



DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY PLANNING, HOUSING AND DEVELOPMENT

Neighborhood Services Division

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DRAFT

MINUTES OF THE HISTORICAL AFFAIRS AND LANDMARK REVIEW BOARD

Wednesday, September 30, 2015
2100 Clarendon Boulevard
County Board Room 307

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Joan Lawrence, Chairman
Charles Craig
Craig Deering
Robert Dudka
Greg Holcomb
Gerry Laporte
Mark Turnbull
Kevin Vincent
Andrew Wenchel

MEMBERS EXCUSED:

Charles Matta, Vice Chairman
Tova Solo
Richard Woodruff

STAFF:

Cynthia Liccese-Torres, Program Coordinator
John Liebertz, Preservation Planner
Rebecca Ballo, Preservation Planner

ROLL CALL & CALL TO ORDER

The Chairman called the meeting to order at 7:35 pm. Mr. Liebertz called the roll and determined there was a quorum.

The Chairman noted that there were two discussion items on the agenda: the proposed Stratford School Local Historic District and the Carver Homes Historic Markers.

DISCUSSION ITEM #1: STRATFORD SCHOOL LOCAL HISTORIC DISTRICT

The Chairman reviewed the public hearing procedures. She asked the Historic Preservation staff to make their presentation. Ms. Ballo stated that the historic context and architectural description detailed at the June HALRB hearing would not be repeated. Instead, staff shared newly acquired historic photographs and technical updates to the report. She noted that the proposed historic district overlay has remained the same.

Ms. Ballo provided a brief recap that the property meets eight of the eleven historic district designation criteria as outlined in the Arlington County Zoning Ordinance (ACZO). She then shared a PowerPoint that featured historic photographs of the four students integrating the school on February 2, 1959. Other images were of the Arlington County Police on-hand for the integration. In addition, she noted that APS and Historic Preservation staff are actively collaborating on the draft Historic District Design Guidelines document, but they are not yet ready for HALRB review at this time. The revised document will be completed by mid-October. The current working draft differs from the previous iteration in that it contains new categories for procedures and review authority. She then provided a review of actions taken on the designation request to date.

Ms. Ballo stated that the HALRB will need to determine whether to move forward with the designation process as outlined in the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with APS or the ACZO. She noted that there is no legal requirement for the HALRB to follow the MoU.

Ms. Ballo added that the Historic Preservation staff's recommendation remains unchanged. The property meets eight of the eleven designation criteria outlined in the ACZO and has sufficient merit to be considered for local historic district designation.

The Chairman noted that the HALRB has no intention or desire to impede the school planning process. She stated that the BLPC/PFRC planning processes are distinct from the Local Historic District Designation process. The HALRB intended to proceed in good faith with the MoU process. The School Board, however, heard the local historic district designation as an informational item [in August] and has yet to take action. Tonight's HALRB hearing provides an additional opportunity for members of the public to speak.

In his remarks, John Chadwick, APS staff, stated that the HALRB has decided to move forward with its authority under the ACZO and not the MoU. He said the Stratford [design] project has been delayed (along with the Wilson School project). APS has faced serious challenges with the budget, as estimates have exceeded the amount approved by the School Board to the extent that APS staff had to reconsider how to proceed. He noted that the process takes time and that the HALRB Chairman has been invited to an upcoming briefing regarding the various options/strategies to realize both projects. The School Board is occupied with these two items and contends that it will not be beneficial to hear the local historic district designation at this time. They do not want to rush such an important matter. There will be additional information available after a School Board work session on Tuesday, October 6, 2015.

The Chairman asked staff to call the public speakers. Mr. Liebertz announced there were seven public speakers.

The first public speaker was Joan McDermott. Ms. McDermott, a retired school teacher, reviewed the social and cultural history of the property. She argued that the Stratford School is the most important 20th century site in Arlington County. She added that it is already listed in the Virginia Landmarks Register and the National Register of Historic Places. She stated that there is no reason not to locally designate the property. Ms. McDermott noted that the property has architectural value as well and asked the School Board to support historic district designation now. She emphasized that only design options that preserve and highlight the desegregation of Stratford should be considered. She contended that this option will not cost more. She believed that preserving Arlington County history within a school would be a top priority.

The second speaker was Thomas Jensen, representing Jamestown Elementary PTA. Mr. Jensen stated that there is a division on the design options of the addition, but no one has denied that Stratford is of

extraordinary importance. The school provides a marvelous opportunity to teach, learn, and to share. There would be an unfortunate irony, however, if the designation resulted in a delay or compromised the functional attributes of the future facility for the following generations of students. He asked the HALRB to approach this subject in fulfillment of their mandate, but with acute sensitivity to the current school issues.

