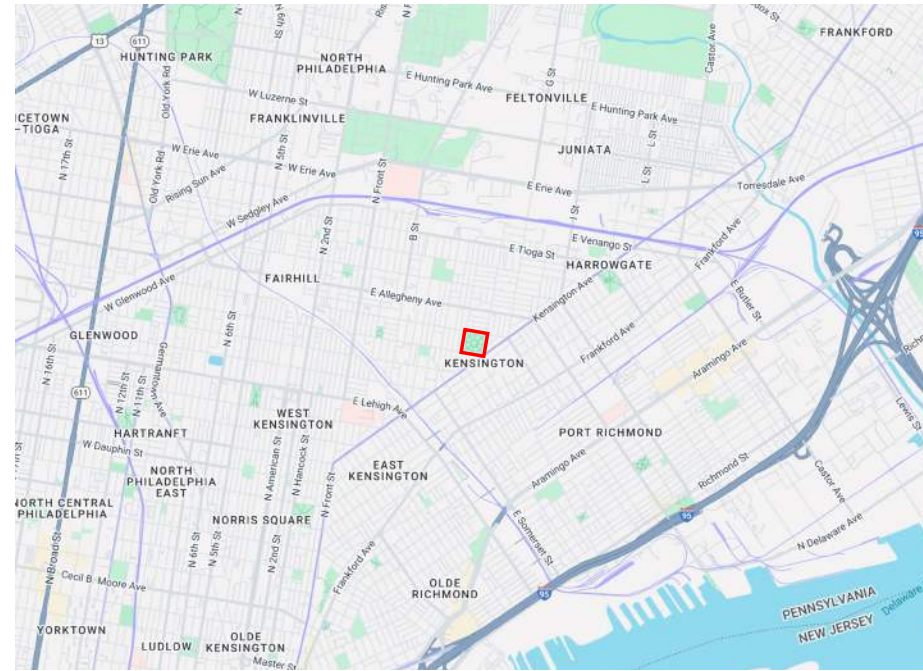
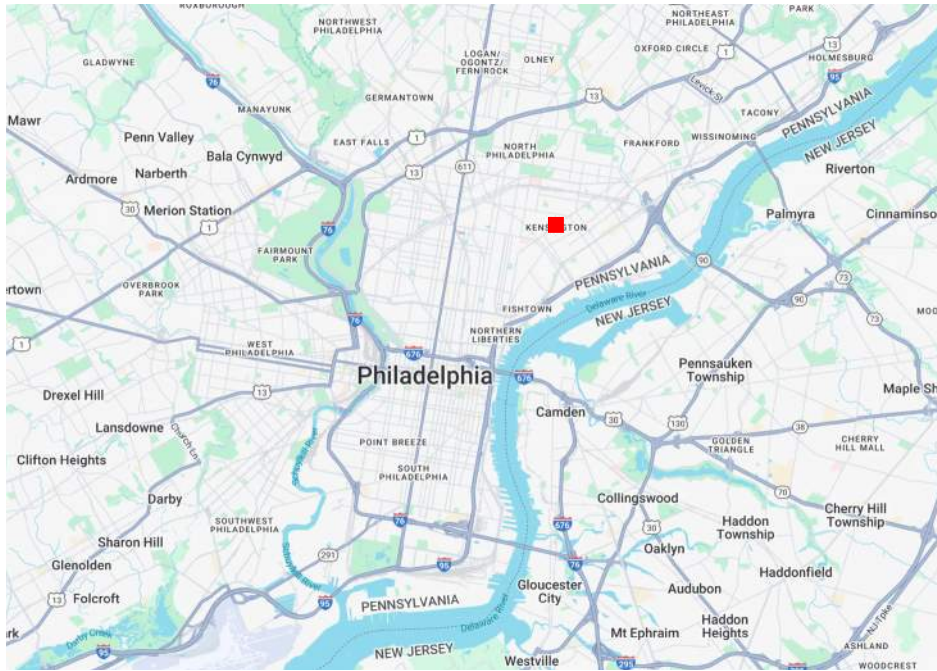
McPherson Square Library Renovations and Park Improvements

Art Commission Review
September 10, 2025



McPherson Square Library
Renovations and Park Improvements
SMP Architects | Ground Reconsidered





McPherson Square
601 E Indiana Ave, Philadelphia, PA 19134

SITE LOCATION

McPherson Square Library
Renovations and Park Improvements
SMP Architects | Ground Reconsidered





1
FRONT STEPS FROM CORNER F ST & KENSINGTON AVE



2
LIBRARY FROM CORNER F ST & KENSINGTON AVE



3
LIBRARY FROM MID-BLOCK ON E ST



McPherson Square
601 E Indiana Ave, Philadelphia, PA 19134

SITE LOCATION

McPherson Square Library
Renovations and Park Improvements
SMP Architects | Ground Reconsidered





c. 1898 (Webster Mansion)



1917 (Library opens)



1917



c. 1940



c. 1950



1961



1974



1975



1980



2010



2017

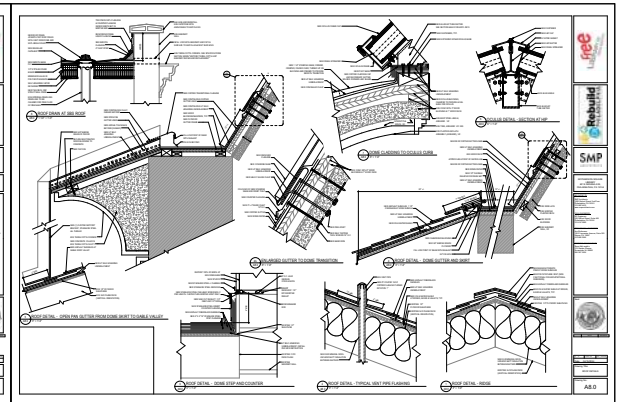
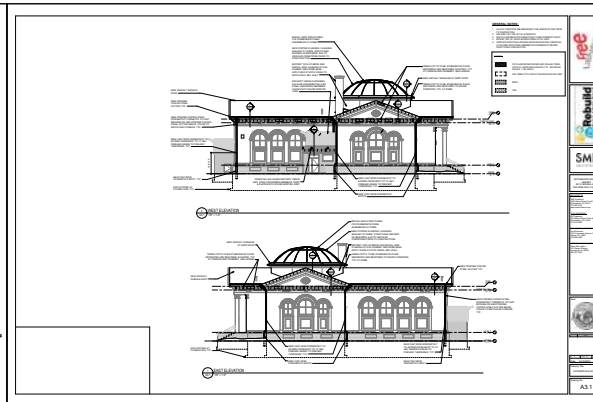
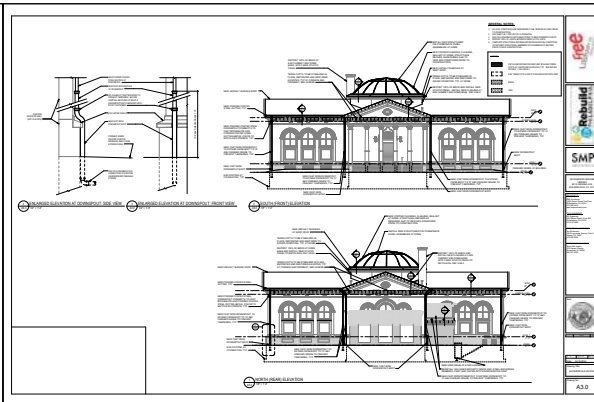
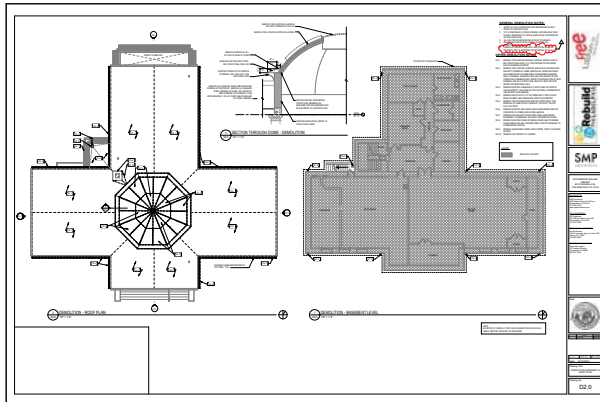


