



**MONTGOMERY COUNTY PLANNING DEPARTMENT**  
THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

August 4, 2009

MEMORANDUM

TO: Historic Preservation Commission

FROM: Clare Lise Kelly  
Research and Designation Coordinator  
Historic Preservation Office

SUBJECT: Public Hearing Draft Amendment to the Master Plan for Historic Preservation: Greenwich Forest; Animal Industry; Higgins Cemetery

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STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Recommend to the Planning Board and County Council that one historic district and two individual sites be designated on the *Master Plan for Historic Preservation*. Recommend to the Planning Board that the resources be added to the *Locational Atlas and Index of Historic Sites* as an interim measure until such time as they are designated.

BACKGROUND

In an ongoing effort to evaluate historic resources in Montgomery County, staff initiates amendments to the *Master Plan for Historic Preservation*. Amendments are generated as part of an area master plan, or as part of an ongoing evaluation of the *Locational Atlas*, or through nominations by the public. The resources in this current Amendment are in the latter category. The Greenwich Forest Historic District was nominated by a citizens association. The two individual resources were nominated by their owners. Under the HPC's approved Executive Regulations, the Historic Preservation Commission must review submitted nominations and forward a recommendation to the Planning Board.

None of the resources under review were previously identified on the *Locational Atlas and Index of Historic Sites*. Placement on the *Locational Atlas* gives the resources interim protection until they are designated on the *Master Plan for Historic Preservation*. That interim protection is the Moratorium on Alteration or Demolition provision of the Preservation Ordinance (Sec 24A-10). The Planning Board has the authority to add resources to the *Locational Atlas*.

Following the HPC evaluation, the Planning Board will hold a public hearing and worksession and transmit their recommendations to the County Council. The County Council makes the final decision on designation of historic sites.

This packet contains nomination materials for each resource: Maryland Historical Trust inventory forms ("research forms"), photographs, and maps. The Public Hearing Draft Amendment (enclosed) contains staff recommendations for criteria, historic district boundaries, and environmental settings. The discussion below highlights differences between nominations and staff recommendations, provides additional historic context, and summarizes issues the HPC may wish to consider.

## DISCUSSION

### **Greenwich Forest Historic District**

On July 8, 2009, the Greenwich Forest Citizen's Association submitted a nomination for a Greenwich Forest Historic District. The GFCA conducted a vote and found that over 70% of residents within the historic core support historic district designation. The research form by Emily Hotaling Eig of EHT Traceries well documents this Depression era residential neighborhood.

Early 20<sup>th</sup> century Montgomery County has not been comprehensively studied. A 1987 preliminary study by Andrea Rebeck hypothesizes that the suburbs of Washington likely contain the largest collection of Depression era communities to be found in the country.<sup>1</sup> Since Rebeck's study, certain communities have been studied including Chevy Chase (M-NCPPC staff 1996-2000; Lampl/Williams 1998), Woodside Park (Oshel 1998), and North Hills of Sligo Creek (Gagne, 2003). We are long overdue for a thorough study of resources from this era.

Research conducted by EHT Traceries in conjunction with the studies cited above reveals certain key characteristics of subdivisions dating from the post-Depression era. These features include natural topography, automobile orientation, and high-quality, revivalist architecture. Greenwich Forest is highly representative of these communities.

#### Natural topography

Suburban subdivisions of this era were increasingly planned with winding streets on natural terrain. A predecessor cited by Emily Eig is W.C. & A. N. Millers' Spring Valley, just over the DC boundary from Montgomery County. In Montgomery County, Woodside Park (1923) and Kenwood (1928) are early examples that followed these suburban ideals. Natural features, including hills, trees, and water features, were retained and promoted. Community names highlighted topography (Rollingwood, Hillandale), water features (Brookdale, Glen Cove), and trees (Greenwich Forest, Woodhaven). Winding streets were arranged in a loose grid pattern, in contrast to earlier subdivisions arranged on a grid plan regardless of topography.

#### Auto orientation

After the Depression, developers began building garages within the body of the house, often at the basement level, built into the hillside. The first three houses in Greenwich Forest, built c1926-29, had detached garages. Subsequent Greenwich Forest houses, built from 1933 on, had integral garages. While earlier suburban subdivisions featured sidewalks for pedestrians who walked between their houses and railroad and trolley stations, subdivisions from this era had no sidewalks since residents got to and from their houses in their cars.