The third speaker was Linda Simmons, representing the Black Heritage Museum of Arlington (BHMA). She noted that she was speaking on behalf of Craig Syphax, President of the BHMA. He authored a statement in support of the designation, which Ms. Simmons read. The statement noted that: the Stratford School has national, state, and local historic significance; many of the remaining African American sites [in the County] have been lost or are in danger; and asked that the Arlington County Board immediately recognize Stratford School as a local historic district.

The fourth speaker was Sandra Green. Ms. Green stated that she was one of the signees of the request to designate Stratford as a local historic district. She added that this is the second time she has addressed the HALRB. At the first meeting, she read a letter of support on behalf of Calloway Methodist Church. Since that time, she participated in many meetings on the subject (BLPC, School Board, HALRB, etc.) and emphasized that she is tired of meetings. She added that she is appalled that Stratford has not yet been approved for local historic district designation. She believes that the decision to recommend designation is being held hostage by the design process, but contended that these are two distinct issues. The historic district designation is important enough to stand on its own merits. She added that she does not want the design guidelines to negatively impinge on the planning process.

The fifth speaker was Doug Taylor. Mr. Taylor noted he is on the BLPC and is a Woodmont resident, but was speaking tonight on his own behalf. Mr. Taylor stated that we should honor the history of the site, but questioned how that should be accomplished. He suggested that one of the primary concerns of HALRB is maintaining the view sheds from the athletic fields. He contended that this view shed [of southeast facade] failed to speak to him in any meaningful way when considering the day of integration. Architecturally, he understands the value of this elevation, but the integration history is more important. The building aspects that resonate with him, however, are the physical doorways the students utilized to enter the building. Crossing the threshold from the exterior to the interior of the building had a deeper impact in his opinion. Prior to joining the BLPC, Mr. Taylor noted that he had no knowledge of the historic events that transpired at the site. He then questioned the HALRB's preference of the terrace plan that would block this historically important entrance. He asked the HALRB to be flexible in their interpretation of the Secretary of the Interior's Guidelines for Rehabilitation and to place additional focus on the aspects of the building critical to telling the history of desegregation.

The sixth public speaker was Eric Dobson, representing Preservation Arlington. Mr. Dobson noted his background in urban planning and historic preservation. He agreed with Ms. Green that there have been too many meetings for this project and stated that his colleagues throughout the country are incredulous that there is a lengthy and contentious hearing process for designating the Stratford School. He added that it is embarrassing how little of the site's history is known and this is why Arlington County needs to tell the story of this important school and why it should be designated now. Regarding the design process, he stated that schools should consider an addition to the west of the building in order to preserve the view sheds of the rear elevation to the greatest extent possible.

The final public speaker was Michael Jones. Mr. Jones stated that he was one of the four students who integrated Stratford School on February 2, 1959. He added that he is appearing on behalf of the other three students and supports the proposed local historic district designation. He stated that the integration was

an important event in his life and his fellow students. Personally, the difference in attending Stratford School was apparent. Mr. Jones explained how his brother graduated from Hoffman-Boston, the segregated African-American high school [in the County], a few years before he integrated Stratford. In his opinion, his brother did not receive the same opportunities in life. Mr. Jones stated that his graduation from an integrated junior high school and high school allowed him to be admitted to Fordham University and gain employment with the Central Intelligence Agency. He reinforced that the integration of Arlington County was not only a local, state, and national event, but covered internationally in the press. This event showed how the United States was changing.

The Chairman opened the matter for board discussion and asked for comments. Mr. Turnbull recognized the School Board's financial and planning concerns and listed other issues occurring County-wide. He is, however, concerned about the delay of designating Stratford School as a local historic district. He discussed the school's social history and its architectural value. He reminded everyone that the County has lost a great number of African American resources. Regarding the design process, he added that the HALRB does not overwhelmingly favor the terrace option, but it is one of the better options presented to date. He favored any option that preserves the building to the greatest degree. He expressed hope that this process can move forward.

Mr. Vincent stated that the purpose of local historic designation is to preserve a property and ensure that future alterations to the building receive proper consideration and input from learned professionals (like on the HALRB). Historic designation does not lock in place all of the features of a building nor does it prevent modifications. The HALRB approves modifications to its historic districts every month. The HALRB will work with property owners to retain the building's historic value and achieve a program that respects the historic property. He added that designation of the school is overdue and should be done as soon as possible. The HALRB is not rushing the design process forward. In response to Mr. Taylor's comments, he stated that several HALRB members believe that no acceptable options have been presented to date. He argued that historic district designation should not be contingent on an approved final design and that the designation process should move forward independently. He noted that the HALRB will not be able to move forward this evening due to advertising reasons, but the HALRB will take action at the next possible date. He added that APS should engage the HALRB and the preservation community in the best way to preserve this nationally important monument. The four children who integrated were fearless individuals who need to be recognized. We can achieve a viable school now and honor those four students from 1959. He suggested that the School Board should honor their own contributions to the end of Massive Resistance.

