

HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION STAFF REPORT

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|-----------------------|---|-----------------------|---------------|
| Address: | 3537 Spencerville Rd., Burtonsville | Meeting Date: | 9/1/2021 |
| Resource: | Individually Listed Master Plan Site Liberty Grove Methodist Church (#34/2) | Report Date: | 8/25/2021 |
| Applicant: | Walter Sadler | Public Notice: | 8/18/2021 |
| Review: | HAWP | Tax Credit: | n/a |
| Permit Number: | 964707 | Staff: | Dan Bruechert |
| Proposal: | New Signage | | |

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends the HPC **approve with one (1) condition** the HAWP:

1. The applied graphic on the base of the sign needs to be removed and the base needs to be constructed out of brick or other masonry material.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

SIGNIFICANCE: Individually Listed Master Plan Site (*Liberty Grove Methodist Church #34/2*)
STYLE: Vernacular Gothic
DATE: c.1863 w/ later additions



Figure 1: The subject property can be accessed from Spencerville Rd. and Old Columbia Pike.

From Places from the Past:

“Liberty Grove Church represents the evolution of a rural community church. Methodist farm families in

the Spencerville area first met at Frog Pond School, a log building named for a nearby marsh. The congregation acquired land and, in 1863, engaged Charlie Richter to build a frame church. Nicknamed Frog Pond Church, the original building was a front gable structure with center entrance flanked by double sash windows. After a fire damaged the church in 1900, it was rebuilt. In 1921, the distinctive bell tower with vestibule was added. A rear wing was built in 1927. Twenty years later, the still expanding congregation built a new church across the road. The historic church was then used for Sunday School classes... [the church building was sold in 1970 and used as office space until the current occupant purchased it and returned it to church use].

The core of the historic church bay is a front gable, two-bay by three-bay, one-and-a-half story building. The church was historically wood clad, but is now covered by vinyl siding. A three-story bell tower with a pyramidal roof was added to the north elevation. At the primary elevation, a large lancet window has been partially blocked in with a plywood insert in the arch and tripled casement window below. A small non-historic portico covers the front entrance... The church roof is covered in asphalt shingles. Most of the windows found throughout the church and its later addition are six-over-six sash windows.”

A two-story cinderblock addition was constructed to the southwest of the church sometime in the 1970s.

The building was unoccupied when the church purchased the property in 2016.¹

PROPOSAL

The applicant proposes to install a new sign with an LED display at the location of the current wood sign.

APPLICABLE GUIDELINES

Proposed alterations to individual Master Plan Sites are reviewed under Montgomery County Code Chapter 24A (Chapter 24A) and the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation*.

Rehabilitation is defined as the act or process of making possible a compatible use for a property through repair, alterations, and additions while preserving those portions or features, which convey its historical, cultural, or architectural values.

Montgomery County Code; Chapter 24A-8

- (b) The commission shall instruct the director to issue a permit, or issue a permit subject to such conditions as are found to be necessary to insure conformity with the purposes and requirements of this chapter, if it finds that:
 - (1) The proposal will not substantially alter the exterior features of an historic site or historic resource within an historic district; or
 - (2) The proposal is compatible in character and nature with the historical, archeological, architectural or cultural features of the historic site or the historic district in which an historic resource is located and would not be detrimental thereto or to the achievement of the purposes of this chapter.
 - (3) The proposal would enhance or aid in the protection, preservation and public or private utilization of the historic site or historic resource located within an historic district in a manner compatible with the historical, archeological, architectural or cultural value of the historic site or historic district in which an historic resource is located; or
 - (6) In balancing the interests of the public in preserving the historic site or historic resource located within an historic district, with the interests of the public from the use and benefit of the alternative proposal, the general public welfare is better served by granting the permit.

¹ The applicant applied for a HAWP in early 2017 to construct an ADA ramp at the front of the church building. See: <https://montgomeryplanning.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/I.G-3537-Spencerville-Rd.-Burtonsville.pdf>.

Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation

1. A Property will be used as it was historically or be given a new use that requires minimal change to its distinctive materials, features, spaces and spatial relationships.
2. The historic character of a property will be retained and preserved. The removal of distinctive materials or alteration of features, space and spatial relationships that characterize a property will be avoided.
9. New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction will not destroy historic materials, features, and spatial relationships that characterize the property. The new work shall be differentiated from the old and will be compatible with the historic materials, features, size, scale and proportions, and massing to protect the integrity of the property and its environment.
10. New additions and adjacent or related new construction will be undertaken in such a manner that, if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment would be unimpaired.

STAFF DISCUSSION

The applicant proposes a new sign in front of the church. Currently, there is a wood sign constructed out of two vertical posts and a painted plywood signboard. The sign is 180' (one hundred and eighty feet) from the front entrance of the church. The applicant proposes installing a new sign, measuring 6' 3" × 6' 5" (six feet, three inches by six feet, five inches) with an aluminum base covered by an applied brick graphic and a 3' 5" (three-foot, five-inch) LED display. The LED display is multi-color and will cycle through several still images; it will not - and cannot under current code - display moveable video.



Figure 2: StreetView image of the front of the church with the existing wood sign.

Staff finds the proposed placement for the sign is appropriate. It is placed adjacent to Spencerville Rd. and a sufficient distance from the church, so it will be visible for cars, but will not obscure the visibility of the church building. Staff additionally finds the size of the proposed sign to be compatible with the site, it is large enough to be visible for passing motorists, but will not overwhelm the site.

The analysis of the proposal now turns to the materials. The base of the sign is aluminum with a printed brick pattern, with a 3' 5" × 6' 5" (three feet, five-inch by six feet, five-inch) LED display. The display is topped by a 1' 7" (one foot, seven-inch) tall fixed signboard. This is the first instance where the HPC has been asked to consider a LED sign of this type outside of an urban environment (Staff is aware of LED

signs approved by the HPC, with the approval of the MHT Easement Committee, in downtown Silver Spring). Staff finds that the proposed sign display is too contemporary to be compatible with the vernacular Gothic architecture of the church. However, compatibility with the architecture is only one consideration for HAWP approval.

Weighing in favor of approval of the sign, Staff finds there are three additional considerations. First, the sign is 180' (one hundred eighty feet) from the front of the church. That significant distance visually separates any sign installed on Spencerville Rd. from the church building itself, so the sign's design and materials will have less of a visual impact on the character of the building than a sign immediately adjacent to the building.

Second, Staff finds the church is more significant for its contribution to the community and social history of the area than its architecture. The church served as a hub of community activity and was one of the earliest purpose-built churches in the Burtonsville area. Much of the original building fabric was destroyed in the early 20th century and rebuilt; and later added on to and modified through the first half of the 20th century, including removing the prominent lancet window and wrapping the building in vinyl siding. Staff finds that the proposed sign will not detract from the social significance of the Master Plan site.



Figure 3: Photo of the church from 1973, before the building was re-sided and the lancet window was removed.

Third, Staff considers the changes in the character of the surrounding area. While only the church parcel was designated, both the Master Plan amendment and *Places from the Past* cite the church's connection to the rural character of the Burtonsville area. However, that rural character has largely been erased. The Fairlands Area Master Plan goes so far as to call out the evolution of the region from a "sparsely

populated agricultural region into a concentrated suburban community.” Immediately adjacent to the subject property, there is a bank to the east and a two-story office park to the west. Both of these buildings are much closer to Spencerville Rd. than the subject property (see the aerial photograph in Fig. 1). While neither of the adjacent properties has the type of sign proposed under this HAWP, they both have illuminated signs along Spencerville Rd. Staff finds that because of the change in community character, the proposed sign will not seem out of place in the surrounding commercial area.