2025

HISTORIC PHOTOS

McPherson Square Library
Renovations and Park Improvements
SMP Architects | Ground Reconsidered

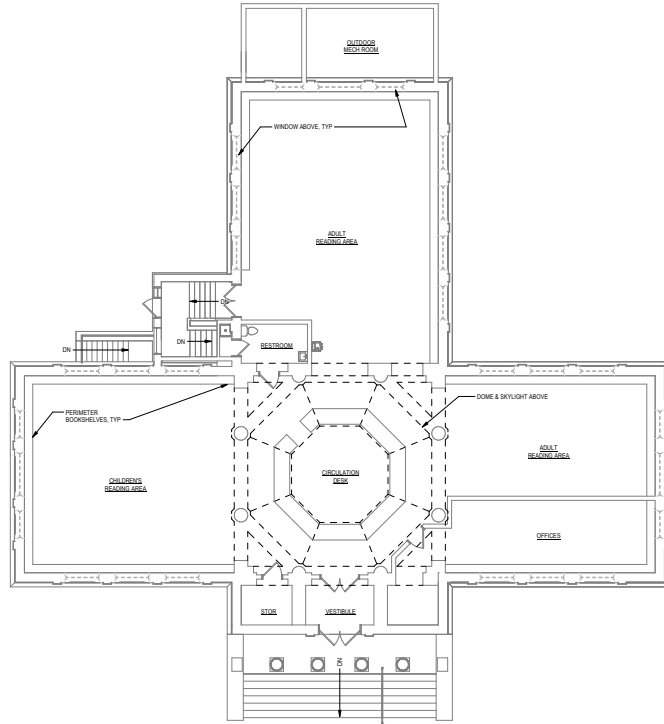




PHASE 1 - ROOF REPLACEMENT, DOME REPAIR, STORMWATER IMPROVEMENTS

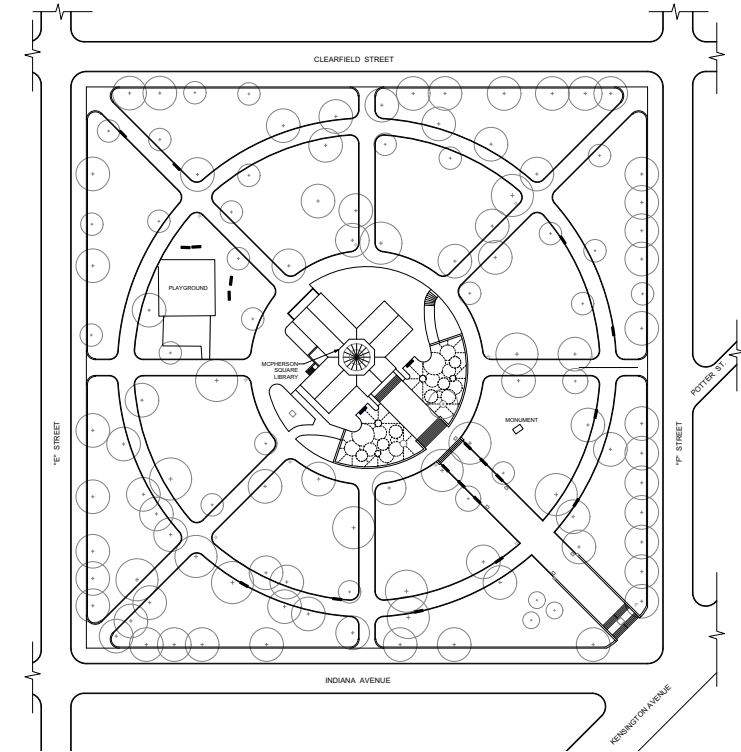
McPherson Square Library
Renovations and Park Improvements
SMP Architects | Ground Reconsidered





Key Points Discussed / Requested for the Building:

- Accessibility a must!
- Systems upgrades, specifically electrical & HVAC mentioned.
- Upgrades to furniture, finishes.
- Openness desired on the main level.
- Better layout and use of space on lower level.
- A refresh for the west entry.



Key Points Discussed / Requested for the Site:

- Improvements to front plaza to allow for more programming.
- Noted the playground and adjacent green are "reclaimed".
- Fixes to site paths, especially those looping building.
- Dedicated storage for outdoor equipment and "pop-ups".
- Separation of vehicles from pedestrians within site.
- A new playground would be very appreciated by the community.



Accessibility

Accessible entrance to building.
New elevator for lower level ADA access.
New / renovated ADA accessible restrooms.



Systems Upgrades

New HVAC systems throughout.
New lighting & electrical throughout.
New / renovated plumbing and fixtures.
New fire alarm and security systems.



General Improvements

Increase restroom count to two per level.
New windows throughout.
Upgrades and repairs to building exterior.
New flooring and painting throughout.
New furniture and casework upgrades.

Project Scope

Increased building accessibility.
Upgrades to all MEP systems.
General improvements to finishes, layouts.
General improvements to park, plazas.
New playground surfaces and equipment.

Project to pursue LEED Gold certification.



Project Budget

\$11 million



Project Team

SMP Architects | Project Architect
Ground Reconsidered | Landscape Architect
Keast & Hood | Structural Engineer
Arora Engineers | MEPFP Engineer
KS Engineers, PC | Civil Engineer
BCA Inc. | Envelope Consultant
Impact Services | Community Engagement
Dharam Consulting | Cost Estimating

Capital Program Office | Rebuild
Free Library of Philadelphia
Philadelphia Department of Parks and Recreation

PROJECT TEAM & BUDGET

McPherson Square Library
Renovations and Park Improvements
SMP Architects | Ground Reconsidered



Community Engagement Events and Touch Points

Project Kick-Off Meeting | Nov 12, 2024 | 30 Attendees

Bi-monthly Engagement with Friends of McPherson | 12+ Attendees

Summer Festival Pop-Up | June 7, 2025 | 550 Attendees

★ **Youth Play Equipment Surveys** | June 2025

Rebuild Community Meeting | Aug 12, 2025 | 52 Attendees

Back-to-School Event Pop-Up | Aug 23, 2025 | 540 Attendees

★ **Youth Color Surveys** | August 2025



Community Members reached since 2024: 1,184+

Community and Staff Early Feedback

- Health, safety, cleanliness, and longevity of Library building.
- Addressing water issues in the building.
- New systems, like HVAC, plumbing, and security.
- ADA accessibility.
- Safety for youth and families.
- More and better use of space in the Library.
 - Spaces specifically for teens and toddlers;
 - Improved lunch room;
 - Improved community spaces;
 - Dedicated spaces for staff;
 - Improved computer access and wifi;
 - Improved bathrooms.
- Safety concerns around using the front entrance of the library; call for a more welcoming side entrance.
- Importance of safe play spaces near the Playground and "the Green;" this includes water access for programs.
- Site improvements like improved pathways, trees, plantings, seating, and shade.

