



CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS STAFF REPORT

TO: Historical Affairs and Landmark Review Board (HALRB)
FROM: Mical Tawney, Acting Historic Preservation Planner
DATE: January 8, 2024
SUBJECT: 4102 North Old Glebe Road, CoA 19-27C, Walker Chapel and Cemetery 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 in 1985 by the Arlington Genealogy Club, 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 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 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. In October 2022, the HALRB approved CoA 22-19A, an amendment to the originally proposed shed installation. The front-gable plastic shed changed in measurement to 10' deep x 8' long; the height and location remained the same.

In December 2023, the HALRB approved CoA 19-27B which included three retroactive project elements and one new element. The three retroactive elements included: a revision to the lighting used on the stairs and walls; a revision to the text engraved on the stone sign along the rear retaining wall of the cemetery; and the reinstallation of five parking lot lights rather than four which had been erroneously included in the original CoA. In support of the church's ongoing interment and cemetery maintenance needs, the application also included the installation of Belgard Turfstone, a precast concrete paver, in the existing earth and gravel ramp located along the northeastern side of the cemetery.

Proposal

The applicant is proposing one additional amendment to CoA 19-27A: the relocation of the site electrical equipment. Prior to the start of the cemetery project, the 100-amp electrical service panels and meter were surface-mounted to the timber retaining wall along the parking lot. Since this wall was replaced by the new stone wall, the site electrical equipment had to be relocated. The re-installation of the electrical service panels and meter was evaluated after the new retaining wall was complete and it became apparent to the applicant that surface mounting the equipment to the wall would be difficult due to the wall's stone surface. Instead, the applicant installed the site electrical equipment on a free-standing support frame made of stainless steel along the new stone retaining wall and driveway of the church (along the north elevation of the cemetery).

Given that this was a change from the original CoA and a new, visible element to the landscape, the applicant began studying how to screen the electrical equipment. In December 2023, as part of the application for CoA 19-27B, the applicant brought forward several screening options. However, the applicant withdrew this element from the application before the December HALRB meeting due to the need to continue consulting outside parties such as Dominion Energy and other County entities to determine what might be feasible.

The applicant explored several iterations of screening. Per Dominion Energy's requirements of having several feet of clearance from the meter, the following were determined not viable options: placing plantings, shrubbery, or planter boxes in front of the equipment or installing a framed partial enclosure over the front of the equipment. Other solutions such as re-installing the electrical equipment into the stone retaining wall (thereby potentially impacting its integrity), relocating the electrical equipment to the other side of the driveway, or widening the sidewalk to install a decorative screen in the middle to provide partial screening also were explored but deemed not viable options for a variety of reasons.

As such, the applicant proposes to leave the site electrical equipment as currently installed with the stainless-steel framework. The applicant is also proposing to paint the electrical equipment a different shade of grey so that it blends better with the stone wall behind it, as well as to plant a low-lying, durable plant at the base of the electrical equipment to help obscure the base of the framework. This solution would be appropriate per the Dominion Energy guidance.



Design Review Committee (DRC) Review

The DRC considered this CoA amendment at its January 3, 2024, hybrid meeting. The applicant submitted three different solutions for screening or relocating the site electrical equipment but brought a new iteration to the meeting for the DRC to discuss. This option, called Option 1, was preferred by the applicant and was the most discussed by the DRC. Option 1, which is the solution presented in this subject application, included leaving the site electrical equipment in its current location, painting it to help camouflage it with the stone wall, and putting a low-lying, durable planting at the base of the equipment.

Mr. Wenchel appreciated this option and suggested the applicant explore potentially painting the equipment different shades of grey to help it blend with the wall even more. He also expressed the opinion that adding screening could call more attention to the equipment. Ms. Foster echoed Mr. Wenchel's support for Option 1 and stated an appreciation for all the thought, effort, and creativity that went into trying to screen the equipment. Mr. Davis also expressed support for Option 1. After briefly discussing some of the other solutions, such as widening the sidewalk or relocating the equipment to the parking lot, the DRC agreed Option 1 was its preferred option. The applicant decided that they would bring forward just this one option to the HALRB. Given that the DRC members did not have any questions or concerns about that option, they placed the item on the Consent Agenda for the January 17, 2024, hybrid HALRB public hearing.

Recommendation

The Historic Preservation Program (HPP) staff recommends approval of the subject application. Staff appreciates the extensive efforts that the applicant has put into finding a solution for screening the already-installed site electrical equipment and understands the circumstances of the situation such as the requirements of Dominion Energy. Although the site electrical equipment is a new, visible element to the cemetery landscape, it would not interfere with the views of the historic cemetery or of the church. Additionally, the painting of the equipment and use of low-lying plantings at the base will help minimize its presence. There is precedence in the LHD for the construction of new site elements; for example, CoA 22-19A permitted the installation of a shed in the cemetery. As such, staff finds that the addition of this electrical equipment site element to the landscape is permissible. Finally, the site electrical equipment could be removed in the future without affecting the historic features of the site, thereby conforming with Standard #10 of *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation*:

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.