#### Architecture

Houses were well designed, using Tudor Revival and Colonial Revival styles, and high-quality natural materials of stone, brick and timber. The quality of Greenwich Forest design was insured through company architects and design review. The architecture has a cohesive whole yet is not cookie-cutter in execution. Each house is designed to be distinctive not formulaic.

Greenwich Forest characterizes the best that post-Depression suburbs had to offer, yet the community is now becoming a rarity. In 2006, staff conducted a study of the phenomenon of mansionization and teardowns. The study included a survey of early 20<sup>th</sup> century neighborhoods and resulted in intensive

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<sup>1</sup> Andrea Rebeck, *Montgomery County in the Early Twentieth Century: A Study of Historical and Architectural Themes*, December 1987.

study of one area (Brookdale), and the publication of the Teardown/Mansionization Bulletin. A map of teardown locations in 2006 shows the concentration of this phenomenon in the Bethesda/North Bethesda area. The survey revealed that the historic character of many neighborhoods has been irretrievably lost.<sup>2</sup> What sets Greenwich Forest apart from many of the other early subdivisions is its high level of integrity of its streetscape and its architecture.

Staff supports designation of a Greenwich Forest Historic District with the criteria cited in the nomination and included in the Draft Amendment. The Amendment reflects staff recommended boundaries, period of significance, and a database inventory of included resources. Staff recommends adding information in the database about architectural or historical significance for specific buildings. Finally, additional research on Greenwich Forest may reveal further historical context and connections with other county communities.<sup>3</sup>

Boundaries

The primary considerations for defining boundaries are the development plats, period of significance, architectural character, and integrity. There were two plats filed for the area under consideration.



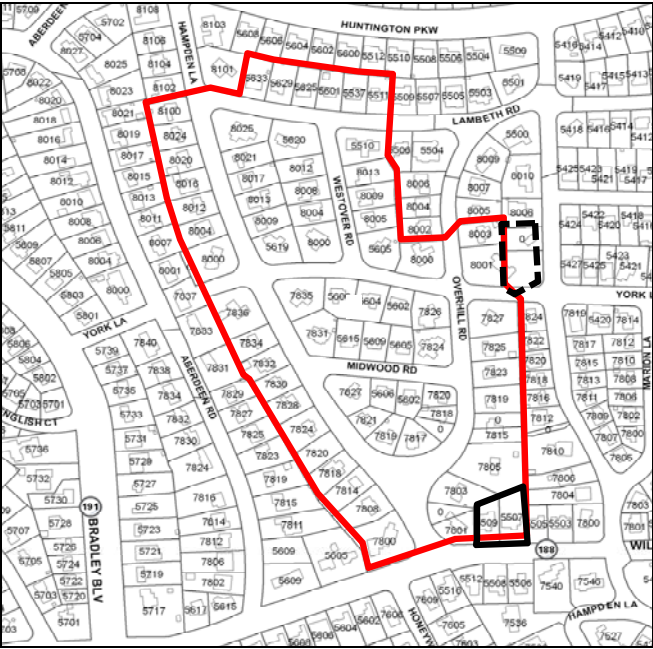
The period of significance for the proposed Greenwich Forest Historic District is 1926-1949. Resources in the northeast quadrant are not included in the district since they date from the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Houses on Lambeth and Hampden date from the early 1950s. Not only are they outside the period of significance,

<sup>2</sup>The bulletin is found at [www.MontgomeryPlanning.org/historic](http://www.MontgomeryPlanning.org/historic)  
<sup>3</sup>Harry Edwards for example is known to have designed houses in North Hills of Sligo Park (Gagne, 92), and Eugene Smith's Ardnave Development Corp. was also developing Silver Spring property (Eig, Greenwich Forest, 8-8).

they also belong to a modernist architectural vocabulary, being horizontal ranch houses or minimal traditional designs. The staff-recommended historic district boundaries shown in the draft amendment differ from nominated boundaries in adding two lots on Wilson Lane and deleting two lots on Moorland Lane. The nominated historic district contains 71 primary houses, including 10 non-contributing resources<sup>4</sup>. The staff recommended boundaries include 71 primary houses, which includes 9 non-contributing resources.

Wilson Lane

The first plat for Greenwich Forest (“1” previous page) included two lots facing Wilson Lane, now premise #s 5507 and 5509. According to the research form, these houses were not considered because they are outside the civic association boundaries. 5507 Wilson Lane is a stone-faced, Tudor Revival house constructed c1933. Though its neighbor, 5509, was built in 2005, the building is compatible with the architecture of the district and sits between two contributing buildings. Staff recommends both Wilson Lane houses be included in the historic district.



