



Public Hearing Draft Amendment to the *Master Plan for Historic Preservation: M-NCPPC Park Resources*

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Staff Recommendation

Staff recommends the following resources for designation on the *Master Plan for Historic Preservation*, and interim listing on the *Locational Atlas and Index of Historic Sites*:

- Wheaton Youth Center (31/48), 11711 Georgia Avenue;
- Stubbs Barn (31/3-2), 2000 Shorefield Road, Wheaton Regional Park;
- Rock Creek Recreation Center (36/90), 7901 Meadowbrook Lane;
- Pinecrest Recreation Center (32/31), 301 St. Lawrence Drive;
- Ken-Gar—Palisades Recreation Center (31/49), 4140 Wexford Drive;
- Veirs Mill Recreation Center (31/50), 4425 Garrett Park Road;
- Norbeck Rosenwald School (23/113-2), 4101 Muncaster Mill Road.

Staff recommends the following resource be neither designated on the *Master Plan for Historic Preservation*, nor added to the *Locational Atlas and Index of Historic Sites*:

- Stubbs House (31/3-1), 2000 Shorefield Road, Wheaton Regional Park.

Procedural Background

This proposed Amendment to the *Master Plan for Historic Preservation* considers eight properties owned or maintained by the M-NCPPC Parks Department. Based on its review of September 11, 2013, the Historic Preservation Commission recommends all eight resources be designated on the Master Plan. The rationale for the HPC recommendation is laid out in the Public Hearing Draft Amendment.

The Planning Board held a public hearing on October 17, 2013 on the *Public Hearing Draft Amendment to the Master Plan for Historic Preservation*. On November 14, 2013, the public hearing will be continued and will be followed by the Planning Board worksession. Planning Board members should bring copies of the Draft Amendment and the previous staff report. The document is available online at:

http://www.montgomeryplanning.org/historic/Park_Resources/documents/ParkResourcesAmendment.pdf

A research form for each resource was part of the previous staff report, and is also available online at

http://www.montgomeryplanning.org/historic/Park_Resources/ParkResourcesAmendment2013.shtm.

Discussion

This memorandum summarizes public testimony and provides staff response to issues raised regarding the proposed Amendment to the Master Plan for Historic Preservation. A table summarizing oral and written

testimony is provided at Attachment 1. A discussion of issues follows.

#31/48 Wheaton Youth Center (1963), 11711 Georgia Avenue, Silver Spring

The majority of the testimony received by the Planning Board was from those who opposed historic designation. They were concerned that historic designation would impair or prevent the construction of a new library-recreation center-Gilchrist Center. Opponents also testified that the resource lacked sufficient historic or architectural significance.

A smaller yet equally passionate group testified in favor of historic designation, citing its architectural design as representative of mid-century modernism and of the work of architectural firm Keyes, Lethbridge & Condon; and citing historic significance as a youth center building type built to serve the needs of a growing postwar demographic group, and representing the youth culture of this era. Supporters also cited the value of preserving this unique element of Wheaton's past, which provides architectural diversity and character to the community.

Preservation and development need not be mutually exclusive. A summary of the proposed redevelopment project is found in the staff report for the October 17 meeting. Planning staff has since conducted a study to examine the potential for retaining the Wheaton Youth Center without compromising plans for a new combined library-recreation facility. A memorandum from John Carter, Area 3 Division Chief, is found in Attachment 2.

The Department of General Studies (DGS) presented three options for a new facility in this location. These options were developed before the HPC evaluated the historic merit of the Wheaton Youth Center. The DGS identified a preferred option (John Carter memo Option 1 and DGS Option A) that sites the new facility on the southern and central portion of the 5.5 acre property. A playfield is identified on the current location of the Wheaton Youth Center. DGS Option A would locate the Gilchrist Center in the west corner of the second story of the proposed new facility. John Carter presents an alternative option (Option 2) that retains the historic resource in the scenario of the DGS-preferred design scheme. This alternative has several advantages:

- New construction is reduced substantially (by approximately 15,000) which translates into lower construction cost
- Demolition costs are eliminated
- The Gilchrist Center could be located into a renovated Wheaton Youth Center with ground floor access, instead of being located in an upper, back level of the proposed facility.
- Provides new recreation facilities, library and shared use space in a new facility
- Minimal or no impact on parking
- Preserves the Wheaton Youth Center, an architecturally unique element of Wheaton's heritage

A disadvantage of this scenario is the decreased green space identified as a play area. A new playfield adjacent to Georgia Avenue may not be an ideal use here, especially in light of the site's location one half mile from Wheaton Regional Park. In any event, as shown in the attached memo, this option would still retain outdoor play space.

