



## CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS STAFF REPORT

**TO:** Historical Affairs and Landmark Review Board (HALRB)  
**FROM:** Mical Tawney, Acting Historic Preservation Planner  
**DATE:** December 12, 2023  
**SUBJECT:** 4102 North Old Glebe Road, CoA 19-27B, Walker Chapel and Cemetery Local Historic District

### **Background Information**

The Walker Chapel and Cemetery was designated a Local Historic District (LHD) on October 3, 1978. Its congregation is the third oldest in Arlington County. The original church building was demolished between 1936 and 1952. The current chapel was constructed by 1962. The Walker Cemetery is still active, and the entire parcel consists of approximately 2.13 acres. The publication entitled *Graveyards of Arlington County, Virginia*, compiled by the Arlington Genealogy Club in 1985, states:

The Walker family started using the “Walker Graveyard” as a family burial site in 1848 when David Walker was buried there.

The cemetery as it is today was deeded in three parts. The first part was conveyed by Elizabeth Bowen on 1 December 1858 to “William, James and Robert Walker, and James and John Reid as trustees, the lot to be used as a graveyard.” (William, James, and Robert were sons of David Walker).

The second part was conveyed by Elizabeth Bowen on 3 August 1871 to five trustees (including Robert and William Walker) “to be held as a site for a Methodist Protestant Church and Burial Grounds.” This parcel comprised the remainder of the original cemetery. The first Walker Chapel Church was built on this site and was dedicated in 1875.

On 1 October 1879, Robert Walker conveyed a triangular parcel of land to the trustees of Walker Chapel for a nominal consideration of \$1. This is the parcel on which the present edifice and the other part of the cemetery is located.

As the LHD was designated in 1978 before design guidelines were individually developed for districts, *The Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation and Cultural Landscapes (SISR)* are used to guide design review.

In January 2020, the HALRB conditionally approved CoA 19-27 which consisted of four main components: the removal of the existing timber retaining wall around the cemetery; the construction of a

new retaining wall (including a columbaria); the installation of a ramp and stairway; and the reconfiguration of the parking lot. Per the proposal, the retaining wall would be in the same place as the timber wall, but it would have a stone veneer and include a limestone sign facing the parking lot. The ramp and stairway would provide access to the cemetery grounds from the parking lot. This proposal also included the removal of five mature trees. The HALRB granted conditional approval of the project so that the applicants could begin their fundraising efforts.

In March 2021, the applicants returned with an amendment, as well as to seek final approval from the HALRB. CoA 19-27A included many of the same elements as the original CoA but the main difference was the elimination of the originally proposed ramp along the retaining wall facing the parking lot. Instead, the applicant only sought approval for the originally proposed stairway for access to the parking lot and the cemetery. The application also included more details about materials as well as the location of lighting and its design specifications. Given that all the requested information had been provided to the HALRB, approval for the application was granted.

In April 2022, the HALRB approved CoA 22-09 to replace the existing defunct air handler, compressor, and condenser with new units to handle the capacity of the building. In August 2022, the HALRB approved CoA 22-17 for the removal of a defunct fire escape on the rear of the building and to infill the door with a window with a cruciform inlay. In September 2022, the HALRB approved CoA 22-19 for the installation of a front-gable plastic shed measuring 4' deep x 8' long with 4½" tall eaves to be placed close to the fence line along the northeast side of the property. It would be sited outside of the zoning setback requirements for sheds and situated parallel with the L15-L20 grave row section. Most recently in October 2022, the HALRB approved CoA 22-19A for an amendment to the size of the originally proposed shed (changed in measurement to 10' deep x 8' long; the height and location remained the same).

### **Proposal**

The applicant is proposing four amendments to CoA 19-27A. Changes to the design have occurred in the field making a few of the proposed changes retroactive.

1. Retroactive Revision to Step Lights and Wall Lights: The applicant has installed two different lights for the steps and wall than what had been approved in CoA 19-27A. The step lights have been installed in the riser of every other stair, are rectangular in shape, and measure 3.25" x 8.25". The wall lights have been installed into the retaining wall, measure 3 3/8" tall and 2" deep, and feature a hood to ensure the light is downcast.
2. Retroactive Wall Sign: CoA 19-27A included the installation of an engraved stone sign for the retaining wall with the text "Walker Chapel Memorial Garden." The applicant has instead installed a different sign that reads "Walker Chapel Historic Cemetery, circa 1842" to better describe the cemetery and its historical significance.
3. Parking Lot Lights: The application for CoA 19-27A erroneously indicated that four parking lot light fixtures would be installed. Originally, there were five parking lot lights, all of which were reinstalled, as part of this project. The applicant is including this in the current application to correct the record. This technically would be retroactive as the lights have already been installed.
4. Service Ramp: In support of the church's ongoing interment and cemetery maintenance needs, the applicant is proposing to construct a permeable paver service ramp atop the existing earth and gravel ramp located along the northeastern side of the cemetery. This ramp is the only access



point to the cemetery from the existing roadways surrounding the church. The applicant is proposing to install Belgard Turfstone, a precast concrete product, in the ground. It is a permeable paver type. They plan to line the ramp with natural stone that matches the retaining walls and plantings.

### **Design Review Committee (DRC) Review**

Since the DRC heard this case at its December 6, 2023, hybrid meeting, changes have been made to the current application. Originally, the proposal included screening for an installed electrical panel; given the feedback from the DRC and the Historic Preservation Program (HPP) staff, the applicant decided to remove this item from the current CoA application to further refine the design before returning to the DRC. Additionally, the proposal included information about plantings; however, the HPP staff determined that these planting details do not need to be included in the CoA application as this item is not something the HALRB reviews at Walker Chapel unless it relates to tree removals.

The DRC members did not have any questions or comments on the proposed lighting or signage changes in this project. Ms. Foster asked about the safety of the proposed Turfstone for the existing ramp and whether it could be a tripping hazard. The applicant shared their familiarity with the material and did not seem concerned it would be a safety issue for the public. The DRC members agreed that the HALRB should discuss the electrical screening design proposed as part of the original application and therefore, placed the item on the discussion agenda for the December 20, 2023, hybrid HALRB public hearing. Although the element the DRC felt the HALRB would most want to discuss is no longer a part of this subject application, the HPP staff kept the project on the discussion agenda given the changes to the proposal.

### **Recommendation**

The HPP staff recommends approval of the subject application. These are all minor changes to a previously reviewed and approved CoA application. The stair and wall lighting better serves the needs of the congregation and allows for safer interactions with the church grounds. The installed signage text better encapsulates the historic significance of the LHD. The number of installed parking lot lights matches what was originally in situ and therefore, is not a change from what was there prior to this work taking place. Finally, staff agrees that the use of the Turfstone pavers on the ramp is an appropriate element to introduce to the landscape. This material allows for the improved usability of the space without compromising the integrity of the historic cemetery. The HPP staff feel that all of these project elements comply with Standards #9 and #10 of *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation*:

9. New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction shall not destroy historic materials that characterize the property. The new work shall be differentiated from the old and shall be compatible with the massing, size, scale, and architectural features to protect the historic integrity of the property and its environment.

10. New additions and adjacent or related new construction shall be undertaken in such a manner that if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment would be unimpaired.