The Chairman read three letters from the absent HALRB members for the record. Mr. Matta, Mr. Woodruff, and Ms. Solo pledged their full endorsement for local historic district designation.

Mr. Deering thanked Mr. Jones for sharing his personal experiences. He considers his own children's experiences with the importance of places in their lives. He agreed with Mr. Taylor that the door is a critical element of the building, but also included the pathways that allowed students to look down them and go forward. He suggested that the entire series of events needs to be preserved. He stated there should be no barrier to designating the school as the design is a separate, independent issue.

Mr. Laporte respected the School Board's request for a delay in this vote. The local historic district designation, however, is important enough on its own merit. He wished the board had considered the item a number of years ago. There is no legitimate reason not to send the item onto the County Board for its consideration.

Mr. Dudka noted that historic preservation should not be contingent on other factors. There have been no comments that this building is not worthy of historic designation. The building may be the most important building within the entire County. The building should be designated and then other items be considered as they arise.

The Chairman summarized the responsibility of the HALRB as outlined in the ACZO. She noted that Stratford School is an important and visible reminder of the cultural heritage of Arlington, Virginia, and the United States, and even achieved international recognition during the desegregation events. When we lose our visual connections to historic places, we lose a sense of our history. She used Ford's Theater, Washington, D.C., as an example of successfully retaining the visual history of a site that has been remodeled and renovated yet retains its visual history. The same can be done here and the HALRB believes that Stratford School can be preserved to retain its visual historic significance, and also be expanded to provide increased capacity and meet other school needs. Ms. Lawrence continued, thanking all of the speakers, the HP staff, and the HALRB members for their comments. She hopes the passion of the speakers also can be felt by the School Board and the County Board. In Arlington County, residents value dialogue. In order to allow for additional opportunity for thoughtful consideration on this matter and to complete the Design Guidelines, the Chairman moved to defer voting on the creation of a Stratford Local Historic District until a time in October. Mr. Holcomb seconded the motion and it passed 8-1. Mr. Deering opposed the motion.

The Chairman concluded the discussion by stating that she will continue her conversations about the designation with the School Board Chairman. She believes that all of the goals for the site can be achieved and she looks forward to working with APS staff and the School Board. It is possible to preserve the visual space of a building and put yourself in it and respect that space. In the case of Stratford, this can be done effectively and still expand some school capacity.

DISCUSSION ITEM #2: GEORGE WASHINGTON CARVER HOMES HISTORIC MARKERS

Ms. Ballo presented on behalf of the applicants since they had not yet arrived. She explained the applicant is proposing to decrease the size of the cast aluminum marker from 24"x36" to 18"x24" due to its location and appearance. The applicant also proposed an 11"x17" version of the marker. Historic Preservation staff decided that such a change should return to the HALRB for comments regarding the size and placement of the marker. The HP staff had concerns about its placement on the lip of the fountain. She reminded the board that the table top marker will be located in the pocket park. Only those changes proposed for the upright marker will be discussed tonight.

Mr. Craig stated that the current placement of the marker made the fountain appear as a memorial. He suggested that the marker be removed from the fountain and placed on a pole.

Mr. Vincent commented that the text is still outdated in regards to the HALRB's previous recommendations and approval last month. He requested that the sentence about the Carver Homes be moved to the beginning of the text, to be followed by biographical information about Cassell.

The representatives for the applicant arrived with poster boards depicting the sizes of the proposed markers. The Chairman stated that the amount of text on the marker dictates one of the larger sizes. She asked for alternative locations to place the marker. She echoed Mr. Craig's concerns that the placement of the marker made the fountain appear as a memorial.

Mr. Deering asked staff if there are any accessibility requirements for the design of the markers. Ms. Ballo stated that there are no accessibility requirements for historic markers. Mr. Deering commented that other states require historic markers to be accessible. The previously approved site is far too low to read and he questions the density and readability of the proposed 3/8" font (25% reduction in text size) on the 18"x24" marker. He noted that the center-height of the marker should be determined by the sign manufacturer to make it accessible for individuals of low vision.

After a brief discussion, the applicant agreed to: remove the marker from the fountain and relocate it to a pole near the path; retain the current size (24"x36"); defer to the manufacturer regarding the most appropriate height of the pole; and update the organization of the text as recommended at the previous meeting. Ms. Ballo stated that she will work with DPR and Studio 39 to ensure the marker meets any accessibility requirements.

The meeting adjourned at 9:03 pm.