Engaging the Community on Design



- Positive feedback and reactions to the designs.
- Desire for more shade beyond planting new trees, specifically in the Playground.
- Enthusiasm for new patio near the side entrance.
- Continued call for safety measures post-construction (via operations, maintenance, staffing, and programs).

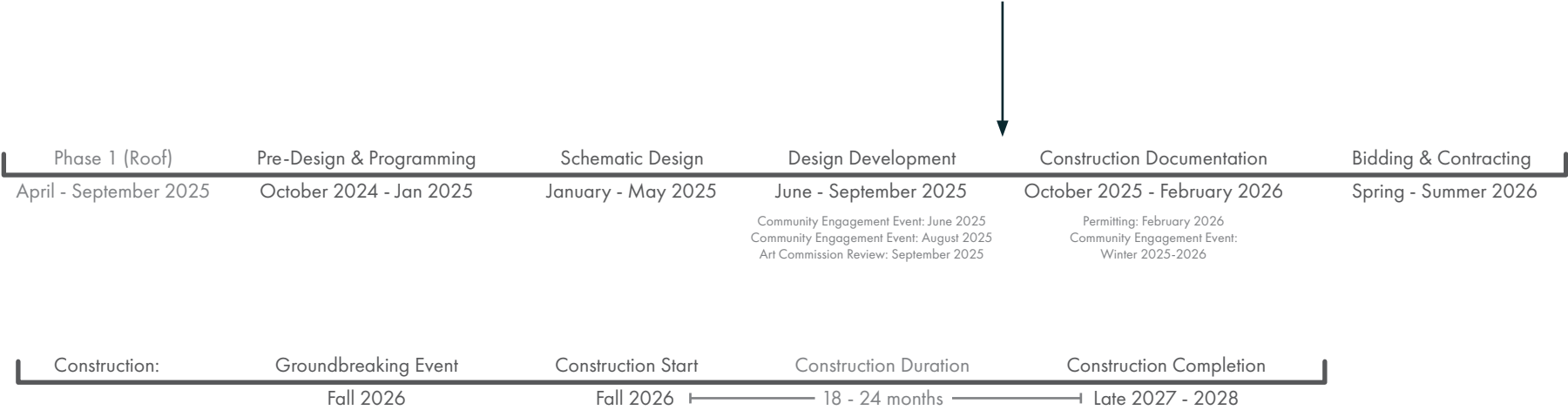
Youth Survey Results



McPherson Playground Colors

Design your playground!
Pick your two favorite colors.





Project Status

Currently finishing Design Development.

Percent for Art - Letter of Intent acquired.
Historic Commission - Admin review complete.
Design Excellence - Presented 8/20/25.





CITY OF PHILADELPHIA

PHILADELPHIA HISTORICAL
COMMISSION

1515 Arch Street, 13th Floor
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19102
Tel: 215.686.7860

Zachary Frankel
Chair

Jonathan E. Farnham, Ph.D.
Executive Director

27 August 2025

Re: 601 E. Indiana Ave; McPherson Square Library Renovations and Park Improvements

To Whom It May Concern:

The Philadelphia Historical Commission staff met with the applicants involved in the McPherson Square Library Renovations and Park Improvements project and reviewed their most recent drawing package dated August 22, 2025. As the project currently stands, the work proposed will fall under the Historical Commission's "staff approval authority". Therefore, unless the project changes in a significant way, the details of this proposal can be reviewed and approved by the staff of the Historical Commission without referral of the application to the public meeting review process. The Historical Commission staff believe that the project, as it stands, satisfies the Standards set forth in the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties*.

If there are any questions concerning this tentative approval, please direct them to heather.hendrickson@phila.gov or preservation@phila.gov.

Thank you,

Heather Hendrickson

Heather Hendrickson
Historic Preservation Planner II

August 8, 2025

Alex Smith
Katherine Liss
The Philadelphia Art Commission
One Parkway, 1515 Arch Street, 13th Floor
Philadelphia, PA 19102

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116 City Hall • Philadelphia, PA 19107 • www.creativephl.org • 215.686.4596



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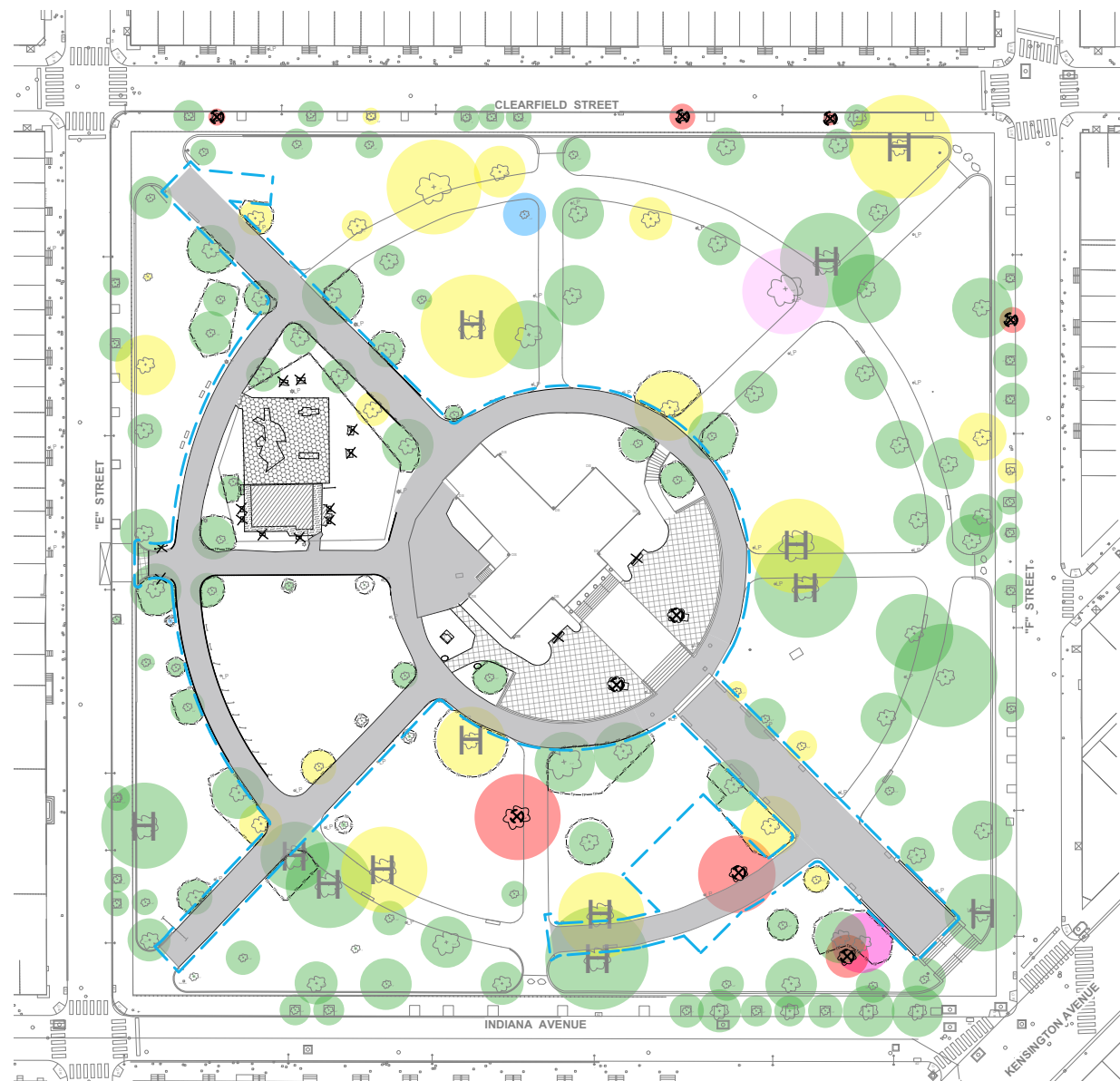


