



DC STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE DETERMINATION OF ELIGIBILITY FORM

PROPERTY INFORMATION

PENDING SHPO REVIEW

Property Name(s): Palisades Recreation Center

Street Address(es): 5200 Sherier Place, NW

Square(s) and Lot(s): Square 1415, Lot 802

Property Owner(s): United States of America

Please include a current map(s) to indicate the location of the property/properties.

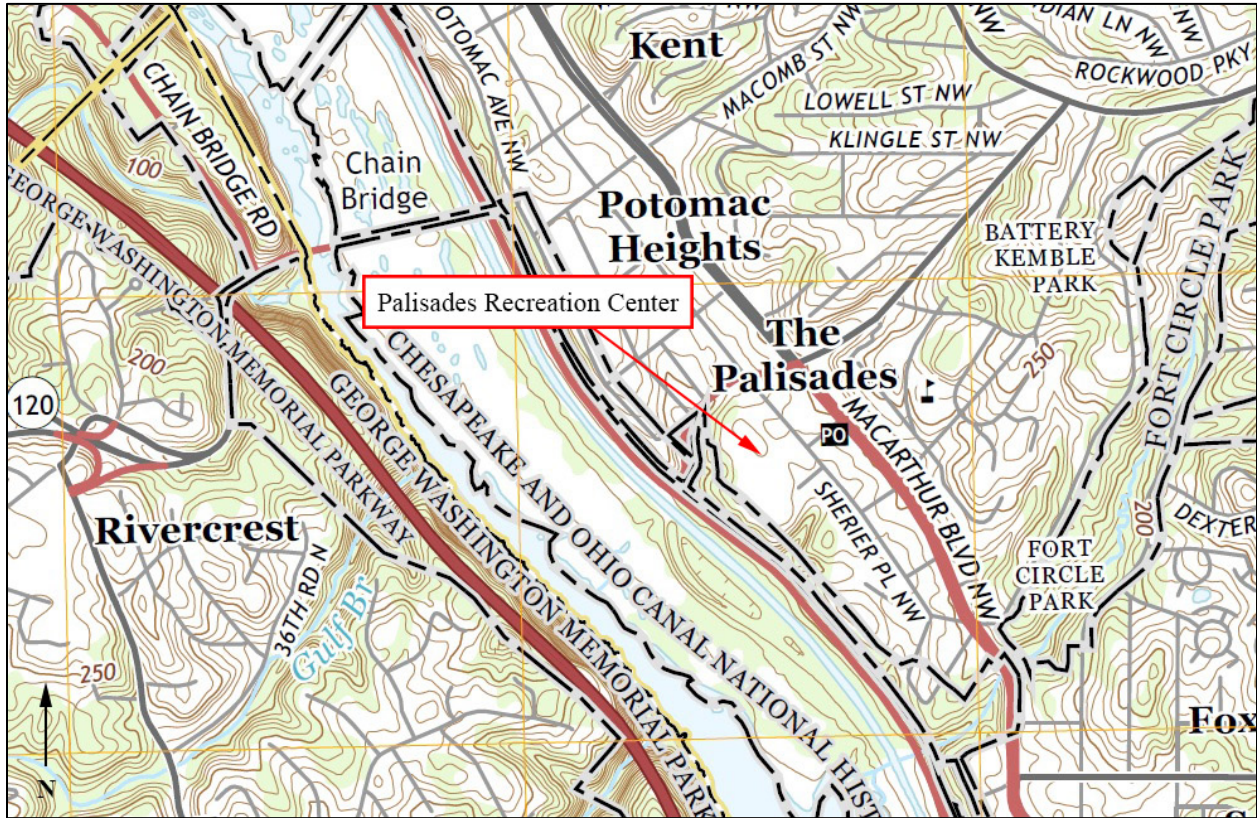


Figure 1. Detail from 2014 USGS Washington West quadrangle, showing the location of the Palisades Recreation Center.

