

North Carolina Historical Commission  
December 18, 2024

Construction of New School Buildings  
in lieu of  
Renovating the Existing Durham School of the Arts

As required by [NC GS § 115C-521](#) the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) received an August 14, 2024, letter from the Department of Public Education (DPI), providing Durham County Schools' *Feasibility and Cost Analysis* report. This report outlined the County's desire to construct new school buildings on a new location in lieu of renovating its existing historic buildings at the Durham School of the Arts located at 401 N. Duke Street in Durham, which are listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

By letter of September 19, 2024, the SHPO replied under NC GS § 115-521 and § [121-12\(a\)](#).

The School of the Arts is located within and contributes to the National Register-listed Trinity Historic District (DH0927). The district is composed of the major portions of the Trinity Heights and Trinity Park neighborhoods which together stand as an important reflection of Durham's coming of age that began in the 1890s. Architecturally, the Trinity Historic District is one of Durham's important areas, serving as a lexicon of the city's fashionable residential and institutional architecture of the late 1890s to circa 1940.

The Durham High School (now the School of the Arts) campus occupies a long, irregularly shaped tract of 16.67 acres that was once part of the Brodie L. Duke estate. The several institutional buildings constructed in the district prior to 1940 embody the Colonial Revival style. Two form the core of the School of the Arts campus and are pivotal/contributing to the Trinity National Register Historic District.

- [Julian Carr Building/Carr Building](#) - Architect George Watts Carr's Julian S. Carr Junior High School built in 1922 features denticulated cornices, keystones at all windows, an elaborate entrance with stylized Ionic pilasters carrying a full entablature, and a belvedere atop the central block. Two perpendicular wings and the auditorium in between were constructed in 1926,
- [Durham High School/Main Building](#) - Designed by Milburn and Heister Company and completed in 1923, is similar to the junior high school in its cornices, keystones, and belvedere. Its distinguishing feature is the three-story bank of five pairs of windows adorned with a stone balcony on scroll consoles that spans the entire bank of windows at the second story.

In addition to the two historic buildings, other campus buildings include the Weaver Auditorium/Theatre, Math and Science Building, and T Building/Media Center. The campus proper includes a track encircling a soccer/football field adjacent to a baseball diamond. Parking

is scattered throughout. Immediately across Minerva Street/north of the campus is a 3.01-acre tract containing six tennis courts and additional parking.

Given, that the school campus with its pivotal and contributing buildings is an important part of the National Register-listed district and that there are currently no identified plans for the campus' future use or reuse, the SHPO found pursuant to North Carolina General Statutes 115C-521 and 121-12(a) that the Durham County Schools' lack of an accompanying plan for the current School of the Arts campus related to its plan to replace the Durham School of the Arts at a new location will adversely affect the National Register historic district. Minus an identified preservation-oriented alternative and robust mothballing of the school's facilities to protect the school from degradation from lack of use and to prepare them for adaptive reuse, the potential for damage to the historic buildings through neglect and/or their loss or sale for future development is likely and foreseeable.

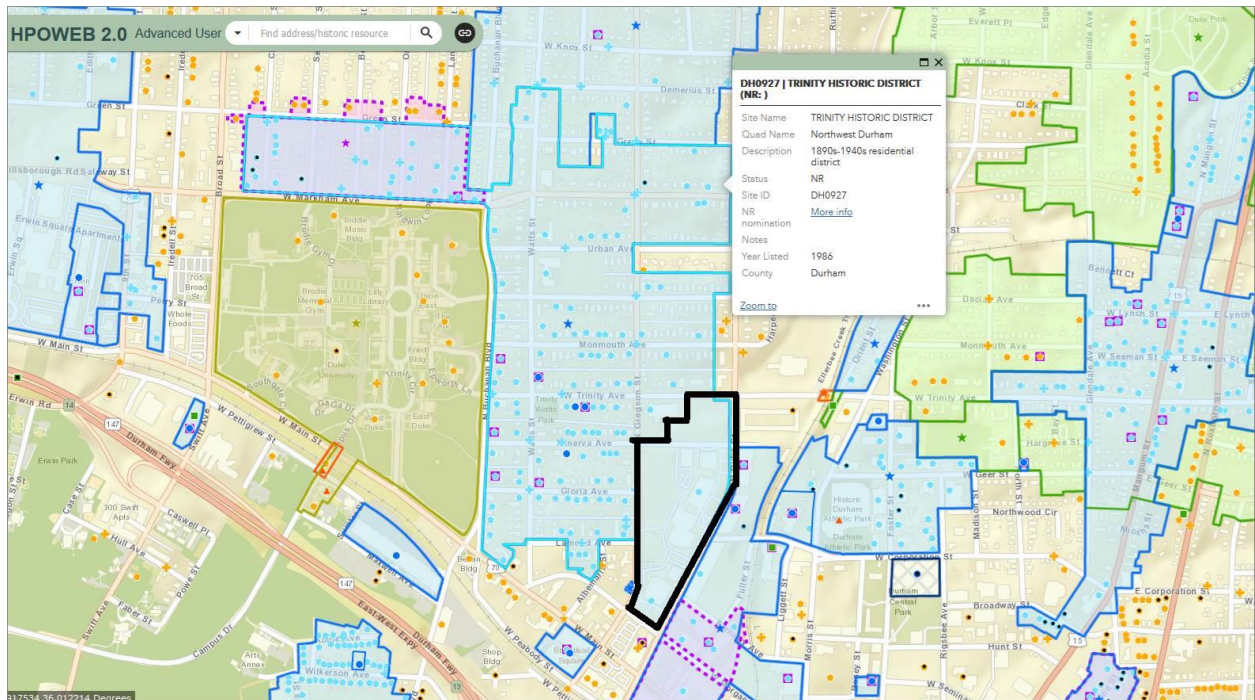
Considering the adverse effects of the proposed undertaking on the National Register-listed Trinity Park Historic District and the Durham County Schools' vote to abandon the School of the Arts campus, the SHPO recommended that Durham County Schools:

