

STAFF REPORT

TO: HALRB

FROM: Rebecca Ballo, Historic Preservation Planner

DATE: January 20, 2015

SUBJECT: Redevelopment of George Washington Carver Cooperative Homes, Columbia Pike Form Based Code Project

The subject Use Permit application is for the demolition and redevelopment of the George Washington Carver Cooperative Homes garden apartment complex. The property is located within the Columbia Pike Neighborhood Form Based Code area, and is bounded by South Rolfe Street, 13th Road South, and South Queen Street. This is a unique property, once considered for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, and currently listed as Important in the County's Historic Resources Inventory. The applicant is requesting to demolish the apartment complex and will construct fifty, 4-story townhomes in its place. As required under the County's adopted Historic Resources Inventory Policy regarding Important structures, the HALRB may comment on this proposed redevelopment prior to the hearing at the County Board.

Historical Background

The following information is taken from the National Register Nomination for the Carver Homes Complex, as prepared by EHT Tracerics for Arlington County in 2003. The link to the full nomination is available on the HALRB meeting page as a separate document. Footnotes from the original text have been deleted for brevity.

Development of Carber Homes and the War

The George Washington Carver Cooperative Apartments, built in 1945, are the most recent incarnation of the housing provided by the federal government for Arlington County's African Americans since the founding of the Freedman's Village in 1863. With the government's dissolution of the village in the late 1890s, its occupants dispersed throughout the county, settling in nearby neighborhoods such as East Arlington, Queen City, and Johnson's Hill, now known as Arlington View. In 1941-1942, the neighborhoods of East Arlington and Queen City disappeared under the Pentagon, the Navy Annex, and the tangle of roadways in the area, dislocating Arlington County's African Americans once again. The federal government built the Carver Apartments for the residents displaced from these neighborhoods. Prominent African American architect Albert I. Cassell designed the garden apartments, an architectural type dominant in mid-twentieth-century Arlington County and throughout the United States. At the time, Cassell was in the midst of another high-profile African American garden apartment project in Washington, D.C., the Mayfair Mansions Apartments. The Carver Apartments have been a wholly African American owned and occupied cooperative since the residents bought the complex from the federal government in 1949.

Hundreds of people, mostly African American, were shifted from their homes by the construction of the Pentagon. Many of these residents were re-settled in the Arlington View and Green Valley

neighborhoods, initially in trailers, and later in apartment complexes such as the Carver Apartments. The eight multiple dwellings that make up the Carver Apartments were built in Arlington View in 1944-1945 by the federal government for the African American residents who had been displaced at least two years earlier. The Dunbar Apartments were built simultaneously by the federal government in the Green Valley neighborhood for the displaced residents. During the late 1930s, and particularly the war years of the forties, new construction in Arlington County was almost entirely devoted to the construction of duplexes and multiple-family dwelling—including Colonial Village, Fairlington, Buckingham, Fillmore Gardens, Dunbar Apartments, and Carver Apartments—with the garden apartment the dominant type.

In 1949, the federal government first offered to sell the housing to Arlington County, and then, when the county declined the offer, to the tenants. After struggling to find a loan to buy the property, the tenants found a lender in the James W. Rouse Company, which issued a Federal Housing Administration (FHA) loan in the amount of \$123,000 for the purchase of the apartments. The cooperative formed by the tenants paid off that loan in 1974.¹ Many of the original residents of the complex, including those moved from their homes in East Arlington and Queen City in 1940-1941, still live at the Carver Apartments. The Carver Apartments was, and remains, a working-class African American complex.

Buildings

The eight multiple dwellings that make up the Carver Apartments are rectangular structures containing between four and six residences. The dwellings are two stories, and each entry corresponds to one residence. The entries at the ends of the buildings are paired. The majority of these buildings are situated so that they form a courtyard with the adjacent buildings. The buildings located at 1300-1310 South Rolfe Street, 1312-1322 South Rolfe Street, and 1324-1334 South Rolfe Street form a U-shaped enclosure for a courtyard. The buildings located at 1344-1354 South Rolfe Street and at 1356-1362 South Rolfe Street form an L-shaped enclosure for a courtyard. The remaining three multiple dwellings – 1725-1735 13th Road South, 1707-1717 13th Road South, and 1324-1330 South Queen Street – front directly on the street. The administration building is located on the edge of the asphalt parking lot, behind the apartment buildings.

Stylistically, the Carver Apartments loosely interpret the tenets of Modernism. They make use of mass-produced materials (i.e., ones that were affordable and readily available): cinder blocks, sash windows, and brick. There is no applied exterior decoration and, prior to the application of Perma-Stone® in 1956, the structural materials were clearly expressed. The primary departure from Modern influences are the side-gabled roofs, which gives the buildings a more familiar and traditional form. Modernist beliefs were not, however, the only inspiration for the design of the Carver Apartments. They also incorporate the ideas regarding form and setting diffused by the Garden City movement. The complex is designed as a superblock, there is a clear separation of pedestrians and automobiles, and the majority of the buildings are grouped around courtyards.