The property/properties is/are being evaluated for potential historical significance as/for:

- An individual building or structure.
- A contributing element of a historic district (specify):
- A possible expansion of a historic district (specify):
- A previously unevaluated historic district to be known as (specify):
- An archaeological resource with site number(s) (specify):
- An object (e.g. statue, stone marker etc.) (specify):
- A new multiple property/thematic study regarding (specify):
- Association with a multiple property/thematic study (specify):
- Other (specify):



Figure 2. Front elevation of the Palisades Recreation Center, looking southwest (EHT Tracerics, 2014).

[Description, rationale for determination, photos & other pertinent information \(enter below\):](#)

Introduction

The Palisades Recreation Center was designed and constructed in 1935-1936 through an extensive program of park improvements that was coordinated by the National Capital Park and Planning Commission. It was constructed as part of a recreation system that was composed of several function-specific, themed facility types. The recreation center and its park setting were designed by the National Park Service, Branch of Plans and Design, and as the first recreation center to be built under the program, it is significant for its contribution to the development of the modern park system in the District. Architecturally, the recreation center serves as a characteristic example of the Colonial Revival style in American architecture, which was applied to the design of park structures in the District during this period. The construction of the recreation center also reflects the role of the Works Progress Administration in developing public infrastructure during the 1930s.

Description

Located in Square 1415, on a high bluff situated approximately 1,200 feet northeast of the Potomac River, the Palisades Recreation Center occupies a thirteen acre site that contains a 1,928 square foot recreation center (also historically referred to as a field house), a play area, tennis and basketball courts, a baseball diamond, and a soccer field (Figure 3).

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Figure 3. Current satellite view of the Palisades Recreation Center (Google, 2014).

The recreation center, constructed in 1936, is sited on the southern edge of the park, and its front elevation faces north. The brick, one-and-one-half-story Colonial Revival-style building features a compound plan that consists of three connected building units that are oriented along an east-west axis (Figure 4). The building's central and western units are rectangular in form and have side-gabled roofs. Differing slightly, the recreation center's eastern unit features an L-shaped plan, resulting from a two bay front-gabled projection that extends from its rear elevation. The building has a concrete foundation, is laid in five-course common bond, and its roof is covered in asphalt shingles. A brick interior chimney rises from the central unit's eastern gable. Unless otherwise noted, the building's windows all feature wooden sashes, and molded wooden lintels and surrounds.



Figure 4. Detailed satellite view of the Palisades field house (Google, 2014).

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The recreation center's front elevation is nine bays wide, and it is divided into three sections that correspond to the building's three units. The eastern section is three bays wide and contains the building's front entrance, which is oriented to the right (west), and is approached by a set of low brick and slate steps, and by a concrete wheelchair ramp (Figure 5). The entrance consists of a double-leaf metal door with a rectangular, single-light transom. In addition to the front entrance, the eastern section is pierced on its first story by two six-over-one, double-hung windows, and on its upper half story by three front-gabled frame dormers that each contains a double-hung window (number of panes vary). A frame porch consisting of a pent roof supported by four wooden posts shelters the eastern section's first story. The porch rises from a low brick base that is surfaced in slate flagstones.



Figure 5. Front elevation of the eastern unit, looking south (EHT Traceries, 2014).

The front elevation's central section is four bays wide, and is pierced on its first story by four double-hung windows (Figure 6). Each of these windows contains a single-pane lower sash; the upper sashes appear to have all been replaced with rectangular wooden panels.

The front elevation's western section is two bays wide (Figure 7). It is pierced by a single-leaf metal door that is oriented to the left (east), and a six-over-six, double-hung window.

The recreation center's west elevation is two bays wide (Figure 8). Its first story is pierced by two rectangular, fixed-sash windows. The glazing has been removed from the left, or northern, window, and has been replaced with a wooden panel. The upper half story of the west elevation features a louvered wooden attic ventilator.

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Figure 6. Front elevation of the central unit, looking west (EHT Tracerics, 2014).



Figure 7. Front Elevation of the west unit, looking south (EHT Tracerics, 2014).

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Figure 8. West elevation, looking east (EHT Tracerics, 2014).

