



CITY OF DURHAM | DURHAM COUNTY  
NORTH CAROLINA



HISTORIC LANDMARK REPORT

Meeting Date: October 15, 2012

<b>Case</b>	LD1200002	<b>Jurisdiction</b>	City
<b>Project Name</b>	East Durham Graded School		
<b>Request</b>	Historic Landmark Designation		
<b>Site Characteristics</b>	<b>Tier</b>	Urban	
	<b>Site Acreage</b>	2.499	
	<b>Existing Use</b>	Vacant	
	<b>Date Constructed</b>	1909-1910, 1920	
	<b>National Register District</b>	East Durham	
	<b>National Register Individually Listed</b>	No	
	<b>Local District</b>	No	
<b>Applicant</b>	Self-Help	<b>Submittal Date</b>	March 30, 2012
<b>Owner</b>	Historic YES LLC		
<b>Address</b>	107 South Driver Street		
<b>Location</b>	East side of Driver Street between Hart Street and Main Street		
<b>PIN(s)</b>	0831-15-63-4509		
<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>Staff</b>	Approval	
	<b>Historic Preservation Commission</b>	Approval	

**A. Summary**

Self-Help is requesting the designation of the East Durham Graded School (Y. E. Smith School), exterior and land, as a Durham Historic Landmark. The structure is contributing to the East Durham National Register Historic District.

**B. Historical Context**

The earliest schools in East Durham were two one-room schoolhouses. One, called the Cherry Grove School, was located near the present-day intersection of Liberty Street and North Driver Street. The second was the Oak Grove School, located

south of the railroad tracks on the later site of the Durham Cotton Manufacturing Company at East Pettigrew and South Driver Street. Durham's growth in the late Nineteenth Century resulted in the need for a larger schoolhouse to cater to the growing population of East Durham. As a result, in the 1890s, a framed schoolhouse was built at the present location of the East Durham Graded School and was described as follows:

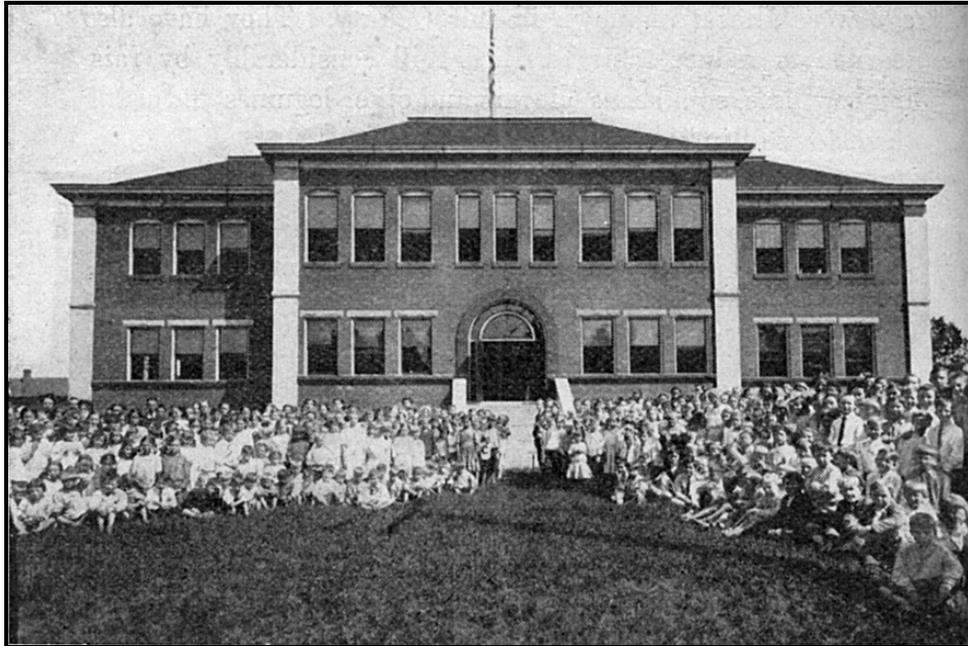
The frame structure...contained 7 classrooms and an assembly hall. It was an 8 grade school with a 36 week term. In 1903-1904, the total enrollment was 337 students with an average daily attendance of 192 students. The building and grounds were valued that year at \$4000, and the school sat on an acre of land. LH Kincaid was principal, and the teachers were L.W. Cameron, Bettie Barber, Mary McIntosh, Bessie Proctor, and Zora Habel. Their salary was \$34 per month. In 1905, a special tax election allowed the school to expand to a nine month term with five teachers paid \$45 per month. It had one grade of high school. (Gary Kueber. "East Durham Graded School/ YE Smith School." *Open Durham*. Accessed 15 May 2012 <<http://www.opendurham.org/buildings/east-durham-graded-school-ye-smith-school?full>>)