Staff’s aesthetic preference for the site would be a more traditionally designed sign. However, after thoroughly evaluating the proposal, Staff concludes that even though the sign is not compatible with the character of the historic site (per 24A-8(b)(1)), the proposed sign will enhance the long term utilization of the historic church as a church by raising awareness of the occupant and activities at the church and recommends approval under Standard 1 and 24A-8(b)(3). To make the sign more compatible with the site Staff recommends the HPC add one condition to the approval: the applied graphic on the base of the sign needs to be eliminated and the base either needs to be constructed out of brick or other masonry material.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Commission **approve with one condition** the HAWP application:

1. The applied graphic on the base of the sign needs to be removed and the base needs to be constructed out of brick or other masonry material.;

the HAWP application under the Criteria for Issuance in *Chapter 24A-8(b)(6)*; and with the *Secretary of The Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation #1, 9, and 10*,

and with the general condition that the applicant will obtain all other applicable Montgomery County or local government agency permits. After the issuance of these permits, the applicant must contact this Historic Preservation Office if any changes to the approved plan are made;

and with the general condition that the applicant shall notify the Historic Preservation Staff if they propose to make **any alterations** to the approved plans. Once the work is completed the applicant will contact the staff person assigned to this application at 301-563-3400 or dan.bruechert@montgomeryplanning.org to schedule a follow-up site visit.



FOR STAFF ONLY:
HAWP# 964707
DATE ASSIGNED _____

**APPLICATION FOR
HISTORIC AREA WORK PERMIT**
HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION
301.563.3400

APPLICANT:

Name: SOUTHERN BETHANY BAPTIST CHURCH E-mail: SBETHANY752@GMAIL.COM
Address: 3537 SPENCERVILLE RD City: BURTONSVILLE Zip: 20866
Daytime Phon 301-421-1440. Tax Account No.: 00267102
PASTOR SADLER

AGENT/CONTACT (if applicable):

Name: JERRY STERLING E-mail: JERRY@PASADENASIGNS.COM
Address: 6300 ARUNDEL COVE AVE City: BALTIMORE Zip: 21226
Daytime Phone: 410-355-5400 Contractor Registration No.: 30877194

LOCATION OF BUILDING/PREMISE: MIHP # of Historic Property _____

Is the Property Located within an Historic District? Yes/District Name _____
No/Individual Site Name _____

Is there an Historic Preservation/Land Trust/Environmental Easement on the Property? If YES, include a map of the easement, and documentation from the Easement Holder supporting this application.

Are other Planning and/or Hearing Examiner Approvals /Reviews Required as part of this Application? (Conditional Use, Variance, Record Plat, etc.?) If YES, include information on these reviews as supplemental information.

Building Number: _____ Street: _____

Town/City: _____ Nearest Cross Street: _____

Lot: _____ Block: _____ Subdivision: _____ Parcel: _____

TYPE OF WORK PROPOSED: See the checklist on Page 4 to verify that all supporting items for proposed work are submitted with this application. Incomplete Applications will not be accepted for review. Check all that apply:

- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> New Construction | <input type="checkbox"/> Deck/Porch | <input type="checkbox"/> Shed/Garage/Accessory Structure |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Addition | <input type="checkbox"/> Fence | <input type="checkbox"/> Solar |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Demolition | <input type="checkbox"/> Hardscape/Landscape | <input type="checkbox"/> Tree removal/planting |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Grading/Excavation | <input type="checkbox"/> Roof | <input type="checkbox"/> Window/Door |
| | | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |

I hereby certify that I have the authority to make the foregoing application, that the application is correct and accurate and that the construction will comply with plans reviewed and approved by all necessary agencies and hereby acknowledge and accept this to be a condition for the issuance of this permit.

[Signature]
Signature of owner or authorized agent

7-27-21
Date

Adjacent and Confronting Properties:

Burtonsville, MD 20866

3535 Spencerville Road

15225 Old Columbia Pike

3537 Spencerville Rd

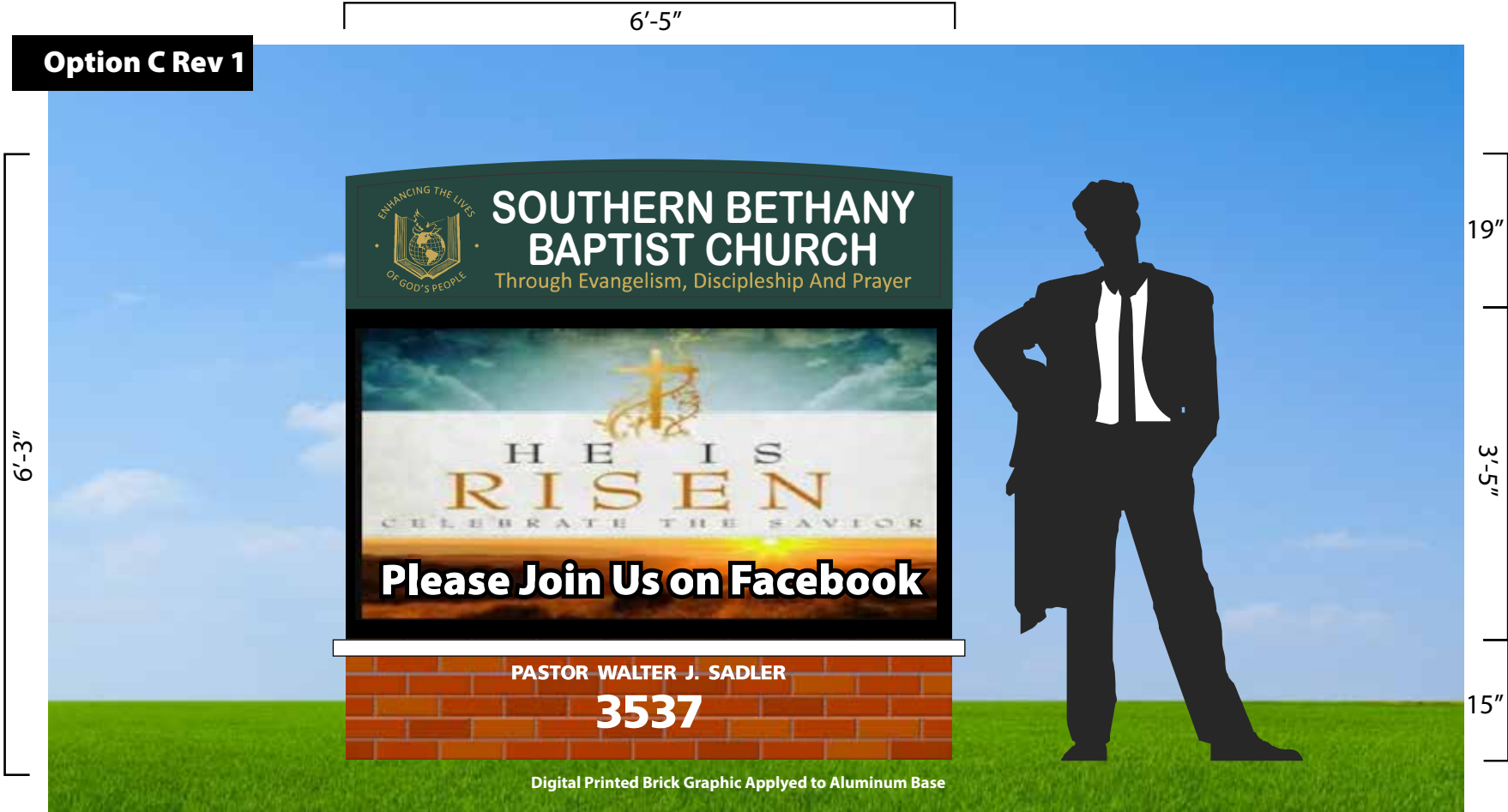


Imagery ©2021 Commonwealth of Virginia, Maxar Technologies, U.S. Geological Survey, Map data ©2021 50 ft

Double Sided Mounument Sign with 3'x6' 10mm RGB Watchfire

☒ Single ☐ Double Sided

Option C Rev 1



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| | | | |
|-------------|---------------------------------|------------|-------|
| client | Southern Bethany Baptist Church | designer | Chris |
| sales exec. | Jerry Sterling | scale | nts |
| date | 9 July 2021 | revision | rev |
| file | Double Sided Mounument Sign.pdf | prod. time | wks |



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410-355-5400



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Google Maps 15399 Spencerville Ct



Existing Sign

Image capture: Sep 2019 © 2021 Google

Burtonsville, Maryland



Street View

Google Maps 3525 MD-198



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Burtonsville, Maryland



Street View

Google Maps Spencerville Rd



Existing Sign

Google

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Burtonsville, Maryland



Street View