Like its front, the center's south, or rear, elevation is divided into three sections (Figure 9). The eastern section is three bays wide, and features a two-bay, front-gabled projection that is oriented to the left (west). This projection is pierced by two six-over-six double-hung windows on its first story, and a single six-over-six window on its upper half story. The sides of this projection each contain a first-story single-leaf metal door, the eastern door being accessed by a set of brick steps with metal railing. The third bay of the eastern section is pierced on its first story by a single six-over-six double-hung window. The upper half story of this bay contains a front-gabled frame dormer that is identical to those found on the building's front elevation (Figure 10).



Figure 9. Rear elevation, looking north (EHT Tracerics, 2014)

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Figure 10. Rear elevation of the east unit, looking south (left), and west (right) (EHT Tracerics, 2014).

The rear elevation's central section is four bays wide (Figure 11). Its first story contains four double-leaf metal doors with rectangular, single-light transoms. An uncovered raised veranda, measuring approximately fifty feet wide by fifteen feet deep, extends to the south and west from the rear of the central unit. This veranda is constructed of brick, and is surfaced in slate flagstones. It is accessed from the south by two sets of brick steps, and from the west by a concrete wheelchair ramp.



Figure 11. Rear elevation of the central unit, looking north (EHT Tracerics, 2014).

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The rear elevation's western section is two bays wide and is pierced on its first story by two rectangular, single-light fixed-sash windows (Figure 12). In addition, the rear elevation of the western section is set back slightly from the rear line of the central section. A single-leaf metal door pierces the west side of the central section at this setback.



Figures 12-13. Rear elevation of the west unit, looking northeast (left); East elevation, looking northwest (right) (EHT Tracerics, 2014).

The recreation center's east elevation is three bays wide (Figure 13). Its first story is pierced by a single-leaf metal door that is accessed by a set of brick and slate steps. A rectangular, single-light fixed-sash window is located to the left (south) of this door, and a six-over-six double-hung window is located to its right (north). The upper half story of the east elevation features a single six-over-six double-hung window. A set of concrete steps descends from the east elevation to the recreation center's basement level.

Alterations

Alterations to the recreation center have changed its appearance slightly, but have not impacted the facility's overall style, form, or structure. A 1939 photograph of the center indicates that the majority of the windows in the building's eastern unit were originally six-over-six in configuration (Figure 14). While several of these original windows remain intact, a number of them have had window panes and muntins replaced, which has altered their configuration. Similarly, the four double-hung windows that pierce the front elevation of the central unit have had the glazing in their upper sashes replaced with boards, as have several of the fixed-sash windows located on the building's east and west units. The majority of the recreation center's double-hung windows also appear to have originally had wooden shutters, with the exception of the dormer windows. The 1939 photograph of the structure also reveals that the building originally had wooden paneled doors, which have all been replaced by modern metal doors. While the door's surrounds have been altered or eliminated, the original placement of the doors within the design remains intact. In addition, a set of brick and slate steps originally descended from the east elevation of the building, and connected the recreation center to an athletic court located to its east. These steps have since been eliminated, and the grade of the transition has

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been leveled. As when it was first constructed, the recreation center is today surrounded by various play spaces and athletic facilities. While the number and type of these has changed over the years, the park still retains its overall circular design and hilltop setting.



Figure 14. Photograph of the recreation center, taken in 1939 (Department of General Services).

Development of the Palisades Recreation Center

The development of the District of Columbia's recreation system was the result of a collaborative government effort during the 1930s. The passage of the Capper-Cramton Act in 1930 provided the National Capital Park and Planning Commission (NCPPC) with the funds to acquire new park lands and develop recreational facilities.¹ In addition, a reorganization of federal agencies by President Roosevelt in 1933 transferred management of the District's parks to the Department of the Interior, National Park Service. At the time, many of these park properties were in need of maintenance and improvement. To upgrade and expand the District park system, the National Park Service requested and received a \$1,000,000 allocation from the Public Works Administration in 1935.² In order to coordinate the development of recreational facilities, NCPPC, the Commissioners of the District of Columbia, the District Board of Education, and the National Capital Parks Office created the District of Columbia Recreation Committee in March of 1935. The committee appointed Lewis R. Barrett Coordinator of Recreation, and he was charged with developing a unified recreation program for the District.³ Implementation of the program was supervised by C. Marshall Finnan, superintendent of

¹ National Capital Park and Planning Commission, *Open Spaces and Community Services: A Portion of the Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital and Its Environs* (Washington, DC: NCPPC, 1950), 17-18.

