

Historical Affairs and Landmark Review Board

Arlington County, Virginia



HALRB March 17, 2021, Case 19-27A (HPCA21-00007)

4102 Old Glebe Road: Request for final approval for previously reviewed landscaping changes including replacement of failing retaining wall and addition of a columbarium.

CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS STAFF REPORT

TO: Historical Affairs and Landmark Review Board (HALRB)
FROM: Serena Bolliger, Historic Preservation Planner
DATE: March 9, 2021
SUBJECT: 4102 North Old Glebe Road, 19-27A, Walker Chapel and Cemetery Historic District

Background Information

The Walker Chapel and Cemetery was designated a Local Historic District (LHD) on October 3, 1978. 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.

In December 2019, the Chapel and Cemetery Trustees submitted a Certificate of Appropriateness (CoA) application seeking conditional approval of a conceptual project to provide their board with reassurance that they could begin fundraising. The HALRB granted conditional approval in January 2020 (CoA 19-27).

Proposal

The proposed project consists of four primary actions: 1) removing the existing timber retaining wall; 2) building a new retaining wall that includes columbaria for additional burials; 3) installing a ramp for circulation with lighting along the walkways, benches for seating, and guardrails; and 4) reconfiguring the existing parking lot.

The applicants are asking to replace 210 linear feet of failing timber retaining wall located on the northeastern portion of the property just west of the parking lot. It is estimated that the wall is between 30 to 35 years old. The applicants' landscape architect advised that timber walls typically are only sound for about 20 years and that the existing retaining wall is not capable of supporting the required loads. The applicant estimates that the existing wall began to fail in 2010.

The replacement retaining wall will be in the same location on the property, but of a new design and configuration. The new wall will be primarily stone veneer interspersed with columbaria to provide space for additional burials. The design calls for a limestone sign on the retaining wall facing the parking lot. The Eickhof niche cabinet columbaria will be faced with stone veneer.

The new configuration of the retaining wall will require some grading. The proposed design includes a new ramp with powder coated steel guardrails to provide new circulation between the existing parking lot and the cemetery grounds. New stairs are proposed at the cemetery grounds entry and the entry to the parking lot, each providing access to the new ramp created by the retaining wall design. The path will be paved with a combination of exposed aggregate concrete, brick, and granite with concrete curbs and steel edging. The wall also will incorporate lighting elements to illuminate the pathway at night, as well as custom benches located in the memorial garden. Finally, the existing parking lot will be reconfigured; it currently accommodates 55 cars and this number will be reduced to 50.

A mature cherry tree in the project area will need to be removed as part of this work due to its failing health, not because of its proximity to the retaining wall. The County's Urban Forester evaluated the tree on January 13, 2020, and made the following report:

[The tree] has a considerable amount of deadwood in its crown, and several of the limbs show decay (some of which have already fallen onto the ground below).

The replacement calculations:

28" DBH * 40% condition rating * 55% species rating = 6.16 = 2 replacements needed.

The replacements can be any tree on [the County's] recommended tree list, however, there is plenty of room on this property for large canopy trees (Oaks, ideally. Maples, with their surfacing roots, may pose risk to the headstones).

This project also will require the removal of four (4) cherry trees of 2" diameter at breast height (DBH) and one (1) spruce tree that is 5" DBH. The design calls for planting both red maples and Norway spruces around the new retaining wall.

DRC Review

The DRC heard this case at its December 4, 2019, and January 8, 2020, meetings as part of the conditional CoA review and approval. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the DRC has not reconvened and this case has not been reviewed since the final drawings were submitted. Therefore, this item has been placed on the March 17, 2021, HALRB agenda as a discussion item.

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At the December 2019 DRC meeting, the DRC asked the applicant to further refine the illustrations and photos of the proposed design, provide additional photos showing the view from the historic core of the cemetery and better context photos of the parking lot, and include information on the historic evolution of the cemetery. The DRC recommended that the applicant return to the DRC with construction level documentation of the project.

At the January 2020 DRC meeting, the DRC recommended that this item be placed on the discussion agenda for the January 22, 2020, HALRB hearing. The DRC requested the following modifications to the application materials prior to consideration by the HALRB:

- Details for rails and guardrails;
- Dimensions added to the enlarged drawings on L401;
- Manufacturer specifications/cutsheets for columbaria;
- All trees to be removed annotated on site plan;
- Detailed note on L004 describing anticipated work to parking lot and addition of stormwater management infrastructure/type of BMP;
- Locations for hardscape drainage/grills denoted on pertinent drawings;
- Note for contractor to stop work if archaeological materials are discovered during construction; and
- Specifications/picture of the stone material for the retaining wall laid in desired pattern.

Recommendation

The Historic Preservation Program (HPP) staff recommends approval of the applicants' request to redesign the existing retaining wall and approach to the Walker Chapel Memorial Garden. The applicants have provided the outstanding information requested at the time of the conditional approval in January 2020, including the: 1) titles and design of the limestone sign and panels; 2) design and configuration of the columbaria; 3) details for the lighting along the ramp and wall; and 4) design and details of the proposed BMPs in the parking lot.

Staff recommends that the design is appropriate for the LHD. The proposed work will not be visible from the portion of the cemetery with the oldest burials and it will have a positive impact on the viewshed from a large portion of the cemetery grounds and the chapel. Given the lack of documentation on this LHD (there are no design guidelines and only a brief site history), the HPP staff makes its recommendation based on the assumption that this area of the property already was disturbed when the original church was demolished and the new church constructed. Therefore, this portion of the property has less historical significance than other parts of the property.

Furthermore, the HPP staff recommends the applicants ensure that their contractors monitor for archaeological finds during construction activities and use any such findings to learn more about the evolution of the site.

To conclude, the design meets the intent of Standards #2, #9, and #10 of the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation*:

Standard # 2: The historic character of a property will be retained and preserved. The removal of distinctive materials or alteration of features, spaces, and spatial relationships that characterize a property will be avoided.

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

Standard #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.