



CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS STAFF REPORT

TO: Historical Affairs and Landmark Review Board (HALRB)
FROM: Mical Tawney, Historic Preservation Associate Planner
DATE: October 4, 2024
SUBJECT: 4102 North Old Glebe Road, CoA 24-24, 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.

In January 2020, the HALRB granted conditional approval to CoA 19-27 for a major hardscaping and landscaping project at the cemetery; the HALRB noted that final approval would be granted upon finalized drawings being submitted. In March 2021, the applicant returned with those final drawings which the HALRB approved via CoA 19-27A. In April 2022, the HALRB approved CoA 22-09 to replace the existing defunct air handler, compressor, and condenser with new units. 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 shed. In October 2022, the HALRB approved CoA 22-19A, an amendment to the originally proposed shed installation. In December 2023, the HALRB approved CoA 19-27B which included revisions to elements of the hardscaping in the original proposal. Finally, in January 2024, the HALRB approved CoA 19-27C for the relocation of site electrical equipment and associated landscaping.

Proposal

The applicant is proposing to remove two black cherry trees from the cemetery. One tree is 42” diameter at breast height (DBH) and the other is 24” DBH. Both are located towards the center of the cemetery with the smaller tree situated to the south of the larger one. The 42” black cherry tree has multiple trunks, one of which failed and fell this past August. The tree has rotting wood, mushrooms, and fungus. The 24” black cherry tree is failing as well; dead branches are falling, the base of the tree has split open, and carpenter bees have made holes. The applicant is proposing to remove both trees so that they do not fall and cause damage to the surrounding gravesites and stones. They would utilize the services of a tree company to remove the trees in pieces and cover the ground with thick load-distributing panels during the removal. The applicant would temporarily remove the marble and soft stone monuments (where they are loose at their foundations) nearby and shield the gravestones they cannot remove to further protect the site during the tree removal process. The cemetery manager would also be present throughout the tree removals.

It should also be noted that the County’s Urban Forester, Melissa Gildea, looked at both trees and reported the following:

I have looked at both trees. The very large cherry which has partially failed could fail further. It does have root rot and is a heavy low branching tree. The second tree is somewhat likely to fail, or slowly crumble. Immediate failure of the second tree is unlikely, but it does have decay and dead branches. Decay and dead branches are not always a concern. In this case, it is more of a concern because of the ants. I agree with the first tree and for the second, approve if there is a commitment to replacement trees.”

Design Review Committee (DRC) Review

The DRC considered this CoA amendment at its October 2, 2024, hybrid meeting. The applicant shared the reason for their proposal and voiced concerns about how the failing trees could cause damage to the cemetery. Mr. Wenchel asked for the size of the trees; the applicant noted they were 42” and 24” DBH. Ms. Tawney shared that the County’s Urban Forester had looked at the trees and noted that she approved their removal given their failing condition so long as the applicant replaced both trees. Since the DRC did not have any concerns about the tree removals, they placed the item on the Consent Agenda for the October 16, 2024, hybrid HALRB public hearing.

Recommendation

The Historic Preservation Program (HPP) staff recommends approval of the subject application. 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 the *Guidelines for Treatment of Cultural Landscapes* are used to guide design review. Additionally, HPP staff utilize the guidance of the County’s Urban Forester. Since Ms. Gildea felt that the removal of the trees was appropriate, HPP staff also find the removal appropriate. HPP staff also agree with Ms. Gildea’s request that the trees be replaced. This would comply with guidance in the *Guidelines for Treatment of Cultural Landscapes* which notes that “removing deteriorated historic vegetation and not replacing it” is not recommended. Since the applicant



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has noted a commitment to replace the trees and has made an effort to plant trees over the years, HPP staff feel that the loss of the two failing trees will not negatively impact the site. Finally, HPP staff find that the applicant's proposed measures to protect the cemetery and its features during the tree removal process are appropriate and believe that these measures will ensure the protection of the archaeologically sensitive site.