



HISTORICAL AFFAIRS AND LANDMARK REVIEW BOARD  
ARLINGTON COUNTY, VIRGINIA

## CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS STAFF REPORT

**TO:** Historical Affairs and Landmark Review Board (HALRB)  
**FROM:** Mical Tawney, Historic Preservation Associate Planner  
**DATE:** September 9, 2024  
**SUBJECT:** 1961 North Culpeper St., CoA 24-21, Mount Salvation Baptist Cemetery Historic District

### **Background Information**

Mount Salvation Baptist Church Cemetery is one of two church-affiliated, historic African American cemeteries in the Halls Hill/High View Park neighborhood. It has been maintained continuously by the trustees of the affiliated church, Mount Salvation Baptist, since the congregation built its first church building on the property in 1892. The cemetery contains at least 89 burials ranging in dates from 1916 to 1974 (although it is likely burials began shortly after the congregation purchased the property in the late-19<sup>th</sup> century). There are at least 43 burials without grave markers, but it is unknown if any pre-date the 1916 burial. The cemetery was designated as a Local Historic District (LHD) in February 2021 at the request of the Mount Salvation Baptist Church Trustees (Trustees). The only CoA to date was for the installation of a replacement headstone for William and Elise Spriggs. This project was approved by the HALRB in October 2021 (CoA 21-24).

In October 2023, Ms. Tawney, while out completing inspections, noticed the installation of two signs in the cemetery. The signage did not have a CoA. That same month, the Trustees reached out to Ms. Bolliger to discuss the removal of two trees along the back lot line of the property. After completing a site visit with the County's Urban Forester, Ms. Bolliger informed the Trustees that they could remove both trees in question because of the emergency nature of the situation and the potential threat the trees posed. Ms. Bolliger shared that the Trustees would need to obtain a retroactive CoA for both tree removals and for the new signage in the cemetery. The two trees were removed in February 2024.

During the site visit in October 2023, a third tree (the third tree in this application) had also been examined. It was determined it was dying, but that the removal should receive a CoA prior to being removed. In February 2024, Ms. Tawney received a call from the Trustees about this tree. She met the County's Urban Forester on site again to look at the tree in March 2024. Again, it was determined that the tree was dying, but that it would need a CoA before it could be removed. No CoA was submitted. In July 2024, Ms. Tawney received a call from a Trustee expressing serious concerns about the tree. Ms. Tawney asked the County's Urban Forester to look at the tree again. It was determined, that since the tree was dead, it could be removed.

### **Proposal**

The applicant is applying for the retroactive review of three tree removals and the installation of two signs. The two metal signs are attached to metal posts and read “No Dogs on Church Property.” One is situated on the northern side of the cemetery and the other is situated on the southern side. The three trees in question are #31, #15, and #16 in the Mt. Salvation Tree Inventory that was prepared as part of the LHD nomination. Tree #31 was located at the center of the cemetery and trees #15 and #16 were located along the southeastern edge of the property.

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

The Design Review Committee (DRC) reviewed this application at its September 4, 2024, hybrid meeting. They did not have any comments or concerns about the work. The DRC recommended that this application be placed on the Consent Agenda for the September 18, 2024, HALRB hybrid hearing.

### **Recommendation**

The Historic Preservation Program (HPP) staff recommends approval of the application. The *Mt. Salvation Cemetery Design Guidelines* note that the “installation, removal, or modification of signage (including historic markers)” requires a CoA, but it does not specify design parameters for signage. The installed signage is unobtrusive and modest in its design which lends to its blending into the scenery. Furthermore, the signage complies with Standard #10 of *The Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation*:

10. New additions and adjacent or related new construction will 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.

Regarding the trees, the *Mt. Salvation Cemetery Design Guidelines* note that the removal of any tree measuring at least 15 inches in diameter at 4 feet of height requires a CoA. However, “if a tree is an imminent hazard to people and/or property, then it should be removed as soon as possible regardless of whether a CoA has been issued. In these cases, the church trustees should apply for a retroactive CoA after removal...” Since all three of these trees posed a threat to people and/or property, their retroactive review is appropriate per the design guidelines. HPP staff have recommended that these removals leave the stump behind to naturally decay so as not to disturb the cemetery.

In terms of replacement, the *Mt. Salvation Cemetery Design Guidelines* note that it would be ideal for trees to be replaced with similar species; however, due to the proximity of some of the headstones to the removed trees, such trees should not be replaced in the same location. HPP staff further recommend that the Trustees confer with the County’s Urban Forestry team to determine if replacements are appropriate for all the removed trees. HPP staff also strongly suggest that the Trustees create a maintenance plan for the remaining trees in the LHD to ensure their future health.