² "\$1,000,000 Betterment Plan Surveyed in District Parks," *Evening Star*, October 24, 1937, <http://infoweb.newsbank.com> (accessed November 3, 2014).

³ National Capital Park and Planning Commission, Committee for Coordination of Plans for the District of Columbia Recreation System, meeting minutes, March 30, 1935, Record Group 328, Entry 7, Planning Files, 1924-1968, Box 103, National Archives, Washington, DC [note: all meeting minutes cited are from RG 328, Entry 7, Box 103 unless otherwise indicated].

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National Capital Parks. The program included projects within the National Capital Park System, as well as areas under the jurisdiction of the D. C. Playground Department.⁴

The new parks were designed as part of an overall recreation system for the District. Recreation projects within the system fell into four classifications that included Nursery Play Centers, Playgrounds, Playfields, and Major Recreation Centers. The system divided the District into twenty-six recreation zones, each with one or more recreation centers. The Palisades Recreation Center was located in Zone One, which also contained the Fort Kemble Park Recreation Center. The new parks and facilities were designed by the Office of the Municipal Architect, NCPPC, and the National Park Service, Branch of Plans and Design.⁵ Other centers being developed at the time included the Cardozo, Takoma, Banneker (D.C. Inventory, NRHP), Eckington, Taft, Oxon Run, and Chevy Chase Recreation Centers.⁶

Planning, land acquisition, and construction took place in 1935-1936. The Colonial Revival field house at the Palisades Recreation Center was designed by the Branch of Plans and Design, Architecture Division, while the park grounds were designed by the branch's Landscape Division.⁷ In addition, the plans were developed with input from local civic groups.⁸ The Committee for Coordination of Plans for the District of Columbia Recreation System, chaired by Lewis R. Barrett, approved plans for the park at its October 10, 1935 meeting (Figures 15-16).⁹ By May of 1936, all the necessary property had been acquired for the development of the park. Landscaping and construction was accomplished through the use of labor provided by the Works Progress Administration, and took place during the spring and summer of 1936.¹⁰ The completed Palisades Recreation Center included a new field house, a wading pool, a surfaced game area, three softball diamonds, and a picnic area. When new, the field house contained a 300-seat auditorium, stage, dressing rooms, play rooms, a movie projection booth, and a kitchen. After its construction, the field house was regularly used by local organizations, children's groups, and neighborhood residents.¹¹

Architectural Context

The National Park Service's Landscape Engineering Division, established in 1918, was renamed the Branch of Plans and Design in 1933. The division was originally based in San Francisco, but a Washington office was opened in 1930, and it soon became the division's headquarters. At the time of the recreation center's development in 1935, the office was headed by Chief Landscape Architect Malcolm Kirkpatrick, who supervised the work of the division's staff architects in designing the field house and park landscape.¹²

⁴ "\$1,000,000 Betterment Plan Surveyed in District Parks," *Evening Star*, October 24, 1937.

⁵ Committee for Coordination of Plans for the District of Columbia Recreation System, meeting minutes, December 1, 1936, May 19, 1936, November 18, 1935.

⁶ Committee for Coordination of Plans for the District of Columbia Recreation System, "List of Units to Accompany Recreation System Plan," December, 1935.

⁷ Committee for Coordination of Plans for the District of Columbia Recreation System, meeting minutes, December 1, 1936.

⁸ "\$1,000,000 Betterment Plan Surveyed in District Parks," *Evening Star*, October 24, 1937.

