

HISTORIC RESOURCES INVENTORY - BUILDING AND STRUCTURES

Connecticut Commission on Culture & Tourism, One Constitution Plaza, 2nd Floor, Hartford, CT 06103

*** Note:** Please attach any additional or expanded information on a separate sheet.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Building Name (Common) Currently Vacant

Building Name (Historic) Martin Luther King School

Street Address or Location 580 Dixwell Avenue

Town/City New Haven Village Dixwell-Newhallville County New Haven

Owner(s) City of New Haven Public Private

PROPERTY INFORMATION

Present Use: Educational - public school

Historic Use: Educational - public school

Accessibility to public: Exterior visible from public road? Yes No

Interior accessible? Yes No If yes, explain During school hours

Style of building Modernist - International Date of Construction 1968

Material(s) (Indicate use or location when appropriate):

- Clapboard Asbestos Siding Brick Wood Shingle Asphalt Siding
- Fieldstone Board & Batten Stucco Cobblestone Aluminum Siding
- Concrete (Type _____) Cut Stone (Type _____) Other _____

Structural System

- Wood Frame Post & Beam Balloon Load bearing masonry Structural iron or steel
- Other Reinforced concrete & precast concrete plank

Roof (Type)

- Gable Flat Mansard Monitor Sawtooth
- Gambrel Shed Hip Round Other _____

(Material)

- Wood Shingle Roll Asphalt Tin Slate Asphalt Shingle
- Built up Tile Other _____

Number of Stories: 1 Approximate Dimensions 144' x 165' x 10' & 15' height

Structural Condition: Excellent Good Fair Deteriorated

Exterior Condition: Excellent Good Fair Deteriorated

Location Integrity: On original site Moved When? _____

Alterations? Yes No If yes, explain: 1-story wing added to north (side) elevation.

FOR OFFICE USE: Town # _____ Site # _____ UTM _____

District: S NR If NR, Specify: Actual Potential

PROPERTY INFORMATION (CONT'D)

Related outbuildings or landscape features:

Barn Shed Garage Carriage House Shop Garden

Other landscape features or buildings: Asphalt parking lot to the south of building, circular playground behind (west of) building, extensive lawn with scattered trees.

Surrounding Environment:

Open land Woodland Residential Commercial Industrial Rural

High building density Scattered buildings visible from site

• Interrelationship of building and surroundings: The school is at the northwest corner of Dixwell Avenue and Ford Street in the Dixwell-Newhallville neighborhood near the northern border of New Haven. The building extends the full depth of the block, west to Sherman Parkway and is surrounded by a residential area of 19th- and 20th-century construction, consisting of a mix of single- and multi-family dwellings. To the west is the Beaver Pond Park; to the east the Farmington Canal Heritage Trail parallels Dixwell Avenue. The building sits in an extensive open grassy site, without organized playfields except for a circular playground.

• Other notable features of building or site (*Interior and/or Exterior*) The building has an irregular rectangular footprint, 1-story gray brick walls, a simple concrete cap cornice, and flat roof. The building's core is formed by a rectangular block with clerestory windows under a raised roof, from which project a number of 1-story wings. North-south solid fin walls extend beyond the core; lateral infill walls have tall windows facing south or north. Hood-like structures face toward the center of the building; a blank sloped surface is visible from the exterior. At the north side these have clerestory windows lighting the classrooms, which also have sloped windows facing north. At the south side the hoods provide shade over conventional windows. The east facade facing Dixwell Avenue is a series of tall masonry walls without visible openings. Several of these enclose courtyards, as can be seen from the aerial view; the street view is a windowless wall which has been decorated with portrait bust murals of prominent African-Americans. The west side is less forbidding, with extending wings enclosing a patio opening to a circular playground with a paved area, a play structure, and a high berm encircling the south side of the play circle. The remainder of the 5.6-acre site is a large expanse of lawn with scattered groupings of trees and paths; the site is oddly lacking in structured play fields.

Architect Damuck and Babbit; Charles Brewer, Consultant. Builder R. A. Civitello Company, Inc.

• Historical or Architectural importance:
See continuation sheet.

• Sources: Brown, Elizabeth Mills; New Haven: *A Guide to Architecture & Urban Design*, Yale U. Press, New Haven, 1976, p. 177. Carley, Rachel D., *Tomorrow is Here: New Haven and the Modern Movement* (Privately printed by the New Haven Preservation Trust, New Haven CT) June, 2008. New Haven Assessor's Record: Map/Block/Parcel 324/0450/00100, Building Department permit files. "Annual Report: City of New Haven," New Haven Register, October 20, 1968; October 5, 1969.

