

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: August 18, 2021
SUBJECT: 4201 N. Fairfax Drive, CoA 21-16, Gravestones and Markers Removal

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. 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.

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 remove the six known gravestones and markers located in the LHD. The applicant has hired Worcester Eisenbrandt Inc. (WEI), a historic building restoration contractor, to remove and store the gravestones and markers. WEI's proposal states that they will photo document the conditions and locations of the six known gravestones and markers. In preparation of the stone removal, WEI will utilize GPS coordinates

and measurements to document the locations of the six gravestones and markers and perform shallow probes (2' max) on a 6" grid to locate bases/foundations/existing stone fragments. They will also probe areas of anomalies identified in the burial ground to determine if fragments are near the surface. The entirety of each grave marking (head and foot) will be stored in fabricated plywood crates and the stones will be braced using wood and ethafoam to prevent movement during transport. WEI staff will hand dig around each marker, which could be buried up to 24" deep, and include anything salvaged during their probes. They will use two to three people to lift the stones from their location and gently place the stones in pre-made crates, which will then be secured and labeled. The crates will be loaded onto a truck and transported to a remote location and stored outside. Once the markers are removed, WEI will place a protective layer of rigid insulation over the grave area, plywood will be laid on top, and secured together with Simpson Panel Sheathing clips, which will then be secured via 3/8" screws. WEI will install orange snow fencing and no trespassing signage around the perimeter of the burial ground to keep pedestrians from entering the area. WEI will return the stones in their identical locations at a later date.

Design Review Committee Review

The DRC heard this case at its August 4, 2021, virtual meeting. Historic Preservation Program (HPP) requested that the applicant provide more information on WEI's professional qualifications to ensure they have worked on historic sites similar to the burial ground. The DRC recommended that it be placed on the discussion agenda for the August 18, 2021, HALRB hearing.

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 remove 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, probing, labeling, and individual crating of each of the six burials, will ensure nothing is left behind that could be damaged during construction and that the gravestones and markers will be correctly reinstalled in the future. The stones will be protected in a remote location for the duration of construction, which will prevent the potential of losing or damaging any of the stones. Lastly, the stones will be returned to their identical locations.