

EDWARD U. TAYLOR ELEMENTARY SCHOOL AND WELLER'S DRY CLEANING: AN AMENDMENT TO THE MASTER PLAN FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION



Description

The Planning Board will receive public testimony, hold a worksession, and act on the request to list the Edward U. Taylor School, 19501 White Ground Road, and Weller's Dry Cleaning, 8237 Fenton Street, on the Locational Atlas & Index of Historic Sites and the Master Plan for Historic Preservation.

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MCPB
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Montgomery County
Planning Board
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Summary:

- The Maryland-National Park and Planning Commission approved the resolution to adopt the *MARC Rail Communities Sector Plan* in 2019. The plan recommended staff, “...evaluate the Edward U. Taylor Science Materials Center for designation as an historic site to commemorate its role as one of the few modern schools constructed in Montgomery County for black students during the era of segregation.”
- On October 12, 2022, the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) recommended that the Planning Board list the Edward U. Taylor Elementary School in the *Locational Atlas & Index of Historic Sites* and requested that the County Council approve an amendment to the *Master Plan for Historic Preservation* to designate the school as a Master Plan Historic Site.
- The Maryland-National Park and Planning Commission approved the resolution to adopt the *Silver Spring Downtown and Adjacent Communities Plan* in 2022. The plan recommended staff study Weller’s Dry Cleaning for listing in the *Master Plan for Historic Preservation* and encouraged the adaptive reuse of the building if the occupant and use changed.
- On December 7, 2022, the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) recommended that the Planning Board list Weller’s Dry Cleaning in the *Locational Atlas & Index of Historic Sites* and requested that the County Council approve an amendment to the *Master Plan for Historic Preservation* to designate the building as a Master Plan Historic Site.
- Staff requests that the Planning Board approve the *Public Hearing Draft Plan* and permit staff to make any requested revisions (technical, graphic, or editorial) as part of the final editing process before transmittal of the Planning Board Draft Plan to the County Council and County Executive; and approve the listing of both resources to the *Locational Atlas & Index of Historic Sites*.

LOCATION/ADDRESS

- Edward U. Taylor School (M:18-11-6)
19501 White Ground Road
Boys, MD 20841
- Weller’s Dry Cleaning (M:36-86-1)
8237 Fenton Street
Silver Spring, MD 20910

MASTER PLAN

- MARC Rail Communities Sector Plan (2019)
- Silver Spring Downtown & Adjacent Communities Plan (2022)
- Master Plan for Historic Preservation (1979)

ZONE

- Edward U. Taylor School: R-200
- Weller’s Dry Cleaning: CR-3.0 C-2.0 R-2.75 H-60 T (Fenton Village Overlay Zone)

PROPERTY SIZE

- Edward U. Taylor School: 6.955 acres
- Weller’s Dry Cleaning: 9,023 sq. ft.

REVIEW BASIS

- §24A: Historic Resources Protection

OVERVIEW

The purpose of the meeting is for the Planning Board to evaluate the historic and architectural significance of two sites, to determine whether to list the properties in the *Locational Atlas & Index of Historic Sites*, and to provide comments to the Montgomery County District Council to inform the Council's final decision-making on whether to designate these properties as Master Plan Historic Sites. If approved by the District Council, this amendment would update the *Master Plan for Historic Preservation*.

Edward U. Taylor Elementary School

The Board of Education built the Modern Movement-influenced Edward U. Taylor Elementary School, located at 19501 White Ground Road, approximately one mile southwest of Boyds, in 1952. The school's history is representative of: 1) the closure and consolidation of one-room and two-room Black elementary schools in the mid-20th century prior to desegregation; 2) sustained advocacy for modern school facilities and pressure applied from state and national litigation against the "separate but equal" doctrine; 3) the desegregation of Montgomery County's school system; and 4) the burden placed on the Black community to achieve the desegregation policies set forth by the county. The Taylor School provides a unique opportunity to protect a cultural landscape that documents the progression of school design for Black residents over a 100-year span through the small collection of three vernacular buildings and sites in Boyds.