EXISTING SITE CONDITIONS

Ground Reconsidered

McPherson Square Library
Renovations and Park Improvements
SMP Architects | Ground Reconsidered





DEMOLITION LEGEND

- LOD—LO LIMIT OF DISTURBANCE, TBD
- TP—TP TREE PROTECTION FENCE
- EXISTING ASPHALT & SUBBASE, TO BE REMOVED
- EXISTING CONCRETE & SUBBASE, TO BE REMOVED
- EXISTING PLAY AREA SAFETY SURFACE & SUBBASE, TO BE REMOVED
- EXISTING CONCRETE BLOCKS & SUBBASE, TO BE REMOVED
- EXISTING WOOD BOARDWALK, TO BE REMOVED
- EXISTING BENCH, TO BE REMOVED
- EXISTING CURB, TO BE REMOVED
- EXISTING CHAIN-LINK FENCE, TO BE REMOVED
- EXISTING TREE
- EXISTING TREE, TO BE REMOVED
- PHASE 1 TREE, TO BE TRANSPLANTED

TREE HEALTH DIAGRAM LEGEND

- GOOD CONDITION
- PRUNE
- POOR CONDITION
- TOPSOIL & MULCH
- SPRAY FOR INSECTS
- REMOVE FOREIGN OBJECT
- HERITAGE TREE

SITE DEMOLITION PLAN

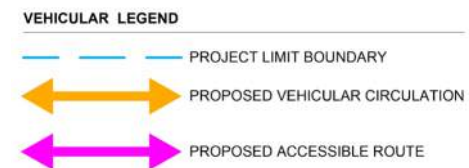
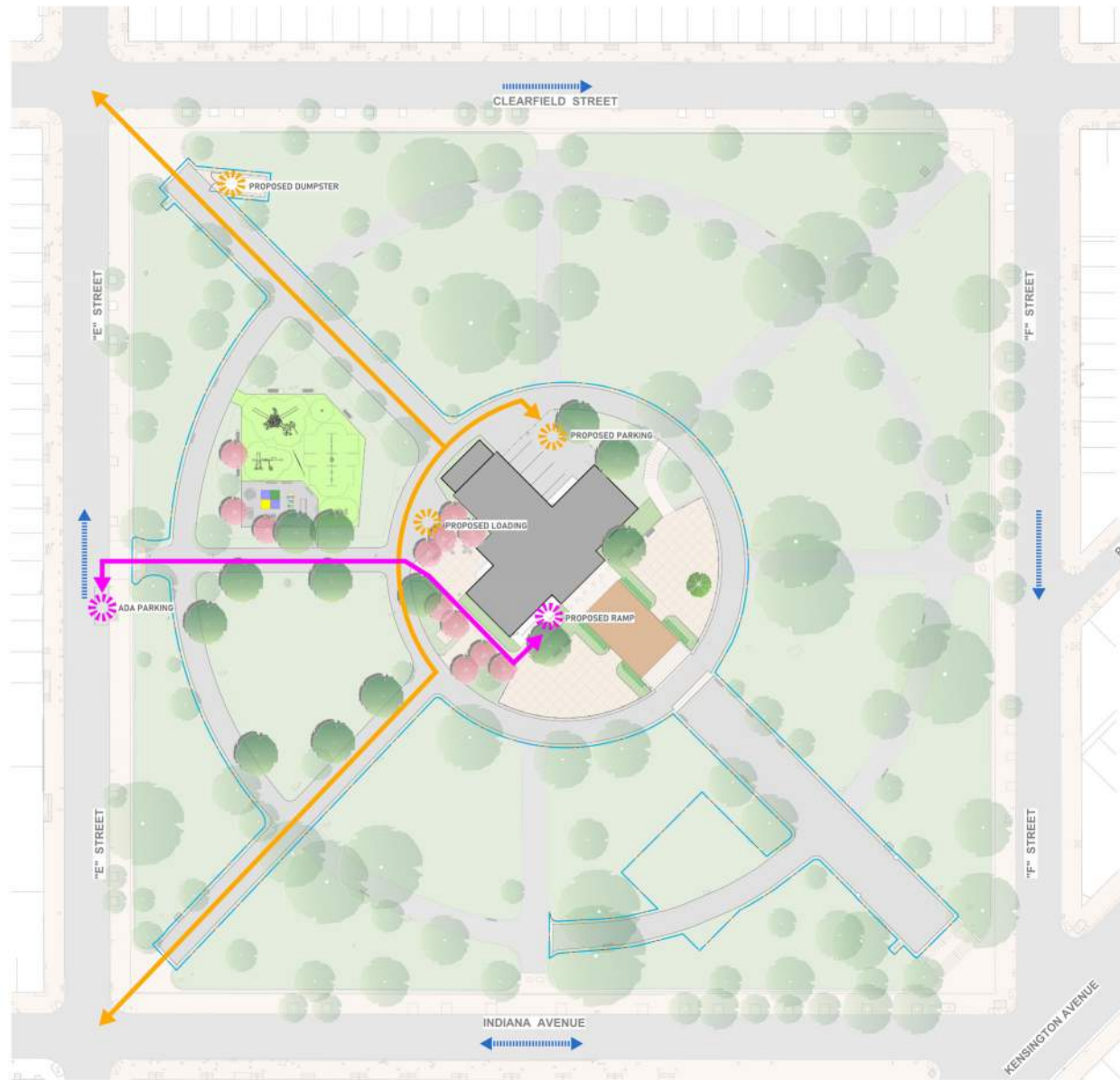