Moorland Lane (8001 Overhill Road)

The eastern boundary for the second plat (“2”) one block facing Moorland Lane, between York Lane and Lambeth Road. Only two lots are within the nominated historic district boundary. These two lots were historically associated with 8001 Overhill Road, a 1939 house demolished in June 2009. (The remaining Moorland Lane lots were not developed until 1956 and later.) The three lots associated with 8001 Overhill were once under common ownership but are now in the process of being sold and new houses are being planned for all three lots. Staff recommends retaining the corner lot at Overhill and York but not including the Moorland Lane lots that face away from the proposed historic district. Staff will be meeting with the owner and architect for 8001 Overhill Road proposed house and will be prepared to report to the HPC on the nature of the plans.

<sup>4</sup> These figures assume construction of houses on three buildable lots at site of former 8001 Overhill Road (at Overhill, York, and Moorland) that are currently in the design-build process.

### **Bureau of Animal Industry Building**

Located in the Norwood Local Park, this building, known as the Norwood Recreation Building, has been used as a recreation center for the Parks Department since 1937. The Park Planning and Stewardship Division completed the MIHP research form and nominated the resource for historic designation. The Parks Department plans for the resource include a two-part study for best usage determination and rehabilitation strategy.

Federal agencies established facilities in Montgomery County beginning in the late 1800s. From the research that has been done to date, the Bureau of Animal Industry building is one of the earliest extant resources of this type, beginning with the 1897 lease of the site with the building constructed in 1909. To date, the Bethesda Naval Hospital Tower (1939) is the only Federal facility to be designated on the Master Plan for Historic Preservation. The David Taylor Model Basin (1937) is listed on the National Register. More research is needed to evaluate additional potentially significant Federal facilities.<sup>5</sup>

The period of significance for the resource is 1906-1936. The nomination documents the national significance and architecture of the Bureau of Animal Industry building. The nomination does not address the history of the site after 1936 when it became a park resource. There are two park-related buildings on site that were apparently built by 1951. Staff recommends the park buildings in the Norwood Local Park be evaluated in the future as part of a comprehensive review of park buildings in the context of the history of the Parks Department.

Staff finds the resource is eligible for designation under the criteria designated in the research form. The recommended environmental setting is included in the Amendment and contains approximately 1.65 acres. The setting includes the historic drive which runs north of the historic building (shown on 1931 map, page 8-8 of research form). The setting also includes frontage on Stratford Street. The setting does not include such park facilities as playgrounds located both north of the historic drive and west of the historic building.

### **Higgins Family Cemetery**

This resource has been previously evaluated by the Historic Preservation Commission and has been brought back as a procedural technicality. The resource was nominated for designation by the Higgins Cemetery Historic Preservation Association and was included in the Twinbrook Sector Plan. The Historic Preservation Commission evaluated this resource on May 25, 2005 and voted unanimously in favor of designation. Unfortunately, the language in the sector plan did not state the area master plan was also an amendment to the Master Plan for Historic Preservation. In order to have the County Council officially designate the cemetery, it is included in this current Amendment.

The research and nomination of the Higgins Cemetery has been a community effort. Twinbrook resident Mary Ann Barnes was instrumental in initial research and public outreach. In 1997 Peerless Rockville organized the documentation of the cemetery, and the Higgins Cemetery Historic Preservation, Inc was incorporated. In 1998, the HCHPA engaged the services of archeologist James Sorensen to investigate the cemetery. The HPC, in 2001, awarded a grant to the HCHPA to develop a master plan for the cemetery.

The cemetery has historical significance for its association with Revolutionary War soldier James Higgins, and for its Higgins-Knowles family connection with the early history of the Town of Kensington. The recommended environmental setting is the entire Lot Part 7, in Block 6, being 14, 400 square feet.

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<sup>5</sup>The Gaithersburg Observatory was constructed in 1899 by the agency that is now NOAA. It is within the municipal boundaries of the City of Gaithersburg. The George Freeland Peter estate on the campus of NIH is a designated historic site, but it is for its connection with the Peter family, and not as a federal facility.

## CONCLUSION

Staff recommends one historic district and two individual sites for designation on the Master Plan for Historic Preservation. Staff also recommends these resources be placed on the Locational Atlas and Index of Historic Sites as an interim measure until they are designated.