Weller's Dry Cleaning

The Weller brothers built the Googie-styled Weller's Dry Cleaning store and its associated sign in 1961. The Googie style is a popular, but relatively rare, mid-twentieth century roadside commercial architecture that is a subset of the Modern Movement of architecture. Architects popularized the style in California where the intention was to attract motorists traveling at 35 miles per hour or more to stop and patronize roadside businesses. The design of the Weller's Dry Cleaning building and sign engaged the everyday consumer with a modern and popular architecture in lieu of the high-style austerity of the International, Brutalist, and Expressionist styles. As a result, the site is a visual landmark for residents and visitors within the Thayer Avenue commercial area and greater Downtown Silver Spring. Very few examples of this architectural style remain intact in the county or region.

In 2002, Montgomery Planning contracted Potomac-Hudson Engineering, Inc. to conduct an architectural survey of 205 resources in Silver Spring. The results of that investigation are included in the *Historic Sites Survey Report: Silver Spring Central Business District* (2002). The report noted that Weller's Dry Cleaning should be evaluated for the National Register of Historic Places (upon passing the 50-year threshold) and for the *Master Plan for Historic Preservation*. In 2015, Claire Lise Kelly, then architectural historian for Montgomery Planning, featured Weller's Dry Cleaning in her publication *Montgomery Modern: Modern Architecture of Montgomery County*. She noted that the space age, Googie-design of the building and sign served as a gateway to the Fenton Street shopping center.

MASTER PLAN GUIDANCE

Thrive Montgomery 2050 (Thrive)

Thrive Montgomery 2050 (2022), Montgomery County’s newly adopted General Plan, reaffirmed that historic preservation, as a component of the built environment, strongly influences community, culture, and overall quality of life. The “**DESIGN, ARTS & CULTURE: Investing and Building Community**” chapter of *Thrive* contains several elements supportive of historic preservation, historic building designation, and adaptive reuse.

These specific elements are as follows:

- Preserve, renew, and reuse existing and historic buildings, districts, and landscapes to affirm the continuity and evolution of communities while celebrating local culture and identity.
- Incentivize the reuse of historic buildings and existing structures to accommodate the evolution of communities, maintain building diversity, preserve naturally occurring affordable space, and retain embodied energy of structures.
- One of the metrics for evaluating success in improving and adapting the built environment will be the “Number and spatial distribution of cultural heritage and historic designations.”
- A practice to “support the preservation of historic African American and Indigenous cultural sites and resources.” (pgs. 59-67)

Master Plan for Historic Preservation

The *Master Plan for Historic Preservation* was approved and adopted by the District Council in 1979 as a Functional Plan Amendment to the General Plan for the Physical Development of the Maryland-Washington Regional District (1964). The *Master Plan* created a framework for evaluating and prioritizing the designation of historic sites and districts, described and promoted financial incentives at the Federal, State, and local level for historic building preservation, and described important historical and cultural themes that should be explored as part of future master plan amendments. It should be noted that the *Master Plan* was organized differently than our more current planning documents. The direction given is discussed in broad terms making the *Master Plan* both an educational document about historic preservation planning practice in general and a roadmap for future policies and initiatives.

There are several relevant portions of the *Master Plan* that contain guidance about historic preservation philosophy and guiding statements that are applicable to this proposed plan amendment under consideration:

- Preservation provides economic benefits such as stabilizing and increasing property values along with cultural and aesthetic values. Preservation of older structures adds to the County's environmental continuity, and these structures convey a standard of liveability [sic] by which new construction can be measured. Historic preservation provides a sense of continuity in

time, of stability and durability, while familiar landmarks instill a loyalty to place and thus a commitment to the community and the County. (pg. 3)