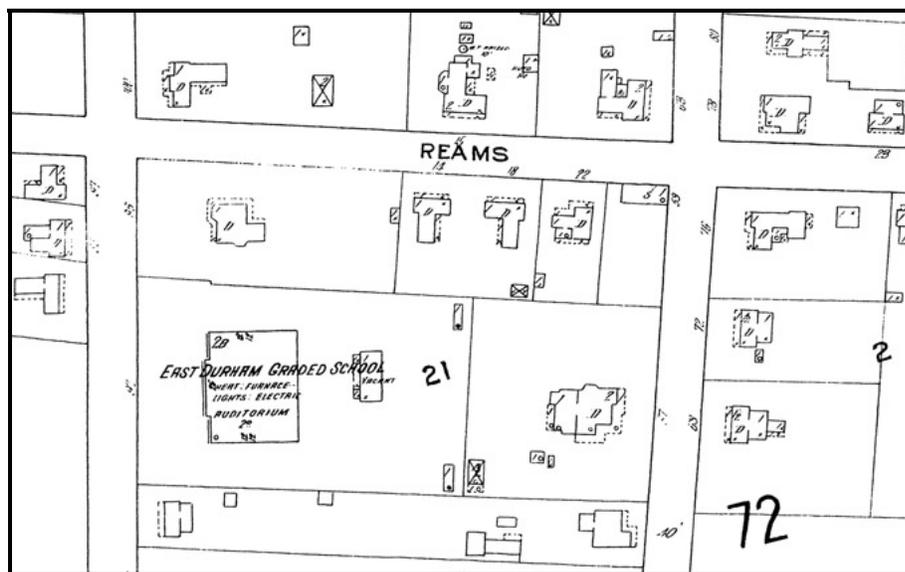
Original East Durham Graded School, 1898

With hundreds of students enrolled in its early years, judging by the size of the original building, it was likely overcrowded and more space was needed. Enrollment continued to surge in the early years of the twentieth century. In 1909,

a new masonry brick structure, designed by Fred Githens of the New York architectural firm Tilton and Githens, was built between the old schoolhouse and Driver Street. Githens also designed the West Durham Graded School, completed in 1912, but no longer standing. With the East Durham Graded School's completion in 1909, there were now two structures present on the site. By 1913, the school had a daily average attendance of 421 students and there were grades added to accommodate students through all four years of high school. The East Durham Graded School needed to expand again as space continued to be limited.



East Durham Graded School, 1910s

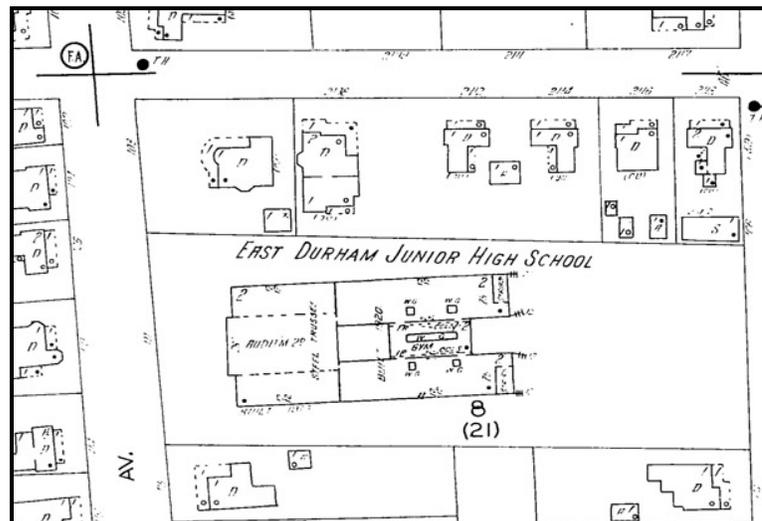


Sanborn Map 1913

In 1920, two wings were added to the rear of the school to accommodate the growth. The wings extended the building to the east and, presumably, the old 1890s framed schoolhouse was demolished prior to or during this expansion. Likely at some point soon after the wings were added, some of the space between the wings was filled in with a gymnasium. It is possible that this gym—with its pitched roof and monitor skylight—could have been a separate structure built sometime between 1913 and 1920 and was later connected to the original main building via the flat roofed wings in 1920. Between 1913 and 1937, the space between the original 1909 school building and bordered by the 1920 wings formed a distinctive open-air courtyard, accessible only from the inside of the school. Eventually, this courtyard was roofed in and the area became interior space.