⁹ Committee for Coordination of Plans for the District of Columbia Recreation System, meeting minutes, October 10, 1935.

¹⁰ Committee for Coordination of Plans for the District of Columbia Recreation System, meeting minutes, December 1, 1936, Appendix A.

¹¹ "\$1,000,000 Betterment Plan Surveyed in District Parks," *Evening Star*, October 24, 1937.

¹² National Archives and Records Administration, Guide to Federal Records, "Records of the National Park Service," <http://www.archives.gov/research/guide-fed-records/groups/079.html> (accessed November 11, 2014); "\$1,000,000 Betterment Plan Surveyed in District Parks," *Evening Star*, October 24, 1937.

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Figure 15. Front elevation drawing prepared by the Branch of Plans and Design in 1935 (Department of General Services).

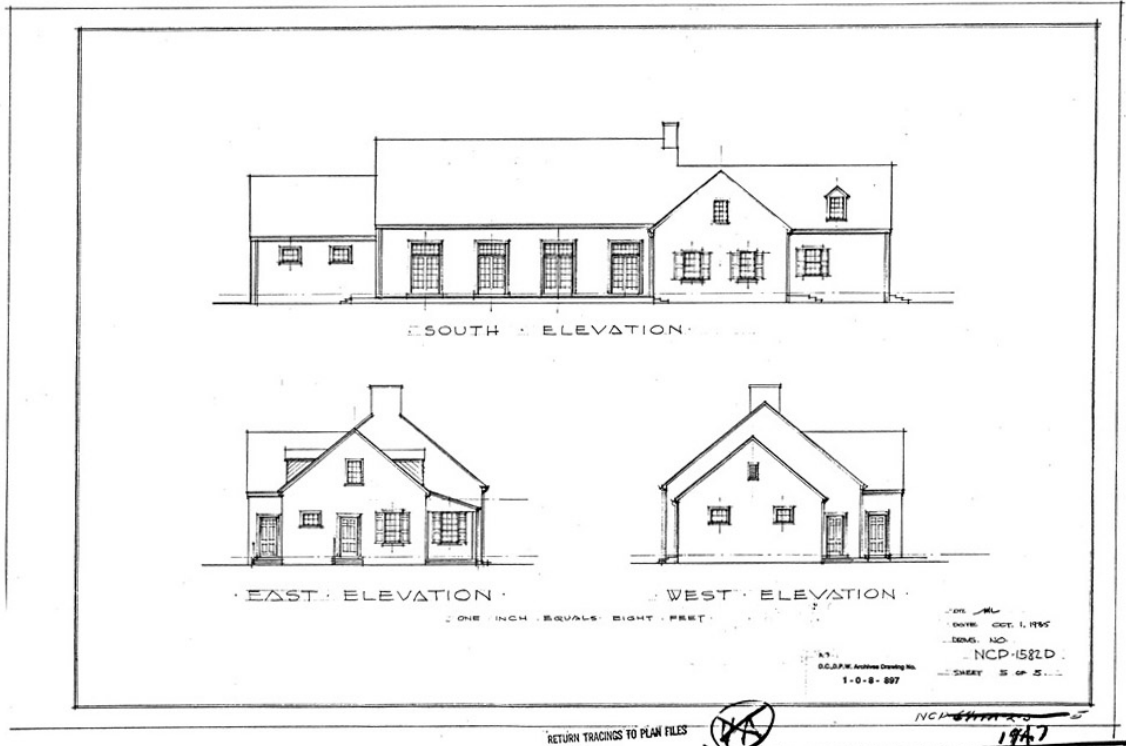


Figure 16. South, east, and west elevation drawing prepared by the Branch of Plans and Designs in 1935 (Department of General Services).