PROPOSED SITE PLAN

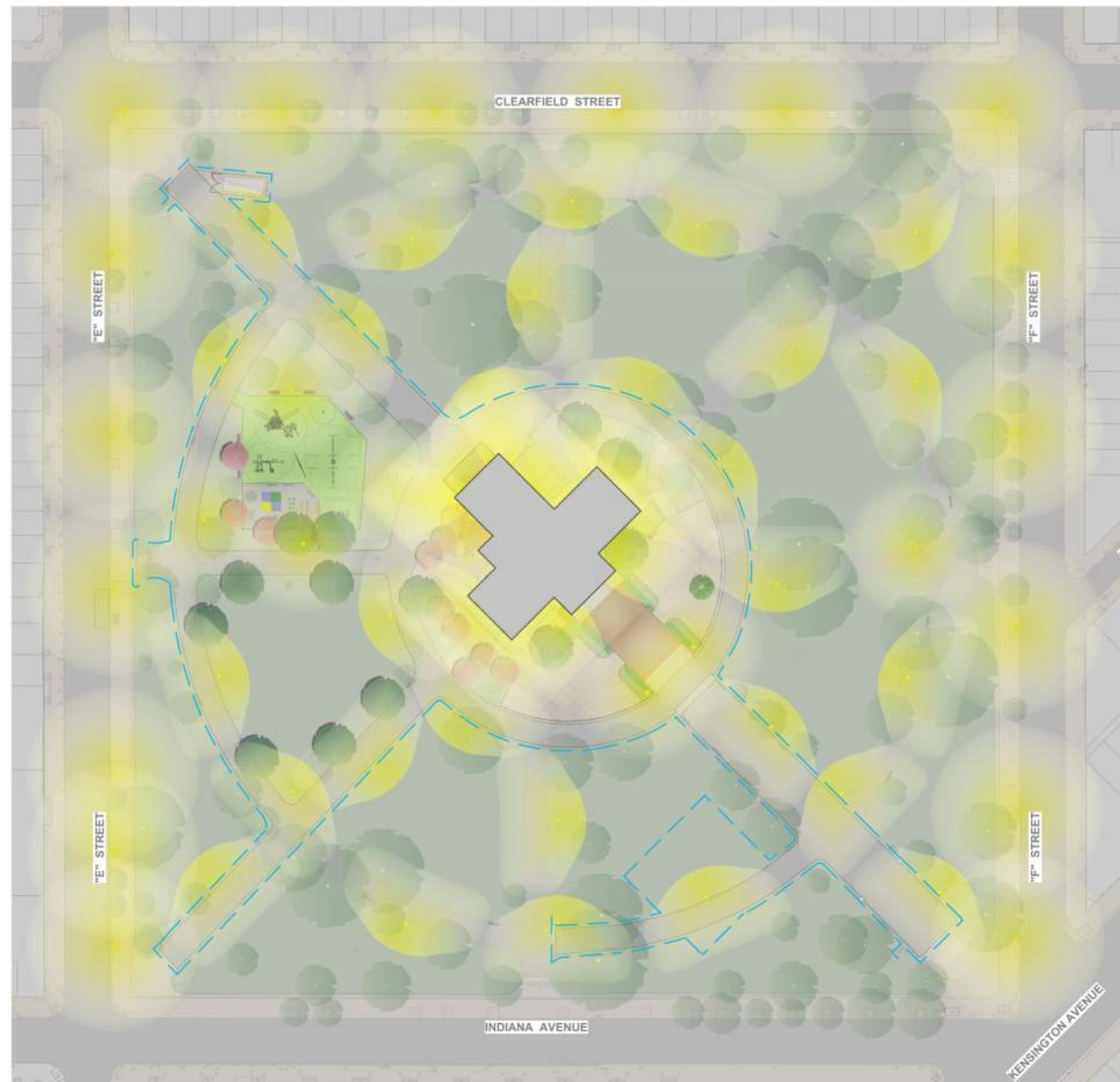
Ground Reconsidered

McPherson Square Library
Renovations and Park Improvements
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SITE CIRCULATION



LIGHTING LEGEND

— PROJECT LIMIT BOUNDARY

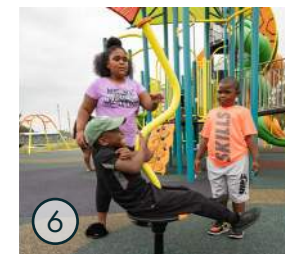


SITE LIGHTING

Ground Reconsidered

McPherson Square Library
Renovations and Park Improvements
SMP Architects | Ground Reconsidered





PLAYGROUND EQUIPMENT

Ground Reconsidered

McPherson Square Library
Renovations and Park Improvements
SMP Architects | Ground Reconsidered





① OCTOBER GLORY RED MAPLE



② RED SUNSET RED MAPLE



③ EASTERN REDBUD



④ AMERICAN HOLLY



⑤ ROUND-LOBED SWEETGUM



⑥ SWEET BAY MAGNOLIA

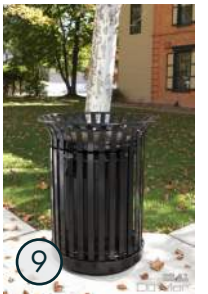
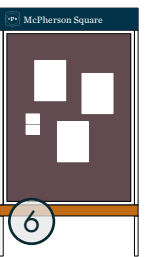
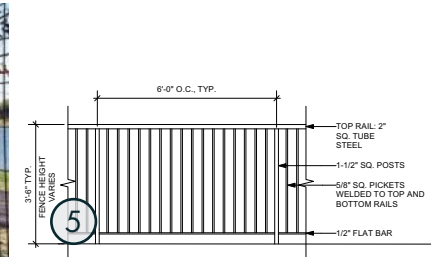