East Durham Graded School, 1926 (note addition of fire escapes)



Sanborn Map 1939 (showing 1920 wings and gymnasium)

In 1925, the school was renamed in honor of former School Board Chair Y. E. Smith. In that year, 13 students graduated from high school at the school. In the following years, students attended high school at Durham High School, while the East Durham Graded School served elementary and middle school grades. By 1939, when the East Durham Junior High School (later known as Holton School) opened, the East Durham Graded School served elementary school aged children, and was known as both Y. E. Smith School and the East Durham Grammar School. During this time, the rear third of the lot was used as a field/open space for the students.

In 1967, the school was decommissioned, and a new Y. E. Smith Elementary School opened just a few blocks to the east. The original school building was used briefly as a school for children with disabilities before closing completely. By 1980, the Durham Exchange Club owned the building and used it for their work with disabled adults. They continued to own the property until 1998, when it was sold to the current owner, Triangle Residential Options for Substance Abusers, Inc. (TROSA). TROSA intended to renovate the building for use as a residential structure, but ultimately found that they were unable to execute its renovation. The property has now been purchased by Self-Help to be rehabilitated for use as a school once again. The rehabilitation is underway utilizing State and Federal tax credits.



1950 Aerial (showing courtyard and open space in back)



1950 West/Front Facade

### C. Architectural Description

The East Durham Graded School is situated on slightly less than three acres of land at South Driver Street just south of East Main Street. The property is located in the geographic heart of the East Durham neighborhood and at the core of the East Durham National Register District. The building, which dates to 1909, is made of brick masonry and was designed by Fred Githens of New York. The two-story building has a habitable basement level replete with windows and direct access to the exterior. The building consists of a primary street-facing volume flanked on the north and south by two identical wings. The building has large double-hung, one-over-one, windows and a tall cornice fascia with deep, guttered overhangs at the edges the hipped roof. The building's corners are beige-colored brick pilasters with a projecting detail at the level of the second floor. The facades are uniform, orange-colored brick. The first floor windows feature stone lintels, while the second floor windows have masonry arched tops, and the basement windows are square-headed and without an expressed lintel detail. There is a corbelled water-table detail running horizontally around the building at the level of the first floor window sills.

The symmetrical, primary facade has nine windows at the second level, over six first level windows that flank a large arched opening for the front door to the school. The three center second floor windows above the arched doorway opening are narrower in width than the other windows of the facade. There is a straight run of brick-walled steps leading to the arched front door opening from grade. The

flanking recessed bays have three windows at each floor level, including the basement. The window frames were originally, and remain today, white in color. The side elevations are very similar to the primary, street-facing facade, including a centered arched opening on each side.

The single-loaded 1920 classroom wings are identical to one another, and each has four groupings of five windows on each floor running the length of the exterior facades. The windows are all square-headed and without an expressed lintel. They are triple-hung in appearance but double-hung in function. The ends of the wings, farthest from the original building, are bounded by internal exit stairs, and each stairwell has arch-topped window opening (which are currently bricked in). The arched windows are on the east facade of each wing and in-line with the east-west corridor running the length of each wing.

The interior of the school has a few distinctive architectural features. First is the large, level-floored auditorium that occupies the front middle of the second floor. This auditorium dates to the original 1909 construction and is the defining feature of the building's interior. It features a stage at the east (windowless) side of the room and large amounts of natural light flood the original maple floors from the nine west-facing windows. The building also features an unusual octagonal main lobby that has three corridors leading directly into it. Some specific interior architectural details include tongue-and-groove paneled wainscoting with molded and beaded baseboards and door surrounds throughout. The staircases feature turned balusters and paneled molded square newel posts with intricate molding detail still intact.



Front Facade



South Facade



North Facade



South Facade



Stairhall



Baluster and Balustrade Detail



Classroom Detail



Auditorium with original maple floor

#### D. Alterations and Condition of Structures

The building can be described as being in fair condition (structurally sound) inside and out and it retains much of its original appearance and details. The exterior and the floor plan of the original structure have remained largely unchanged since its construction.

In the past few decades the interior of the building and the site have experienced some notable alterations as well as deterioration of some elements due to neglect. Two metal storage sheds were added to the back of the site around 1980. These storage sheds were not contributing to the integrity of the site and have since been demolished. There were also some interior alterations made to the building after its use as a school. From the 1970s through the 1990s, modifications included the removal of some interior partition walls to convert smaller classrooms in the top floor wings of the building into large open spaces for work and storage. Most of the original school furnishings (chairs, desks, blackboards, etc.) have been removed from the building, though a small number of original light and plumbing fixtures remain. The original maple floors remain in the structure, except for the former stage area in the auditorium, which was destroyed from severe water damage caused by a hole in the roof. In the early 2000s, replacement windows were installed to match the historic grid patterns of the original building. As seen in the photographs, early fire escapes were installed prior to 1926, likely when the wings were added a few years earlier. They have since been removed in the past few decades and the windows to which they were affixed have been restored to their original appearance. The roof monitor on the roof of the gymnasium has also been removed. The building is currently under renovation with the use of the historic tax credit program and will be used as a school once again. The house at 115 South Driver Street was moved in the renovation of the property.