The conclusion of this report is that the Wheaton Youth Center could be retained without a significant compromise to plans for the new facility. Staff has shared its recommendations with Department of General Services staff. Regarding whether the preservation of the Wheaton Youth Center would delay construction of the new facility, staff points out that M-NCPPC and Montgomery County have not come to an agreement on a land swap upon which this project is predicated.

Staff finds that the Wheaton Youth Center is a highly significant resource, for its history and especially for its architecture, which is unique in Montgomery County. The resource has been found eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. A stated goal of our Planning Department, as presented in the recent Semi-Annual

Report to the District Council, is to retain the unique character of our communities, while making them more liveable, with a range of activities. Here is an excellent opportunity to accomplish all three goals, by preserving a distinctive resource, while providing for a new, expanded facility to serve the community.

#31/3-1 Stubbs House (c1850), 2000 Shorefield Road, Wheaton Regional Park

The Stubbs House is the one resource for which staff and the Historic Preservation Commission disagree. Public testimony concerning this resource supported historic designation, stating that the Stubbs House has historic significance as a rare pre-Civil War structure in the Wheaton area, and as an example of the evolution of a country estate over time, from a farmhouse to a Colonial Revival retreat.

Staff of the Cultural Resources Stewardship Division of the Department of Parks disputes research submitted on this resource (Attachment 3). Based on their research, Parks staff has concluded that the house was built following an 1860 fire, which is a decade or more later than stated by the nominator. Among other findings, Parks staff notes that the nomination materials fail to include cited documentation for claims that many prominent national political figures visited the Stubbs House, the nature of Civil War activity in relation to the Stubbs family or property, and the date of alterations to the property.

This resource was previously listed on the Locational Atlas and Index of Historic Sites, was evaluated for historic designation, and was removed from the Locational Atlas. Generally, staff does not recommend re-evaluation of resources already reviewed and removed from the Locational Atlas. Exceptions to this rule were Falkland Apartments and Wild Acres, which were both properties that had undisputed historic and architectural significance. Staff does not find the Stubbs House to be in this category. The resource was found to be greatly altered at the time of its previous evaluation in 1989, and it has been altered more in the intervening years. Additional research since its previous evaluation does not persuade staff that the resource merits designation.

Staff is sympathetic to statements made regarding the rarity of a mid-19th century house in the Wheaton area. Though Parks staff observes that a pre-Civil War house still stands on Cory Terrace, no resources have been designated to reflect the early history of this community. Yet, the preservation program is a countywide program. Its intent is not to identify and protect buildings from every era for every community, but instead to preserve buildings that reflect the criteria of the Preservation Ordinance on a countywide basis. In the case of the Stubbs House, staff finds that alterations to the resource have been so great that it no longer represents a mid-19th century residence and does not merit historic designation. Staff is not persuaded that the mid-20th century history of this resource is sufficient basis to merit designation.

31/3-2 Stubbs Barn

Research by Parks staff indicates that the Stubbs Barn was built by Edward Stubbs about 1842-43. The barn is in a fine state of preservation. Designation of this resource would represent the pre-Civil War farming history of the Wheaton area. Staff continues to recommend the resource for historic designation.

Other Park Resources in the Draft Amendment

All testimony received regarding the remaining five resources supported historic designation, with the exception of one individual who calls into question the process and benefits of the historic preservation program.

Environmental Settings

Staff has completed detailed maps of proposed environmental settings which include master planned rights of way. The maps are found in Attachment 4.

Attachments

Attachment 1: Staff Response to Testimony

Attachment 2: John Carter memo, Reuse of Wheaton Youth Center with DGS redevelopment

Attachment 3: Parks Staff Response to Nominator's Research on Stubbs House

Attachment 4: Environmental Setting Maps

Attachment 5: Recent Public Submittals

Documents available online at: www.montgomeryplanning.org/historic/parkresources/