



2026 Sample Entry— Louise Archer Elementary School

Submitted by: Architecture Inc.

Excellent use of before and after photos to illustrate the capital improvements being made. Color coding the site plan and the narrative was also helpful.

Sample entry has hard costs redacted. Cost is a key factor for the judges; please make sure this information is included in your submission.

Capital Improvement_Public_Louise Archer Elementary School

Project Size: 104,000 SF | Floors: 2 | Hard Construction Cost:



OVERALL CONCEPT:

A comprehensive renovation and expansion of the existing Louise Archer Elementary School was undertaken to align the facility with current Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) standards and accommodate the needs of a growing student population. The goal of the project was to expand the building to accommodate increasing enrollment while also honoring the history of the existing building.

DESIGN:

The project team was tasked with doubling the size of the school while maintaining operations, preserving community amenities, and respecting the surrounding residential neighborhood.

The 104,000 SF renovation and expansion project included:

- 51,000 sf of renovated existing space
- 32,000 sf of first-floor additions, including:
 - 24,000 sf of classroom additions
 - 6,000 sf kitchen and cafeteria addition
 - 2,000 sf lobby addition
- 21,000 sf of second-story addition

The improvements included upgrading the commons areas, restrooms, MEP systems, interior classrooms and core spaces, exterior of the building, and outdoor spaces. Despite the constraints of an eight-acre sloping site, the project succeeded in enhancing site circulation, increasing parking capacity, and retaining two community-use softball fields.

INNOVATION:

The transformation of Louise Archer Elementary School reflects a balance between honoring history, addressing site and programmatic constraints, and creating a modern learning environment that serves both students and the wider community. The original three-room, wood-framed 1939 schoolhouse, which had been concealed within additions from 1948 and the 1950s, was carefully revealed and integrated into the new design as a celebrated historic feature.

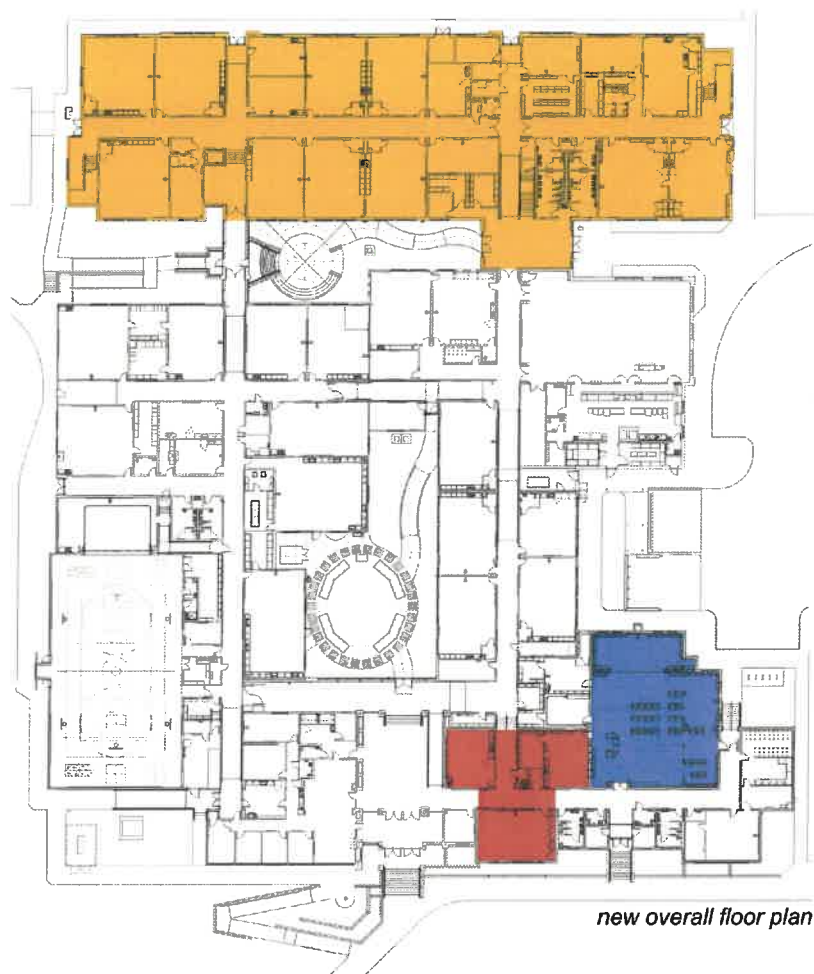
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HISTORY:

Louise Archer Elementary School is a central landmark in Vienna, Virginia, with deep roots in the community. Built in 1939 as the Vienna Colored School, a three-classroom building serving African American children, it was later renamed in honor of its first principal, Louise A. Reeves Archer. Founded by three dedicated educators, Louise Archer, Mabel Mack, and Channie Henderson, the school opened with a powerful mission to provide the highest quality education and opportunities for all students. More than 80 years later, that vision continues to thrive. Today, Louise Archer Elementary serves nearly 700 students with the support of 65 dedicated educators and staff who carry forward the values and dreams established generations ago.



Principal Louise R. Archer



DESIGN GOALS:

Reconfigure existing space and construct an addition.

- Address a shortfall of amenities, auxiliary spaces, and support areas.
- Accommodate 12 classrooms previously housed in modular trailers.
- Support growth from the existing 646 students to the projected 700 students.
- Expand the kitchen and cafeteria to reduce the number of lunch shifts.
- Increase the size of the library.
- Provide additional parking.
- Separate parent drop-off/pick-up traffic from bus drop-off/pick-up.

DESIGN CONSTRAINTS:

- Minimize the amount of demolition to the existing school.
- Close proximity to a residential neighborhood.
- Steep slopes on the front and back.
- Desire to keep the modular classrooms in place for the duration of construction, so the addition could not be located at that location on the south side.
- Minimize impact on the existing parking lot.
- Maintain the two softball fields.

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TWO-STORY ADDITION

The school had not received any significant improvements over the past 30 years and desperately needed updated to the current educational specifications for capacity, programs and staffing. After programming, the conclusion was that the 51,000 square foot school had to double in area. Twelve classrooms in modular trailers accommodated the classroom shortfall for many years in the overcrowded school. Since the trailers needed to remain during construction, the only remaining location for a significant addition was at the rear of the school. However, two existing community softball fields also needed to remain in this area, so the design solution was a long, linear two-story classroom addition strategically tucked behind the existing school. The existing grade slopes down eight feet from front to back, the visual mass of the two-story, 24 classroom addition was reduced from the street by placing it at the lowest location on the site.



before & after



LIBRARY



before & after

The existing multipurpose room served as the cafeteria as well as a small theater for school productions. The comprehensive renovation added a new stage off the end of the gymnasium to accommodate the well-attended plays and musical productions. The existing kitchen could not be easily expanded, so an addition was designed and built for a new kitchen and cafeteria. These moves freed up the existing multipurpose room with its high ceilings and beautifully proportioned space to be re-purposed as the new library. The raised stage floor was removed and rebuilt at the same level as the remainder of the room. The proscenium trim was kept and enhanced to become a focal point. The colors, finishes, and furniture combine to provide an inspiring and accommodating new library space.

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LOBBY

The original three room, wood framed, wood sided schoolhouse constructed for the African American community in 1939 was concealed within the first addition in 1948 as well as subsequent additions in the 1950s. Covered in brick, one of the original schoolhouse gable walls was in the exterior courtyard behind the existing main entry. The new expanded main entry lobby design centered around revealing and celebrating the original building by removing the brick from the original gable wall and constructing a new steel framed lobby around and over it. After restoration and trim replacement, the historic 1939 building historic feature wall helps tell the story of the community and Louise Archer.



original schoolhouse

before & after



before & after



ACHIEVEMENT OF GOALS

- Louise Archer Elementary is now both a 21st-century learning environment, a living tribute to its history, and embodies the values of the Vienna community.
- The design uses sensitive and innovative design solutions to integrate additional program requirements and site amenities required to bring an older school up to current FCPS standards while also revitalizing a cherished community treasure.
- The design preserves the school's historical significance while modernizing it to meet the needs of today's students and the community.
- During design, the original schoolhouse wall's condition was unknown. It was uncovered during construction and turned out to be in good condition. The original materials were preserved and is now a featured element in the renovated facility to be shared with future generations of students.