Aerial view of the site (note addition of shed buildings)

#### **E. Criteria for Landmark Designation**

The Unified Development Ordinance (UDO), Section 3.17.4 Designation of an Historic Landmark, includes the following criteria to qualify for the landmark designation:

A building, structure, site, area, or object may be considered for designation as an historic landmark only if both of the following criteria are met:

- A. The [Historic Preservation] Commission deems and finds that the building, structure, site, area, or object appears individually eligible for listing or is individually listed on the National Register of Historic Places;
- B. The Commission deems and finds that the property is of special significance in terms of its pre-historical, historical, architectural or cultural importance, and possesses integrity of design, setting, materials, feeling and association.

#### **F. Fiscal Impact**

The Historic Landmark program is a way to protect historically important properties throughout the City and County. North Carolina General Statute 105-278 provides that taxes are reduced by 50% on such properties, to take into account the extra costs associated with restoring, preserving and maintaining historic structures. The reduction occurs upon designation of the property as a landmark. The tax reduction may be lost in the event of a change in the ordinance or a change in the property that causes the property to lose its historic significance. In that event, the tax reduction amount for the year in which the status was lost and for the three previous years become payable, with interest. The property tax reduction represents 50% of the assessed value of the landmark. The current assessment (land and structures) of the property is \$2,018,287; however, the property has been tax-exempt throughout its existence, first as a public school and later owned by various non-profit organizations. Once designated as a landmark the taxable value would be reduced to \$1,009,144. This would result in a loss of tax revenues for the City and County of \$5,727 and \$7,512, respectively.

#### **G. Notification**

Staff certifies that notification, including newspaper advertisements and letters to adjacent property owners, has been carried out in accordance with Section 3.2.5 of the UDO. In accordance with Section 3.17.4D.1, notice has also been provided

to the City and County Managers and their respective Finance Directors. At the request of the County Board of Commissioners, the staff provided a briefing on September 10, 2012 that included the tax implications of designation.

#### H. Property Significance

The East Durham Graded School is the oldest existing school building in Durham, due to the demolition of the West Durham Graded School. The structure is architecturally and culturally significant, as it represents the oldest intact early Twentieth Century school building remaining in Durham. It is a contributing structure within the East Durham National Historic District, and is associated with noted architect Fred Githens, who has a national reputation for designing public buildings. The school building was one of Githens' early projects before he went on to construct 21 Carnegie-funded public libraries. Originally one of a series of schools built in the early Twentieth Century, East Durham Graded School remains Durham's oldest remaining intact school structure after the destruction or massive alteration of its contemporaries.

#### I. Recommendations

**Staff.** The East Durham Graded School is associated with a nationally known architect and exemplifies the growth of Durham in the early Twentieth Century, specifically East Durham. It currently remains as the oldest intact school building in the city.

The staff has determined that the East Durham Graded School meets the UDO criteria. Therefore, staff recommends designation of the East Durham Graded School (LD1200002), exterior and land only, as a Durham Historic Landmark.

**State Historic Preservation Office.** In accordance with the UDO, the Staff provided an opportunity for the NC Department of Cultural Resources (the State Historic Preservation Office) to review and comment on this proposed Historic Landmark Designation. The Department stated that, with minor modifications included in this staff report, the designation report provides adequate historical and architectural contexts for the property and that the report provides the Durham Historic Preservation Commission and the Durham City Council with adequate information to determine whether the East Durham Graded School has the requisite special significance and integrity for landmark designation.

**Historic Preservation Commission.** The Historic Preservation Commission found that the East Durham Graded School meets the two criteria for Historic Landmark designation. On August 14, 2012 the Commission voted 8-0 to recommend that the City Council designate the East Durham Graded School as a Historic Landmark,

with the condition that the residential structure on the property be removed before City Council designates the property as a landmark.

**J. Alternatives**

As per UDO Section 3.17.4.D.2, the City Council may adopt the ordinance of designation as proposed, adopt the ordinance of designation with any amendments it deems necessary, or reject the proposal.

**K. Staff Contact**

Lisa Miller, Senior Planner, (919) 560-4137 ext. 28270, [Lisa.Miller@DurhamNC.gov](mailto:Lisa.Miller@DurhamNC.gov)

**L. Attachments**

Attachment 1, Context Map

Attachment 2, Application Materials

Attachment 3, North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources Letter, July 25, 2012

Attachment 4, Ordinance of Designation