- The record of the [Historic Preservation] Commission shall document that each site has real merit which warrants its protection as a valuable community resource. In addition to the proven inherent historic, architectural and cultural value of the historic resources, priority should be given to those offering other public benefits, such as enhancing neighborhoods and communities, meeting needs for housing, education, recreation, and being visible and accessible to the public. (pg. 3)
- The criteria do not set a date restriction on resources to be considered, and it is anticipated that as the Commission's work proceeds, more 20th century resources will be reviewed. Age alone does not qualify a resource for the strong protection offered by the proposed ordinance. (pg. 21)
- As a regular part of the master planning process, the Historic Preservation Commission should be asked to identify sites that should be added to the Master Plan for Historic Preservation. (pg. 25)
- THE ROLE OF THE PRIVATE SECTOR IN HISTORIC PRESERVATION: County historical resources owe much to the private owners who have planned, funded, and preserved or restored their own properties. The business community has also taken initiatives to preserve historic buildings with the realization that property values increase with the amenities offered by a sense of continuity with the past. An increasing number of businesses are also finding that there is a strong customer response to doing business in a preserved or restored historic building. Banks, professional offices, restaurants, and many other businesses are beginning to enjoy the comfort, the publicity and the profit of working in old buildings adapted to new uses. More incentives should be developed to encourage builders' and developers' cooperation in recycling older buildings. (pg. 27)

MARC Rail Communities Sector Plan (MARC Plan)

The approved and adopted *MARC Rail Communities Sector Plan* (2019) recognized the significance of the Taylor Elementary School to the Boyds community. The plan recommended retaining and supporting existing Boyds institutions including the Taylor School in recognition of its role as an “historical and physical landmark.” Specifically, the *MARC Plan* directed staff to evaluate the site for future inclusion in the *Master Plan for Historic Preservation*:

- **IV. PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS.Preserve.C.1.e.** In the future, evaluate the Edward U. Taylor Science Materials Center for designation as an historic site to commemorate its role as one of the few modern schools constructed in Montgomery County for black students during the era of segregation (Site BD). (pg. 92) https://montgomeryplanning.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/FINAL_19.04.30_Approved-and-Adopted-MARC-Rail-Communities-Sector-Plan.pdf

Silver Spring Downtown & Adjacent Communities Plan (SSDAC Plan)

The recently adopted *Silver Spring Downtown & Adjacent Communities Plan (2022)* called for the evaluation of Weller's Dry Cleaning for listing in the *Master Plan for Historic Preservation*. The recommendation stemmed from an architectural survey of the property by EHT Tracerics (a cultural resource management firm) who found the resource potentially eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

- **3.9.4. New Site to be Studied as Future Historic Preservation Master Plan Amendment:**
The Weller's Dry Cleaning Building (M:36-86) is a one-story commercial building at the intersection of Fenton Street and Thayer Avenue. Charles Weller, the original owner, constructed the building in 1961 to house his dry cleaning business. He died in 2016 at the age of 101, after owning and operating Weller's Dry Cleaners for more than 55 years. He hired prominent local architect Ted Englehardt to design the building. Englehardt founded his own firm (Englehardt & Associates) in 1949. He later served as the first president of the Potomac Valley Chapter of the American Institute of Architects (AIA). The Weller's Dry Cleaning Building represents a rare example of a mid-twentieth century, Googie-styled commercial building in downtown Silver Spring. Googie architecture is considered a stylistic subset of the Modern Movement and often features dramatic acute angles, boomerang and amoeba shapes, upswept cantilevered roofs and architectural elements, exposed steel, and prominent use of glazing. The large amount of glass allowed pedestrians and passing vehicles to catch a glimpse of the commercial activities within. Most Googie-styled stores were accompanied by parking lots to facilitate ease of customer and staff access. Bold commercial signage, use of bright colors, and neon attracted the attention of passing vehicles. The style continued to rise in popularity throughout the 1950s and 1960s, spreading from California across the American landscape. Owners of roadside buildings including diners, drive-ins, motels, bowling alleys, arcades, and dry cleaners embraced the style.
- **Recommendation:** Study the Weller's Dry Cleaning Building for the potential future listing in the Master Plan for Historic Preservation and encourage the adaptive reuse of the building if the occupant and use change. (pg. 186) <https://montgomeryplanning.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Silver-Spring-DAC-Approved-Adopted-web.pdf>