1. Secure and mothball all the Durham School of the Arts' buildings to ensure that they are protected from vandalism and other threats that could endanger their stability and future rehabilitation.
2. That the sale and/or transfer of the Durham School of the Arts to another entity include historic preservation covenants that require:
  - a. the rehabilitation of the School's buildings in accordance with the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation* and
  - b. That any new construction within the School's campus be compatible with the size, scale, and massing of neighboring buildings within the Trinity National Register Historic District to avoid adversely affecting the historic district.

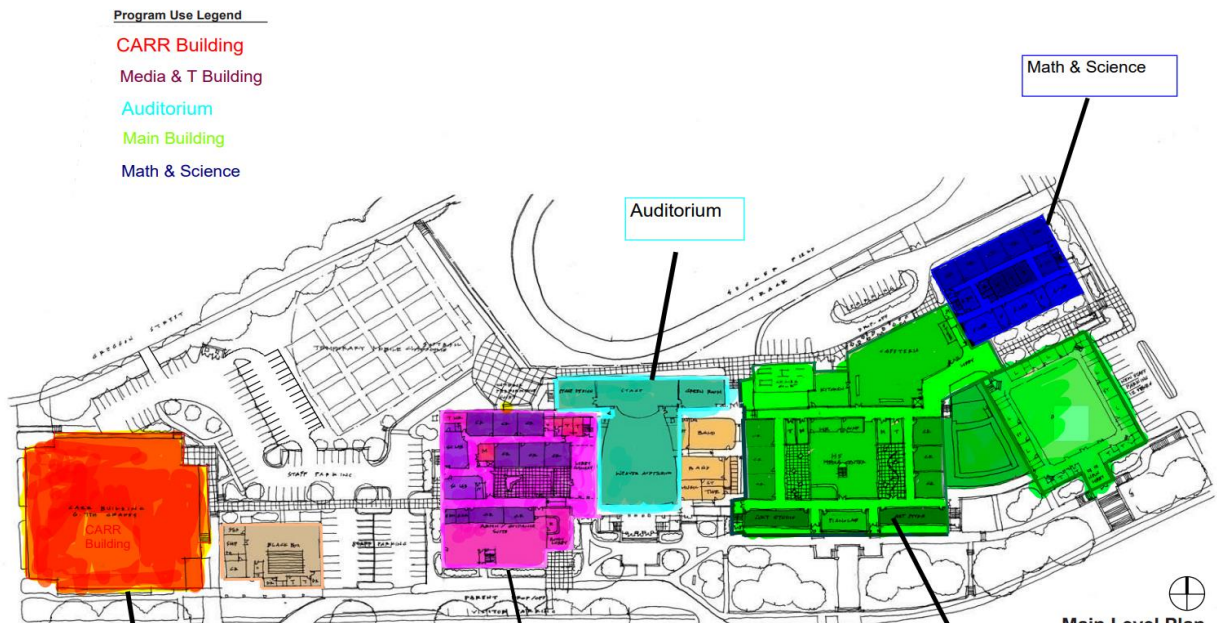
We would note that prior to receipt of the County's proposal to abandon the current School of the Arts campus, the County submitted and the SHPO reviewed the proposed new site and found that there were no historic structures or archaeological resources that would be affected by new construction.

At this stage, the NC Historical Commission should provide comments in response to this proposal.

Attachments: Map of Trinity National Register Historic District  
Site Plan/Building Durham School of the Arts



Trinity National Register Historic District with Durham School of the Arts outlined in black



Durham School of the Arts Site Plan



CARR BUILDING at Durham School of The Arts



MAIN BUILDING at Durham School of The Arts



WEAVER AUDITORIUM at Durham School of The Arts



MATH & SCIENCE Building at Durham School of The Arts