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The development of new park facilities in the District represented a continuation of the work of Municipal Architect Albert L. Harris, who designed numerous park structures in the District during his 1921-1933 tenure. Like the design for the Palisades Recreation Center, Harris drew upon the Colonial Revival style in developing a standardized field house type. The field houses designed by Harris were intended to replace the storage sheds then found on many of the District's municipal playgrounds. Harris-designed field houses included facilities at Mitchell Park (1931), Park View (1932; D.C. Inventory, NRHP), Happy Hollow (1933), Twin Oaks (1934), and Lincoln (1934).¹³ Like the Palisades Recreation Center, these structures were typically of brick construction, measured one-and-one-half stories in height, and featured side-gabled roofs, porches, and attic dormers (Figure 17). Their overall appearance resembled the three-bay eastern unit of the Palisades Recreation Center.



Figure 17. Park View field house, 1938 (Star Collection, DC Public Library).

The recreation center building type, constructed after 1933, expanded the size and function of the smaller Harris-designed field houses. During the 1930s, the National Park Service produced a number of publications that provided guidelines for the design of park structures, but these mainly involved rustic shelters and other buildings intended for national parks in the western United States. Locally, the Branch of Plans and Design and the Municipal Architect worked closely with the District of Columbia Recreation Committee in establishing the specifications for the various building types in the recreation system. In 1936, the committee recommended that new recreation centers in the District park system include an auditorium, gymnasium, locker rooms, two club rooms, two craft rooms, a kitchenette, and offices.¹⁴ These recommendations provided a set of guidelines for the design of the new facilities, while allowing each to be specifically tailored to meet local needs. However, these design recommendations were released after the construction of the Palisades Recreation Center. Initially designated as a playground,

¹³ "ANC 1A to Consider Landmark Nomination for Park View Playground," *Park View News* 3, no. 5 (May 2013): 2-4.

¹⁴ Committee for Coordination of Plans for the District of Columbia Recreation System, meeting minutes, December 1, 1936, Appendix A.

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Palisades was in essence a prototype for the larger, expanded field houses being designed for the new recreation centers. A 1937 newspaper article, describing the progress achieved by the program, referred to the facility as a recreation center, and quoted C. Marshall Finnan, who described the center as the “first field house of that kind constructed in the Washington park system.”¹⁵ This is also reflected on a 1939 map of the District recreation system, produced by NCPPC, which labels the facility as the “Palisades Rec. Center” (Figure 18). In 1949, the committee considered plans for a gymnasium addition onto the recreation center, a feature included in the 1936 design guidelines, but the addition was never constructed.¹⁶