Additionally, the property is located within the Fenton Village District in the *SSDAC Plan*. The "Illustrative Diagram" below shows several Opportunity Sites (sites targeted in the plan for higher density redevelopment) and areas for proposed public open space and other improvements. No such improvements or changes were envisioned for the subject property within the Fenton Village District. Plan recommendations for the Fenton Village District support preservation and high-quality urban design as a means to enhance and promote the small-scale businesses and unique character of this commercial district.

- **2.3.2.Fenton Village District Vision:** Fenton Village will build on and sustain its diversity with new community open space, new development at an appropriate scale to support small businesses, and an expanded presence for the arts.
- **Goals:** Maintain zoning that provides low-rise development on Georgia Avenue and Fenton Street, and taller development in the middle of the block. Enhance Fenton Street as the main street for the district by preserving and improving opportunities for both active retail and arts and entertainment venues and organizations. (pg.42)



Figure 1: Approved and Adopted SSDAC Plan, Fenton Village District Illustrative Diagram, pg. 45. The Weller's Dry Cleaning Site is shown in the blue box superimposed on the Diagram. Opportunity Sites are shown in the black hatched marks.

HISTORIC PRESRVATION COMMISSION (HPC) RECOMENDATIONS

Edward U. Taylor School HPC Recommendations

On October 12, 2022, the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) held a duly advertised public hearing and work session. The HPC received testimony from the Boyds Historical Society and two members of the public in support of the designation. The Board of Education was briefed on the designation at a work session in April 2021. The Board created a video to promote the project, which may be accessed at this link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YPZXvyNusXg> . No additional testimony from MCPS was received by the HPC. At the conclusion of the public hearing and work session, the HPC recommended that the Planning Board list the Edward U. Taylor Elementary School in the *Locational Atlas & Index of Historic Sites* and requested that the District Council approve an amendment to the *Master Plan for Historic Preservation* to designate the school as a Master Plan Historic Site.

After the HPC hearing, the Planning Department interviewed several members of the public who came to testify in support, and created this video compiling their recollections of the Taylor School and Boyds: <https://youtu.be/-suzxurdCDQ> .

Weller's Dry Cleaning HPC Recommendations

On September 21, 2022, the HPC held a duly advertised public hearing and work session to list the property in the *Locational Atlas & Index of Historic Sites*. The commission concurred with staff's recommendation and unanimously moved: 1) that the Weller's Dry Cleaning site met two designation criteria as outlined in §24A-3: Historic Resources Protection of the Montgomery County Code; and 2) recommended that the Planning Board list the property to the *Locational Atlas & Index of Historic Sites*. The Atlas protects resources from demolition or substantial alteration until review of the property for listing in the Master Plan for Historic Preservation.

The Planning Board scheduled a public hearing and work session for Weller's Dry Cleaning on October 27, 2022, but the hearing was delayed. In early November, the property owners and/or new tenants painted the exterior of the building off-white and altered the sign.

On December 7, 2022, the HPC held a public hearing and work session to list the property in the *Master Plan for Historic Preservation*. The commission concurred with staff's recommendation and moved: 1) that the Weller's Dry Cleaning site met two designation criteria as outlined in §24A-3: Historic Resources Protection of the Montgomery County Code; 2) reaffirmed its recommendation that the Planning Board list the property in the *Locational Atlas & Index of Historic Sites*; and 3) recommended that the Planning Board endorse listing the building in the *Master Plan for Historic Preservation* in its transmission to the District Council.

Written public testimony received for all HPC hearings is included in Attachment 4.