The exterior cladding of the Carver Apartments consists of Perma-Stone® on the first story, and pink-colored stucco on the second story. Above each entry is an asymmetrical ornamental block of Perma-Stone® in the midst of the stucco, as if it had been stuccoed over, and then uncovered. At the corners, Perma-Stone® is used to form rough quoins in the second story. The buildings are capped by side-gabled roofs sheathed in asphalt shingles, and have overhanging eaves. The façade fenestration is symmetrical, and comprised of 1/1 vinyl sash windows, the majority of which are

paired. The number of windows on the façade varies with the number of dwellings in the building. In the six-unit buildings, there are six sets of paired windows and one single window on both the first and second stories. The four-unit buildings have four sets of paired windows on both first and second floors. The side elevations are devoid of fenestration. There are four stretcher-bond brick chimneys – two exterior end and two interior – on the six-unit buildings, while there are only three on the four-unit buildings. Projecting brick surrounds mark the entries, which are sheltered by metal canopies. The canopies at the paired end entries are two bays wide, while the others are a single bay each. At each entry, there is a low poured concrete stoop.

The one-story administration building is clad in the same manner as the dwellings, with Perma-Stone® on the first story, and pink stucco in the gable ends. It is a rectangular building, capped by a front-gabled roof. The peak of the roof is not centered on the building, so the pitch is steeper on the north end of the building than it is on the south end. There are two entries, and one window in this structure. The two entries are side-by-side, although not so close that they appear paired. One entry has a paneled wood door, and the other entry has a metal storm door with a single large plate-glass light. The window has a 1/1 vinyl sash, and has a window-unit air conditioner in the lower half. The northernmost entry has a poured concrete ramp, while the southernmost one has a poured concrete stoop. The most distinctive feature of this structure is the oversized corbeled five-course American bond brick chimney on the rear.

Policy Background

The complex has been deemed eligible for the National Register under Criteria A and Criteria C as part of the Garden Apartments, Apartment Houses and Apartment Complexes in Arlington County, Virginia: 1934-1954 Multiple Property Document. The complex is considered significant for its association with the County's African American History, as well as its innovative use of materials and design as a garden apartment complex constructed for African Americans displaced by construction of the Pentagon during World War II. For these reasons, and for the overall architectural integrity of the complex, Carver Homes was listed as an Important Property in Arlington's Historic Resources Inventory in October 2011.

The Columbia Pike Form Based Codes for Neighborhoods, adopted by the County Board in 2013, has designated the Carver Homes as an area for redevelopment. At the time of the Neighborhood Plan's adoption and throughout the planning process, the HALRB advocated that Carver Homes be set aside as a Conservation Area; however, that recommendation was not adopted as part of the final plan.

The Historic Resources Inventory does state that for properties listed as Important, and for all historic properties, there are certain policy goals and objectives that the County should strive to meet. Recognizing that preservation of the complex is not being promoted by the Form Based Code, the following HRI goals are applicable for the Carver Homes:

GOAL 3: INCORPORATE SUSTAINABLE DESIGN PRINCIPLES IN THE RENOVATION OF ALL EXISTING HISTORIC BUILDINGS AND IN NEW CONSTRUCTION.

- The County will encourage the salvage of usable building materials and architectural or stylistic elements/details.

- The County will promote new architectural design that respects the prominent historic architecture of the immediate neighborhood in terms of massing, materials, and architectural style.
- The County will promote that historic buildings and materials be replaced with those that are compatible with neighborhood character.

GOAL 5: PROMOTE THE PRESERVATION OF THE IMPORTANT HISTORIC BUILDINGS IN THE HRI.

- The County will strive to protect and promote the reuse of those properties listed as Important.
- The County will collaborate with owners of Important properties to preserve the buildings' historical and material integrity to the maximum extent possible.
- The County will require that new development proposals affecting Important properties be reviewed by the Historical Affairs and Landmark Review Board (HALRB).

GOAL 7: CONTRIBUTE TO THE LASTING HISTORIC RECORD OF THE COUNTY BY DOCUMENTING HISTORIC RESOURCES LISTED IN THE HRI.

- The County will require, through site plan and use permit conditions and coordination with Historic Preservation Program staff, the formal recordation of historic resources ranked as Essential and Important in the HRI prior to any proposed demolition.
- The County will require that Important buildings proposed to be demolished in whole or in part through the site plan or use permit process will be documented by HABS-level photographs.
- The Historic Preservation Program office will maintain copies (both hard copy and electronic formats) of all historic documentation materials pertaining to HRI properties.

Discussion

Historic Preservation staff have recommended a series of conditions for this use permit that are similar to those required in site plans where Important historic resources, or other properties listed in the National Register, are being demolished. The conditions cover basic archaeology in the event artifacts are found during demolition and construction, recordation of the Carver Homes with HABS standard photographs and drawings, salvage and donation or reuse of building materials, and the creation of two new historic markers to be installed on site. Staff recommends one marker be dedicated to the architect, Albert Cassell, while the second should tell the story of the people at Carver and the lineage of this wholly unique Arlington community. In addition, staff has asked the applicant to facilitate contact between residents and owners at Carver Homes and the Libraries staff for the purpose of conducting an oral history project.