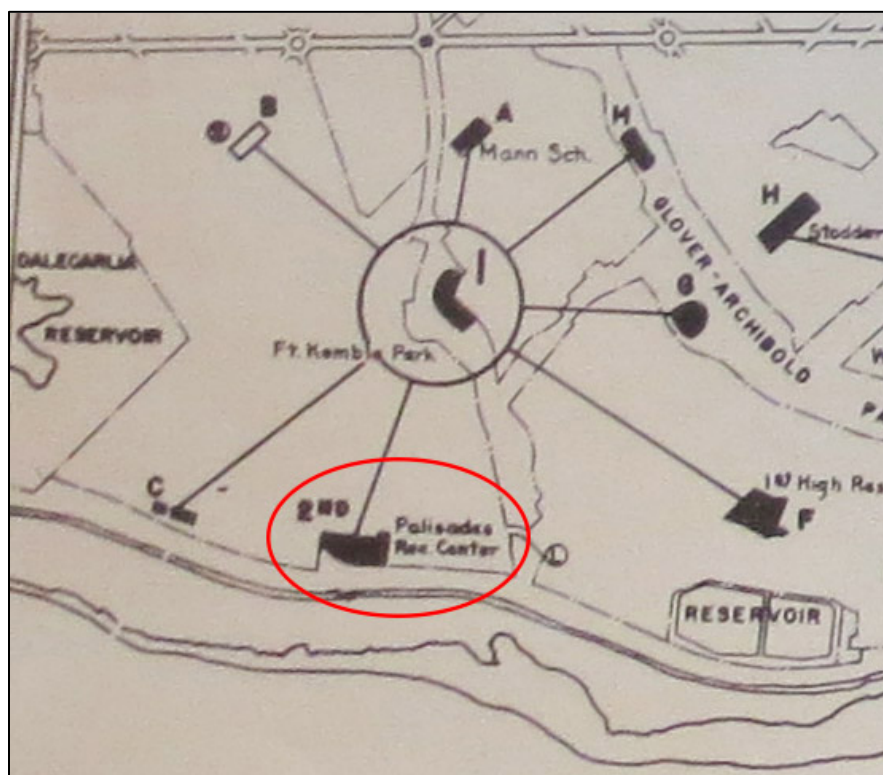


Figure 18. Detail from 1939 recreation system map, with the Palisades Recreation Center circled in red (National Archives).

The recreation centers, and other structures, contributed to the overall landscape design for each park. In producing the plans for new parks, the Branch of Plans and Design sought to integrate recreation buildings within the design of the parks and their broader natural settings. The District of Columbia Recreation Committee discussed the design of the Palisades Recreation Center at its December 1, 1936 meeting:

The area is located on a prominence overlooking the Palisades of the Potomac, commanding an excellent downstream vista of the Potomac and the historic C. and O. Canal. In preparing the plan for the development of the playground, the location of the field house, at a point accentuating this vista was given just consideration. As a result, the design for this playground is one of the most individual yet prepared for any area in the park system and is entirely in keeping with the natural condition of the site, although the planners worked within the

¹⁵ “\$1,000,000 Betterment Plan Surveyed in District Parks,” *Evening Star*, October 24, 1937.

¹⁶ Committee for Coordination of Plans for the District of Columbia Recreation System, meeting minutes, February 15, 1949, Appendix A, National Capital Planning Commission Library, Washington, DC.

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definite limitations predicated by the form of the available playing field areas. The field house was designed by the Branch of Plans and Design, National Park Service, as were plans for grading and planting. Details of water supply and sanitation were provided by the Branch of Engineering, National Park Service. Coordination between the architectural and landscape divisions of the Branch of Plans and Design on this project resulted in an ideal arrangement of interior facilities in relation to exterior play areas.¹⁷

Evaluation

This property has been assessed for its eligibility for listing in the D.C. Inventory of Historic Sites and the National Register of Historic Places.

D.C. Inventory of Historic Sites: The evaluation of the significance of a historic property for listing on the D.C. Inventory of Historic Sites (D.C. Inventory) is authorized under the Historic Landmark and Historic District Protection Act of 1978 (D.C. Law 2-144, as amended). The specific criteria for designation are outlined in Title 10A, Chapter 2 of the District of Columbia Municipal Regulations.¹⁸ In order to be eligible for designation to the D.C. Inventory, a property must possess one or more of the following values or qualities:

(a) Events: They are the site of events that contributed significantly to the heritage, culture or development of the District of Columbia or the nation;

The construction of the Palisades Recreation Center was an event that contributed significantly to the historical and cultural development of the District of Columbia. Over the years, the center has provided a meeting place for numerous local clubs and groups, and has also served as a venue for various cultural events.

(b) History: They are associated with historical periods, social movements, groups, institutions, achievements, or patterns of growth and change that contributed significantly to the heritage, culture or development of the District of Columbia or the nation;

The Palisades Recreation Center was designed and built as part of the development of the modern park system in the District of Columbia, and it was the first recreation center that was constructed in the system. In addition, the Works Progress Administration contributed funding and labor to the project, and the center's construction reflects the role that the WPA played in the development of public infrastructure in the United States during the Depression.

(c) Individuals: They are associated with the lives of persons significant to the history of the District of Columbia or the nation;

¹⁷ Committee for Coordination of Plans for the District of Columbia Recreation System, meeting minutes, December 1, 1936, Appendix A.

¹⁸ These criteria are based on the criteria for National Register evaluation, as authorized under Title I, Section 101 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended. DC criteria a-b roughly corresponds to National Register criteria A, b corresponds to B, d-f corresponds to C, and g is based on NR criterion D.

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The present Palisades Recreation Center is not associated with significant figures in the history of the District.