DESIGNATION CRITERIA

Edward U. Taylor Elementary School

As noted in the Public Hearing Draft Plan, staff finds that the subject property satisfies three designation criteria as listed in 24A-3 of the County Code:

1.A Historical and cultural significance. The historic resource has character, interest or value as part of the development, heritage or cultural characteristics of the county, state or nation.

The Edward U. Taylor School's history is representative of: 1) the closure and consolidation of one-room and two-room Black elementary schools in the mid-20th century prior to desegregation; 2) sustained advocacy for modern school facilities and pressure applied from state and national litigation against the "separate but equal" doctrine; 3) the desegregation of the school system; and 4) the burden placed on the Black community to achieve the desegregation policies set forth by the county. The Taylor School provides a unique opportunity to protect a cultural landscape that documents the progression of school design for Black residents over a 100-year span through the small collection of three vernacular buildings and sites in Boyds. The progress in their design reflects the transition of segregated schools from being located in churches to the acquisition and construction of one-room schoolhouses, and the building of consolidated elementary schools before integration. St. Mark's Methodist Episcopal Church, presently located at 19620 White Ground Road, housed the first school for Black children c. 1878 in Boyds. The Board of Education purchased and constructed the nearby one-room School No. 2, Election District 11, located across from the Taylor School at 19510 White Ground Road, in 1896. This one-room school remained open until 1937, but other similar one-room and two-room school buildings housed Black elementary school students until the construction of the four consolidated elementary schools (including the Taylor School) in the mid-20th century. Taken as a collective, these three sites highlight the architecture of racial segregation and integration.

1.D Historical and cultural significance. The historic resource has character, interest or value as part of the development, heritage or cultural characteristics of the county, state or nation.

The Edward U. Taylor School serves as a reminder of segregated life in the 20th century and desegregation of public education in Montgomery County. Local Black teachers, parents, and advocates fought against injustice to improve educational environments for Black school children during segregation. The segregated Black schools received fewer funds and were in poorer condition than their counterpart white schools. Coinciding with national and local litigation that demanded equal facilities in public education, the community succeeded in the closure of most of its obsolete one-room and two-room upcounty school buildings in the late 1940s. The construction of the four consolidated modern brick schools (including the Edward U. Taylor School) were major achievements for Black residents in the county.

Following the Brown vs. the Board of Education of Topeka (I and II) rulings by the Supreme Court, Montgomery County desegregated public school facilities between 1955 and 1961. The Edward U. Taylor School was one of the last schools to be desegregated by the county and the

only elementary school to remain open as an integrated elementary school. The Board of Education changed the use of the three other segregated Black elementary schools to integrated special education facilities due to a perceived need to retain a 3:1 ratio of white to Black students at any given school. As a result, the burden of desegregation primarily fell to Black residents. While Montgomery County completed their desegregation plan by 1961, many schools retained an all-white student body.

2.E Architectural and design significance. Represents an established and familiar visual feature of the neighborhood, community or county due to its singular physical characteristic or landscape.

The Edward U. Taylor School is the last major building constructed on White Ground Road in Boyds. The community recognized its significance within the built environment in the MARC Rail Communities Sector Plan (2019). The sector plan recommended retaining and supporting existing Boyds institutions including the Taylor School in recognition of its role as an “historical and physical landmark.” The school serves as a tangible link between the residents and their past. Formerly segregated public school buildings are a powerful reminder of difficult and challenging aspects of American history and the persistence of racism. None of the other consolidated segregated Black elementary schools are listed in the Master Plan for Historic Preservation.

Weller’s Dry Cleaning

As noted in Public Hearing Draft Plan, staff finds that the subject property satisfies two designation criteria as listed in 24A-3 of the County Code:

2.A Architectural and design significance. The historic resource embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction.

