

HISTORICAL AFFAIRS AND LANDMARK REVIEW BOARD
ARLINGTON COUNTY, VIRGINIA

CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS STAFF REPORT

TO: Historical Affairs and Landmark Review Board (HALRB)
FROM: Lorin Farris, Principal Planner, Historic Preservation
DATE: October 12, 2023
SUBJECT: 4201 N. Fairfax Drive, CoA 21-16, Gravestones and Markers Reinstallation

Background Information

The Robert Ball Sr. Family Burial Ground is located at 4201 Fairfax Drive in the Ballston neighborhood and commercial area. The burial ground is immediately east of the Ballston Central United Methodist Church (CUMC). In 2016, the Ballston Station Housing Corporation (then Bozzuto Development Company and Monticello Partners) proposed redevelopment of the church building for construction of an eight-story residential building that would incorporate a new church, with on-site childcare and a preschool on the first two floors, a mixed income housing component with almost half committed as affordable housing, and below grade parking for residential and church uses. In addition, the applicant proposed to restore, maintain, display, and provide public access to a Tiffany stained glass window that the County received from the demolished Abbey Mausoleum (this window restoration is now nearing completion).

On November 5, 2016, the County Board heard the request to advertise (RTA) public hearings for the local historic district (LHD) designation of the burial ground, voted unanimously to advertise public hearings for the designation, and decided that the designation would be heard concurrently with site plan #443. The applicant committed to preserving the cemetery during testimony at the November 2016 RTA hearing and revised their plans to show a design that carved out approximately 502 square feet to preserve the burial ground. After the November RTA hearing, the proposed site plan #443 and boundaries for the LHD were reviewed by the HALRB at the January 18, 2017, public meeting, and the design guidelines were reviewed at the February 15, 2017, public meeting. In between these meetings, the HALRB sent a letter to the County Board dated February 1, 2017, where the HALRB indicated their support of the LHD designation of the burial ground, along with reservations on the design of the new building and the Tiffany window placement. Overall, while the HALRB would have desired that the design allowed the cemetery to be fully open to the sky, it acknowledged the importance of the creation of the LHD. On February 28, 2017, the County Board approved site plan #443 and the LHD.

On August 18, 2021, the project team presented a plan to the HALRB to remove the existing gravestones and markers and the scope was approved for a Certificate of Appropriateness (CoA 21-16).

Proposal

The applicants, now Arlington Partnership for Affordable Housing (APAH), along with their partners/representatives (KCM Group, DCS Designs, Bean Kinney & Korman) are requesting approval to reinstall the six known gravestones and markers located in the LHD. The applicant has hired Worcester Eisenbrandt Inc. (WEI), a historic building restoration contractor, to reinstall the gravestones and markers. WEI's proposal states that they will follow the photo documentation utilized from the removal of the six known gravestones and markers. One gravestone that had been previously removed and stored within the church also will be reinstalled. The location of said gravestone will need to be determined by the HALRB, as the actual location of the grave is unknown.

In preparation for the stone reinstallation, WEI will utilize GPS coordinates and measurements to establish the locations of the five gravestones and markers. The entirety of each grave marking (head and foot) will be removed from their fabricated plywood crates and reinstalled into their documented location. They will use two to three people to lift the stones from their crates and gently place the stones back to their documented locations.

Design Review Committee (DRC) Review

This CoA was not required to go to the DRC.

Recommendation

The HPP recommends approval of the subject application. In reviewing WEI's professional experience, the firm has specifically provided comprehensive historic building conservation and restoration services since 1987, but has been a specialist in masonry repair, renovation, and restoration since 1926. Approximately 70 percent of their projects have involved architecturally, historically, or culturally significant places, and specifically concerning historic cemeteries, WEI has worked at notable landmarks including Arlington National Cemetery, Alexandria National Cemetery, and Congressional Cemetery.

The work proposal from WEI provided the appropriate care needed to reinstall the six known gravestones and markers. They will not be using heavy machinery or equipment that could cause damage to the stones or the burials. The documentation they are providing, including photographs and labeling of the six gravestones and markers, will ensure that they will be correctly reinstalled. The stone marker that was previously removed and stored within the church is related to the gravestone of Francis E. Dyer, as it contains these initials. Therefore, staff recommends placing the marker approximately three to five feet east of the Francis E. Dyer obelisk.