(d) Architecture and Urbanism: They embody the distinguishing characteristics of architectural styles, building types, or methods of construction, or are expressions of landscape architecture, engineering, or urban planning, siting, or design significant to the appearance and development of the District of Columbia or the nation;

The Palisades Recreation Center was a key facility within a carefully planned and designed District recreation system. Its field house represents the emergence of a specific building type within that system, and its park design reflects an integration of architecture, planning, and landscape design by the National Park Service, Branch of Plans and Design. The center is also characteristic of the Colonial Revival style, which was applied to the design of recreation structures in the District during the 1930s.

(e) Artistry: They possess high artistic or aesthetic values that contribute significantly to the heritage and appearance of the District of Columbia or the nation;

At the time of its construction in 1936, the design of the Colonial Revival-style recreation center and its park setting was intended to contribute artistically and aesthetically to the heritage and built environment of the District of Columbia.

(f) Creative Masters: They have been identified as notable works of craftsmen, artists, sculptors, architects, landscape architects, urban planners, engineers, builders, or developers whose works have influenced the evolution of their fields of endeavor, or are significant to the development of the District of Columbia or the nation;

The palisades Recreation Center was the product of the Branch of Plans and Design, whose work provided important local and national precedents for the design of parks and recreational facilities during the 1930s. In addition, the new parks and facilities that the branch designed for the District of Columbia recreation system represents a skillful fusion of architecture and landscape design.

(g) Archaeology: They have yielded or may be likely to yield information significant to an understanding of historic or prehistoric events, cultures, and standards of living, building, and design.

The site of the Palisades Recreation Center possesses a high level of potential for archaeological investigation, as determined by a preliminary archaeological survey of the property in 1984. Shovel test pits at that time located undisturbed soils on the site that contained both prehistoric and historic artifacts.¹⁹

In addition, the property must possess **sufficient integrity** to convey these values or qualities, and should be of a **sufficient age** to allow for the professional evaluation of the resource within its historical context.

¹⁹ Janice G. Artemel et al., *Preliminary Archeological Survey of 23 Recreation Facilities in Washington, D.C.*, report prepared for the District of Columbia Department of Recreation by Engineering-Science, Washington, DC, 1984.

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Despite modifications to the center's windows, and the replacement of its original doors, the Palisades Recreation Center maintains integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association, which correspond to the building's 1936 date of construction.

The National Register of Historic Places:

The Palisades Recreation Center is significant under National Register criteria A, C, and D:

(A) Associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.

The construction of the Palisades Recreation Center was an important event in the development of the modern recreation system in the nation's capital, and is representative of the public improvement programs of the Depression era.

(C) Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction.

The Palisades Recreation Center is characteristic of the Colonial Revival style, and represents an artistic blending of architecture and landscape design by the National Park Service, Branch of Plans and Design.

(D) Have yielded or may be likely to yield, information important in history or prehistory.

The Palisades Recreation Center property holds considerable potential for both prehistoric and historic archaeology.

Therefore, it is recommended this property is eligible for listing in the National Register.

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“\$1,000,000 Betterment Plan Surveyed in District Parks.” *Evening Star*, October 24, 1937.
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records/groups/079.html](http://www.archives.gov/research/guide-fed-records/groups/079.html) (Accessed November 11, 2014).

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Planning Files, 1924-1968, Box 103, National Archives, Washington, DC.

Date:

March 30, 1935
October 10, 1935
November 18, 1935
December 1, 1935
May 19, 1936
December 1, 1936

PREPARER'S DETERMINATION

Eligibility Recommended **X**

Eligibility Not Recommended

Applicable National Register Criteria:

AX B CX DX

Applicable Considerations:

A B C D E F G

Prepared By: John Gentry, Architectural Historian, EHT Traceries Date: November 14, 2014

DC SHPO REVIEW AND COMMENTS

Concurs with Recommendation

Does Not Concur with Recommendation

Reviewed By (specify):

Date:

DC Government Project/Permit Project Log Number (if applicable): _____