⑦ WILLOW OAK



⑧ KNOCK OUT SHRUB ROSE

PLANTING PLAN



SITE FURNISHINGS PLAN



PLAYGROUND PERSPECTIVE VIEW



PLAYGROUND PERSPECTIVE VIEW



PLAYGROUND PERSPECTIVE VIEW



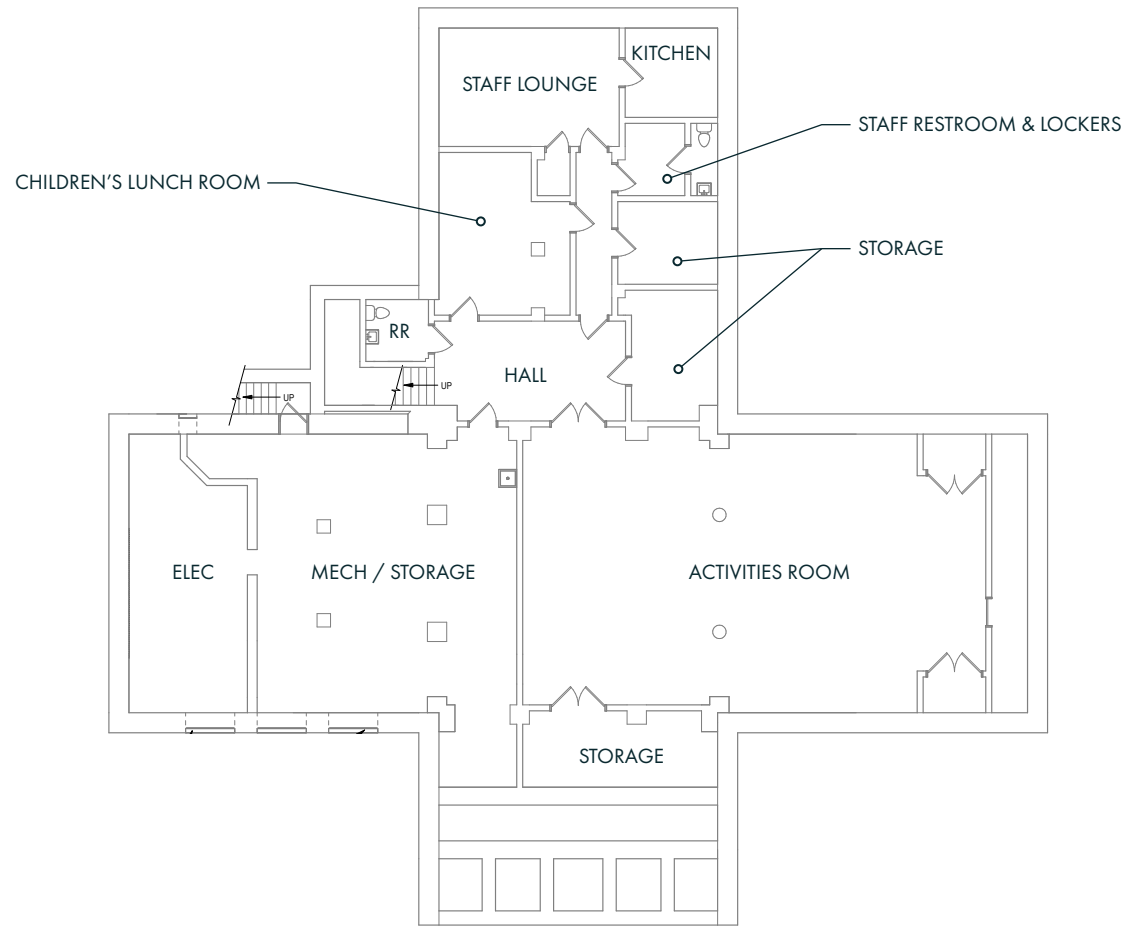
SIDE ENTRY PERSPECTIVE VIEW



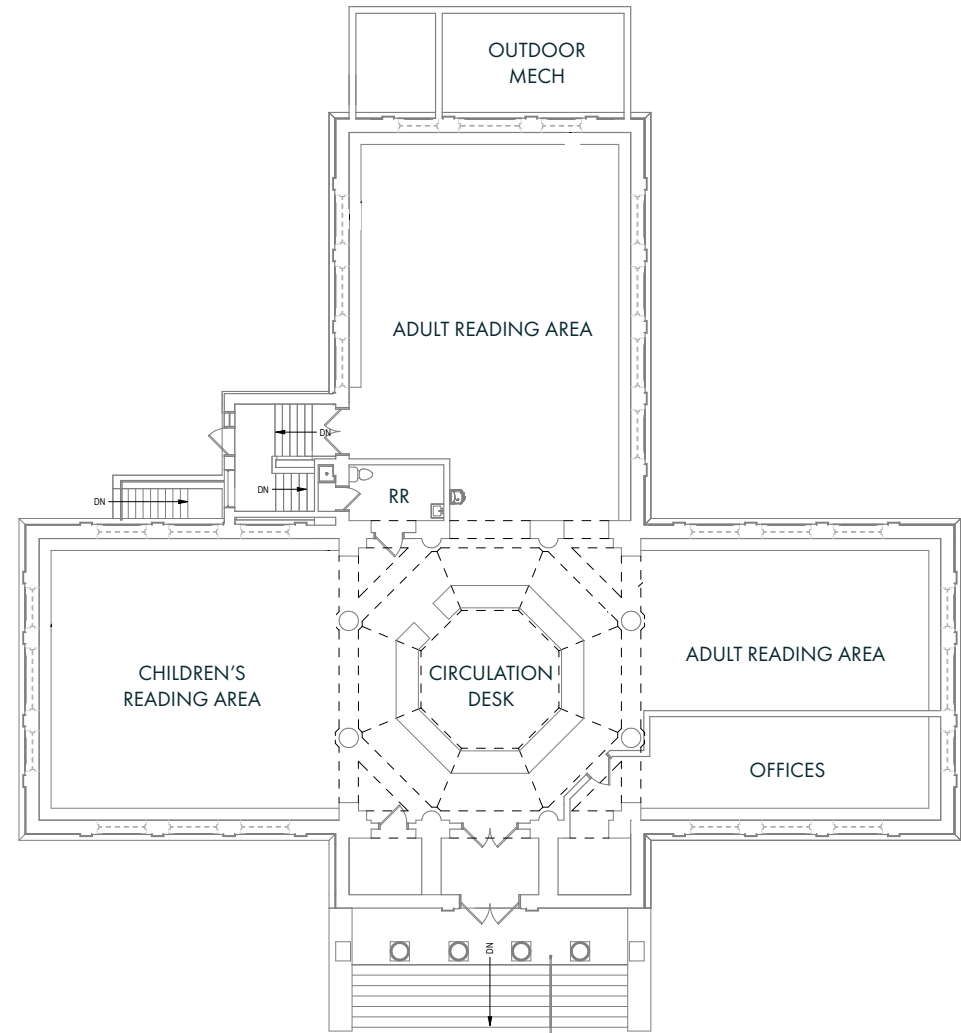
EXISTING BUILDING CONDITIONS

McPherson Square Library
Renovations and Park Improvements
SMP Architects | Ground Reconsidered