### Attachments:

- Correspondence received
- Amendment to the Master Plan for Historic Preservation
- Greenwich Forest HD MIHP form
- Animal Industry MIHP form
- Higgins Cemetery MIHP form

CORRESPONDENCE RECEIVED

Esko and Jane Korhonen  
7836 Hampden Lane  
Bethesda, Maryland, 20814

July 31, 2009

*Via Email and Mail Delivery*

David Rotenstein, Chair  
Historic Preservation Commission  
c/o Clare Lise Kelly  
Historic Preservation Office  
1109 Spring Street, Suite 801  
Mail: 8787 Georgia Avenue  
Silver Spring, Maryland 20910  
Email:clare.kelly@mncppe-mc.org

Re: Application of Greenwich Forest as a Historic District- Opposition

Dear Mr. Rotenstein:

As homeowners in the Greenwich Forest area of Bethesda, we urge the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) to deny the application submitted by the Greenwich Forest Citizen's Association (GFCA) for the classification of our neighborhood, consisting of a typical variety and age of suburban homes identical to numerous downcounty neighborhoods, as a historic district. Although the GFCA did not fully circulate the application materials to all of the approximately 68 affected homeowners (of which we understand only 36 supported the designation), we did receive the July 10<sup>th</sup> hearing notice from the HPC. The letter from the GFCA states there are 90 homes in the Greenwich Forest subdivision, while only 68 homes are included in the application. We are **NOT** in favor of an Historic Designation for Greenwich Forest or our home and we do not understand the random exclusion of the other homes in the subdivision, which were built relatively contemporaneously. This is further evidence, in our opinion, of the capricious nature of the application and that these homes are not deserving of a

Historic Designation. Rather this whole action relates to a few homeowners who wish to use the Historic Designation to control renovations and for purposes of architectural controls.

We will be out of town on August 12<sup>th</sup> as many neighbors are at this time of year, but as residents that have lived in our home for over 17 years, we wanted to use this opportunity to present our position in writing to oppose the application that adversely impacts our property.

We appreciate the time and sincere efforts of the HPC staff with respect to this application; however, the GFCA has acknowledged that this application is simply part of the “strategy to deal with teardowns and mansionization” after other efforts failed. This transparent use and abuse of the Historic Preservation process and resources as a strategy to add more regulations, process and expense to any home improvements is a disservice to the homes and districts that truly have historic integrity and satisfy the historic criteria. The character, development, construction, time period, and layout of the Greenwich Forest subdivision is consistent with numerous neighborhoods in the Montgomery County suburbs, and does not reflect any unique or distinguishing cultural character in style or construction. Further, the developer and the various architects of the numerous home styles throughout the Greenwich Forest subdivision are not masters nor historical or influential persons that merit historic designation. In addition, the description of the significant variety in the styles (and sizes) of homes constructed from 1930 through 2007 in the area demonstrates that there is not one artistic value represented or that the neighborhood represents a “distinguishable entity”. As an example, my Cape Cod style home is grouped with the “Colonial Revival” label in the application; however, the application describes

the numerous categories and varieties (and renovations) to these “Colonial Revival” homes, which could be describing any neighborhood in our area.

In summary, the application submitted by the GFCA was premised on efforts of a few to stop the recent lawful demolition of a particular home (which contradicts the position in the application, since the previous structure was sited on an original lot line of the lauded subdivision) and to provide “protection against tear downs”. The GFCA application is an elaborate and thoughtfully detailed neighborhood description, but it could be a description of the development, time period, character and variety of homes of any neighborhood in the Bethesda area. The Greenwich Forest area does not satisfy the historic criteria in Historic Preservation regulations and thus does not qualify as a “historic district”. Designation of this typical neighborhood as historic would be an arbitrary and capricious decision, and would lessen the value and integrity of genuine historic districts in our County and the work of the Historic Preservation Commission.

As the owners of one of the homes affected, we urge the Historic Preservation Commission to deny this application to designate our typical neighborhood as historic and preserve the integrity of your work for truly historic, significant and valuable resources. Thank you for your consideration of our comments.

-----Original Message-----

From: Walt Wood [mailto:walt@wrwood.com]

Sent: Tuesday, August 04, 2009 8:47 AM

To: Whipple, Scott

Cc: jjessen@voa.com; Beverly Glover-Wood

Subject: Favor Historic District Designation of Greenwich Forest

Dear Mr. Whipple,

My wife and I favor designating Greenwich Forest in Bethesda a Historic District. The affect on property values is unclear, so that argument against the designation is merely fear mongering. And the added trouble to apply when one wants to make physical changes to the house is well worth the preservation of our beautiful and historic neighborhood.

I cannot come to your meeting on August 12. I will be out of town. But I wanted you to hear a supporting word.

Thank you for your work,

Walt

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Walt Wood

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