Photographer Lucas Karmazinas Date 11/12/2009

View Multiple Views Negative on File NHPT

Name Lucas Karmazinas / Charlotte Hitchcock Date 5/27/2011

Organization The New Haven Preservation Trust

Address 934 State Street, P.O. Box 1671, New Haven, CT 06507

• Subsequent field evaluations:

Threats to the building or site:

None known Highways Vandalism Developers Renewal Private

Deterioration Zoning Other _____ Explanation _____

• Historical or Architectural importance:

The Martin Luther King School opened in September 1968. In addition to its educational function, the school provided neighborhood recreation and playground facilities in the heart of the Newhallville neighborhood. The “Newhallville Renewal Plan,” still pending federal approval in 1969, targeted a zone bounded roughly by Sherman Parkway, the Hamden town line, Winchester Avenue, and Munson Street. Typical of the city’s redevelopment projects, a neighborhood group, the United Newhallville Organizations (UNO), coordinated with the city to identify and prioritize problems. A mix of commercial, educational, recreational, and residential projects was planned. The total estimated cost of the Newhallville redevelopment project was \$10.6 million, with \$5.6 million projected to come from the federal government, and \$5.0 million provided by the city. At 356 total acres the plan was the third largest in the city. One of the needs identified was for a new educational facility that could double as a community recreational space. This materialized as the Martin Luther King School, which was the 10th new school opened between 1953 and 1968. Original plans called for eight classrooms and a kindergarten; space was left to construct five additional classroom spaces. Subsequently, classrooms have been added in a rectangular block at the north-eastern corner of the structure.

The Martin Luther King School was combined with Jackie Robinson School in a new K-8 school building constructed in 2004. Since that time the building has functioned as the Urban Youth Center; it appears to be vacant.

This school’s design follows a philosophy of turning inward, bringing light from above but strictly controlling views of the outside world. Its massive masonry walls capped by the towering masses of the light monitors give it a somewhat overbearing abstractness that adds to the forbidding aspect of the east wall. Like many Modernist compositions, the man-made structure sits in a huge expanse of rather blank open space, with a highly artificial geometric playground imposed on the natural landscape. Elizabeth Mills Brown commented (Brown, p. 199) on the trend toward fewer windows and greater land area, as schools were constructed during urban renewal. Several of these buildings have failed to stand the test of time and are now being replaced or reconstructed (as with King-Robinson at 150 Fournier Street and Columbus School at 255 Blatchley Avenue).



1. East (front) and south (side) elevations from Dixwell Avenue, camera facing northwest.



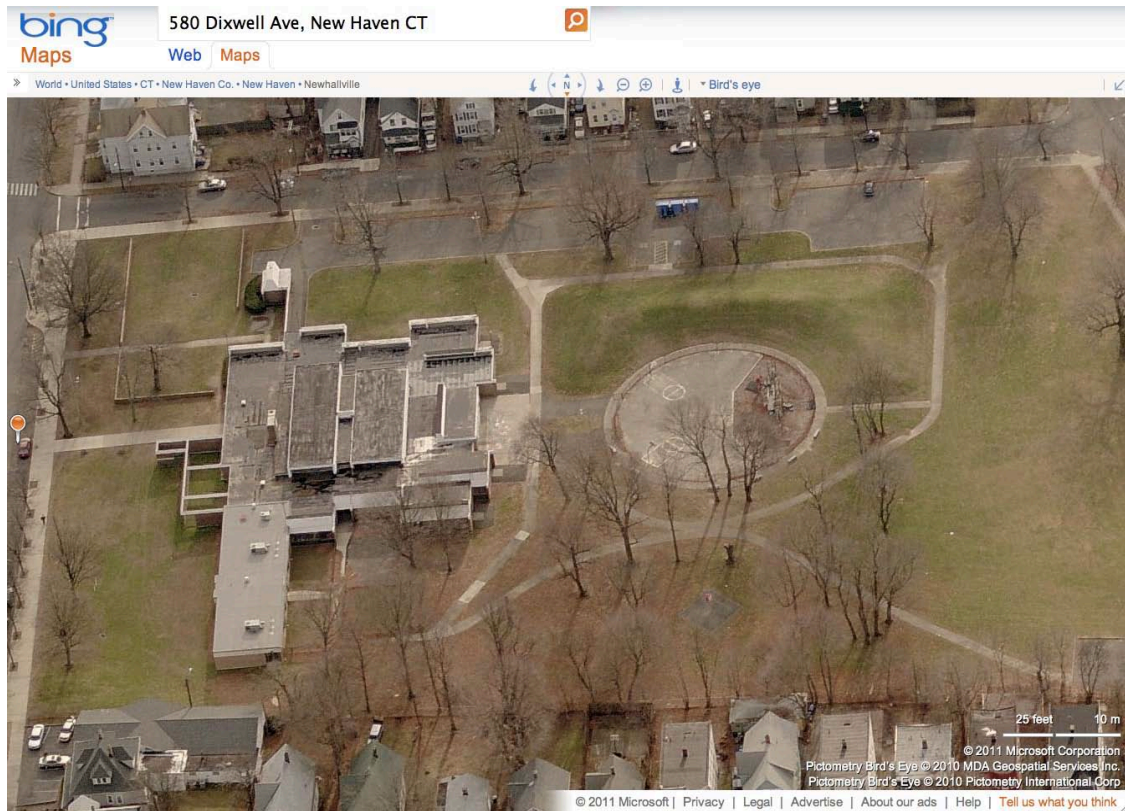
2. East (front) elevation from Dixwell Avenue, camera facing southwest.



3. East (front) and north (side) elevations from Dixwell Avenue, camera facing southwest.



4. South (side) elevation from Ford Street, camera facing northeast.



5. North aerial view from Bing Maps <http://www.bing.com/maps/> accessed 5/26/2011.



6. Site Plan – detail from City of New Haven Tax Map 168/782/011 not to scale, North ↑.