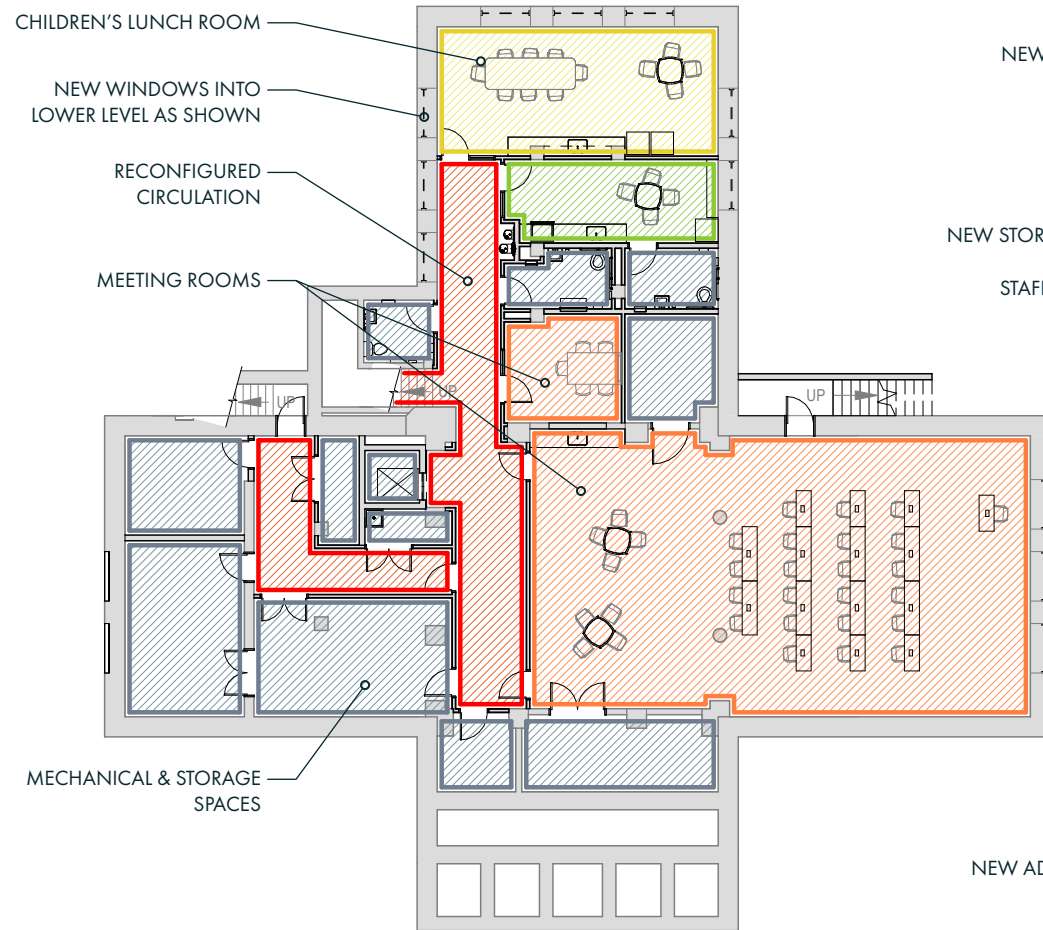
EXISTING LOWER LEVEL



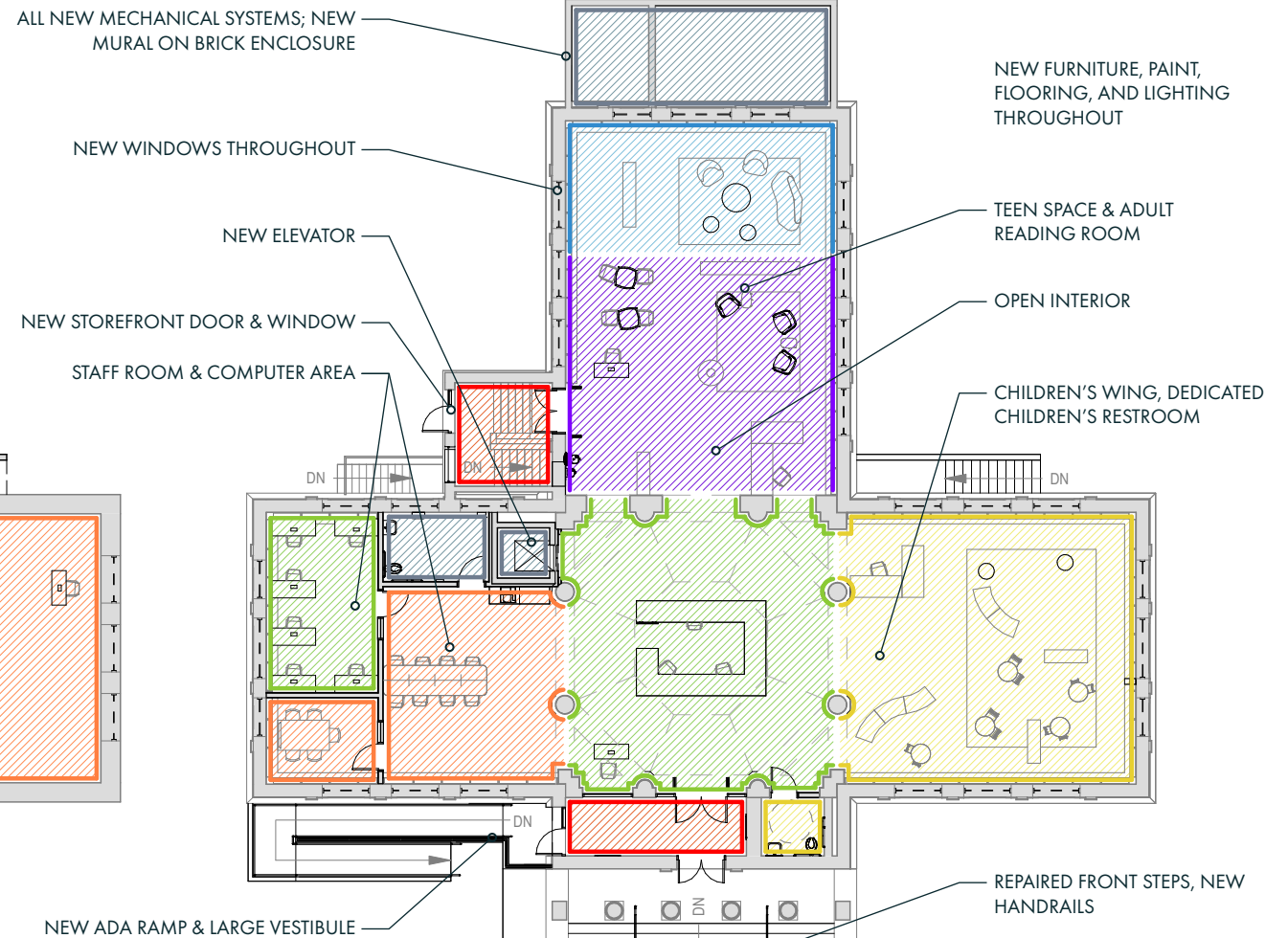
EXISTING UPPER LEVEL



EXISTING PLANS



PROPOSED LOWER LEVEL



PROPOSED UPPER LEVEL



CHILDREN'S SPACES



STAFF SPACES



COMMON SPACES



CIRCULATION SPACES



ADULTS' SPACES



TEENS' SPACES



BUILDING SERVICES

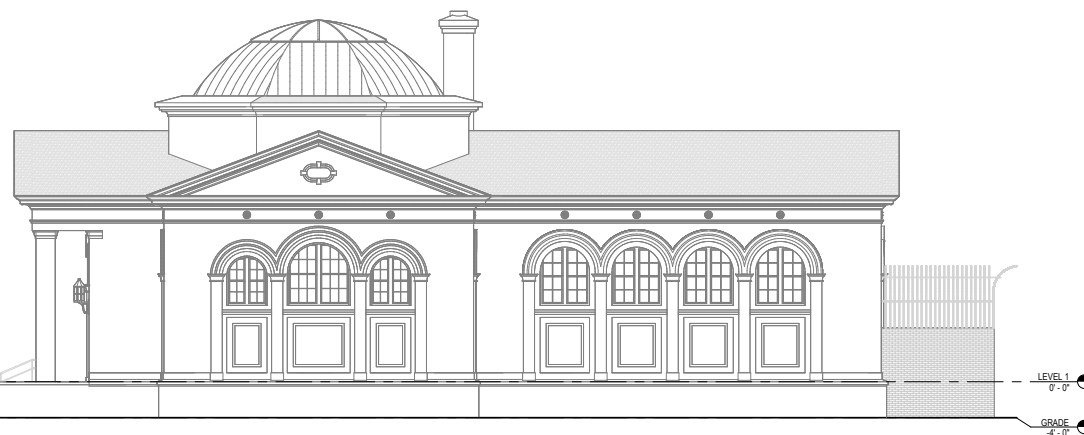
PROPOSED PLANS

McPherson Square Library
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EXISTING SOUTH ELEVATION