The Weller’s Dry Cleaning building represents the characteristics of Googie design, a subset of the Modern Movement of architecture. The humorous and playful space-age architecture appealed to the broader public and captured the sense of technological optimism permeating the country. Purveyors of the style designed dramatic forms, celebrated new materials, contrasted natural and textured forms with glass openings, and accentuated these elements with bold colors to use architecture as advertisement. Architect Ted Englehardt relied on these elements to create a landmark building in downtown Silver Spring. He successfully contrasted the solid, red and pink striped porcelain enamel box with a stone veneer and lighter, projecting section featuring expansive windows and a cantilevered awning that floated in the air. The roof form permitted greater visibility as the floor-to-ceiling windows allowed motorists and pedestrians to view operations of the business. All of these features combined to create a playful and quirky building that engaged the everyday consumer with a modern and popular architecture in lieu of the high-style austerity of the International, Brutalist, and Expressionist styles. While the building has since been painted, obscuring the porcelain enamel panels, the siting, massing, and juxtaposition of design and materials are still apparent to express the Googie design and the architect’s original intent.

The Weller’s Dry Cleaning business featured a distinctive Googie-styled sign that embodied commercial architecture in the mid-twentieth century. The original, double-sided sign

oriented travelers on Fenton Street and harmonized with the design of the building. The sign served as a visual landmark with a scale and composition that attracted motorists and pedestrians to the store. The design consists of three distinctly shaped and illuminated metal-framed sign boxes stacked on two metal poles anchored in the sidewalk. The shapes (rectangle, triangle, and circle) are offset from one another and slightly separated which creates a whimsical appearance and suggestion that these elements float in defiance of gravity. The upper component of the sign includes a circular operational clock inspired by the works of George Nelson and offset towards the property. The clock features a white face, black clock hands, and rectangular, multi-colored rectangles in place of numerals.

2.E Architectural and design significance. The historic resource represents an established and familiar visual feature of the neighborhood, community, or county due to its singular physical characteristic or landscape.

The Weller’s Dry Cleaning is a rare example of Googie commercial architecture in Montgomery County. Many of these architectural resources have been lost to demolition throughout the country. *Montgomery Modern* (2015), a chronicle of mid-century modern architecture in Montgomery County, documented three commercial Googie-styled buildings.

The Weller’s Dry Cleaning building and sign represent the continued suburban development of Silver Spring and the area’s importance as a vital transportation route in the mid-twentieth century. Googie-styled buildings relied on nearby high-volume traffic to attract motorists to the futuristic design. Weller’s Dry Cleaning addressed the car-orientated populace but remained successful at the pedestrian scale. The illuminated sign overhanging the sidewalk anchored the building at the intersection and beckoned customers to return with its physical presence on the street. The roadside architecture serves as a tangible link between the community and its past, providing a sense of continuity, orientation, and place.

CONCLUSION

Staff finds that both sites meet the requisite criteria listed as listed in 24A-3 of the County Code. Additionally, staff finds that designating the properties and environmental settings as detailed in the Public Hearing Draft Plan and Attachments 2 and 3 is consistent with master plan guidance and in the benefit of the public interest.

Staff requests that the Planning Board:

- 1) Approve the Public Hearing Draft Plan and permit staff to make any requested revisions (technical, graphic, or editorial) as part of the final editing process before transmittal of the Planning Board Draft Plan to the District Council and County Executive; and,
- 2) Approve the listing of the Edward U. Taylor School and Weller’s Dry Cleaning to the *Locational Atlas and Index of Historic Sites*.

ATTACHMENTS

- Attachment(s): 1) Public Hearing Draft Plan for the Edward U. Taylor Elementary School and Weller's Dry Cleaning: An Amendment to the Master Plan for Historic Preservation*
- 2) Appendix – Edward U. Taylor Master Plan Historic Site Designation Form*
- 3) Appendix – Weller's Dry Cleaning Master Plan Historic Site Designation Form*
- 4) Testimony received by the Historic Preservation Commission for the Edward U. Taylor School and Weller's Dry Cleaning public hearings.*