EXISTING EAST ELEVATION



EXISTING NORTH ELEVATION

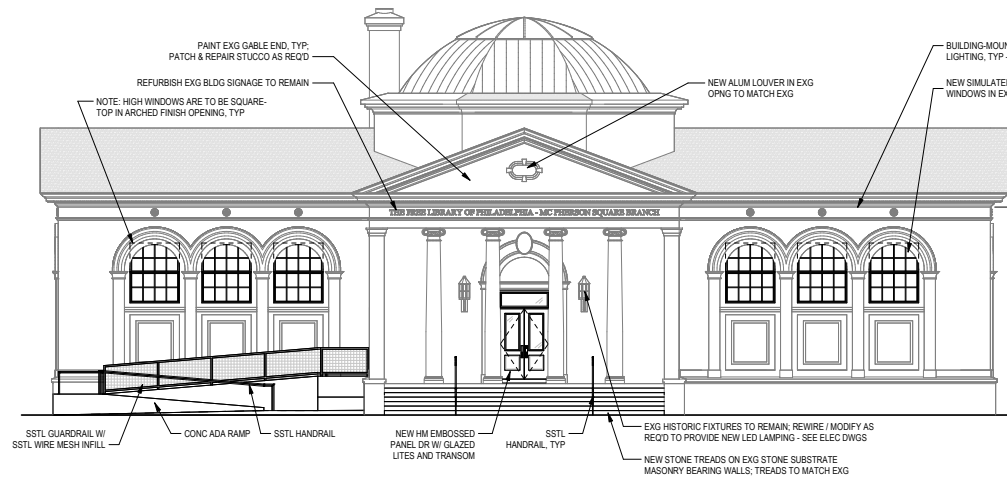


EXISTING WEST ELEVATION

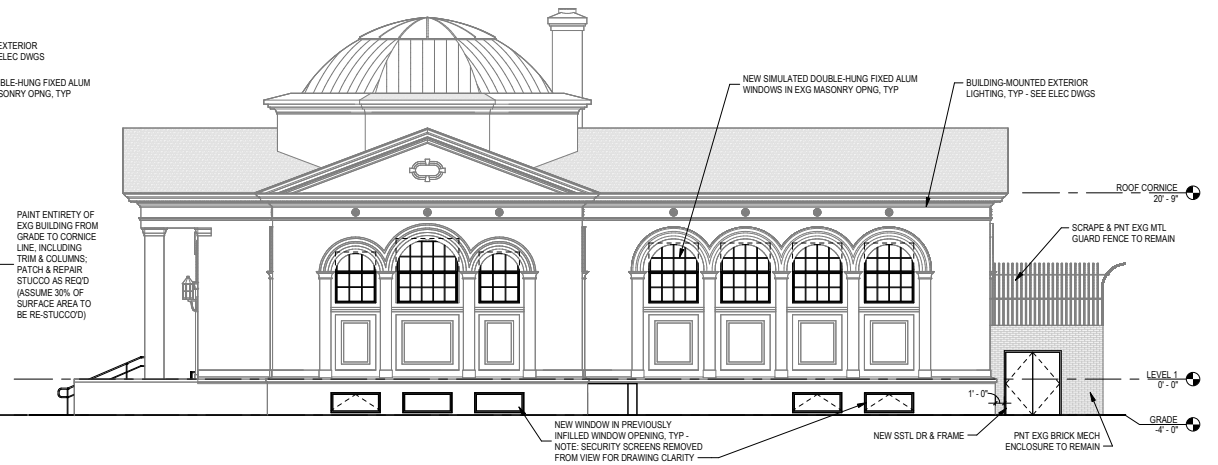
EXISTING ELEVATIONS

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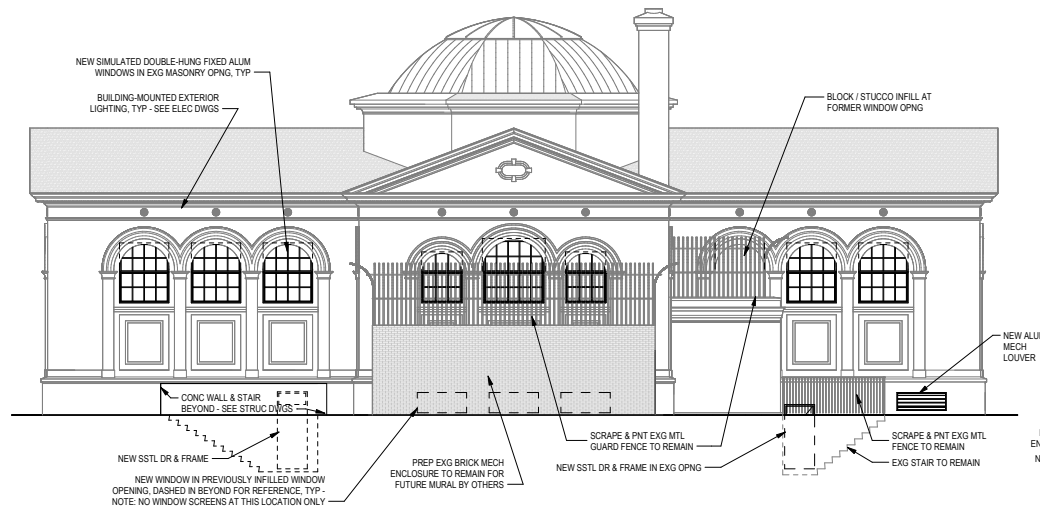




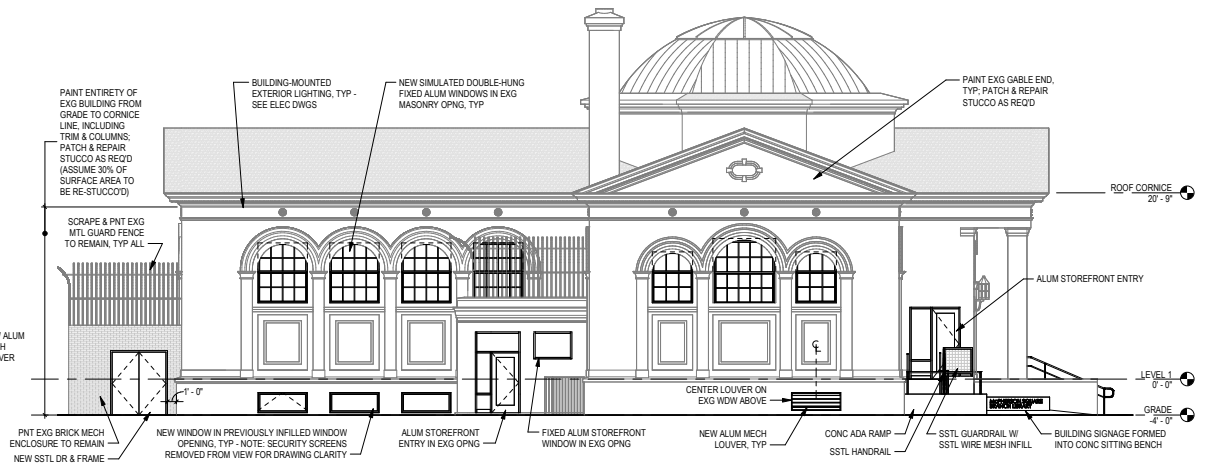
PROPOSED SOUTH ELEVATION



PROPOSED EAST ELEVATION

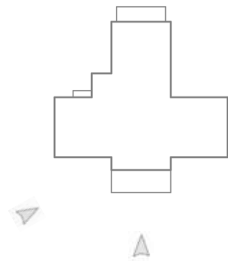


PROPOSED NORTH ELEVATION



PROPOSED WEST ELEVATION

PROPOSED ELEVATIONS



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