

MONTGOMERY COUNTY HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION
STAFF REPORT

Address:	9400 Rockville Pike, Bethesda	Meeting Date:	4/17/2024
Resource:	Master Plan Site #35/5 (<i>Bethesda Meeting House</i>)	Report Date:	4/10/2024
Applicant:	Bethesda Meeting House Foundation, Inc. Hank Levine, Agent)	Public Notice:	4/3/2024
Review:	Historic Area Work Permit	Tax Credit:	No
Permit Number:	1063979	Staff:	Dan Bruechert
Proposal:	Sign Installation		

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

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

1. A full site survey shall be submitted to Staff identifying the location of the signs in relation to the historic church building, the road, and any significant landscape/hardscape features before issuance of the final permit documents.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

SIGNIFICANCE: Master Plan Site #35/5 Bethesda Meeting House
STYLE: Greek Revival
DATE: 1850

Excerpt from *Places from the Past*:

“Set up on a knoll overlooking the environs of Bethesda to which it gave its name, the Bethesda Meeting House is a Greek Revival structure. The church has a front gable structure has a projecting pedimented portico (dating from the early 1900s) with wide frieze supported by square columns. Three walls of the main block have a wide frieze with pilasters alternating with windows and set in pairs at each corner. Gothic Revival windows with lancet arches are lit by red, blue, and gold panes of glass. On the interior, a slave gallery is a reminder of pre-emancipation practices when the church was built. Original pews were replaced with Gothic Revival ones from the First Baptist Church of Washington. A bell suspended from the portico ceiling is said to have belonged to Paul Revere.

The building is the earliest church in the county built by Presbyterians. Originally known as the Bethesda Presbyterian Church, the 1850 structure replaces an 1820 church destroyed by fire. Foundation stone and a dated cornerstone were reused from that earlier church. Sold in 1925, the church changed hands several times until the Baptists purchased it in 1950. The Presbyterian congregation, who built a church in downtown Bethesda, retains ownership of the cemetery and has an original pew from the church. A parsonage was built on site in 1851. Judging by its Queen Anne style, the present multi-gabled parsonage, adorned with brackets, shingled accents, and wrap-around porch, appears to date largely from the late 1800s. The name Bethesda, meaning House of Mercy, is taken from the biblical story of Jesus healing a lame man at a Jerusalem water pool.”



Figure 1: The Bethesda Meeting House is on the west side of Rockville Pike.

PROPOSAL

The applicant proposes to modify an existing sign and install a new sign.

APPLICABLE GUIDELINES

When reviewing alterations and new construction at Master Plan Sites several documents are to be utilized as guidelines to assist the Commission in developing their decision. In this case, these documents include *Montgomery County Code Chapter 24A (Chapter 24A)*, the *MARC Rail Communities Sector Plan (Sector Plan)*, and the *Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation (Standards)*. The pertinent information in these documents is outlined below.

Montgomery County Code; Chapter 24A-8

- (a) The commission shall instruct the director to deny a permit if it finds, based on the evidence and information presented to or before the commission that the alteration for which the permit is sought would be inappropriate, inconsistent with or detrimental to the preservation, enhancement or ultimate protection of the historic site or historic resource within an historic district, and to the purposes of this chapter.
- (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 ensure 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; or

- (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.
- (c) It is not the intent of this chapter to limit new construction, alteration or repairs to any 1 period or architectural style.

Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation

- 2. The historic character of a property shall be retained and preserved. The removal of historic materials or alteration of features and spaces that characterize a property shall 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 historic church building recently changed hands and is now owned by a non-profit organization. While additional funds are raised for the rehabilitation of the historic church building, the applicant proposes to alter an existing sign and to replace a deteriorated sign on-site. Staff finds the proposed changes will not have a significant impact on the historic character of the site and recommends the HPC approve the HAWP. The application materials indicate that a full survey of the site will be submitted to Staff and will identify the location of the signs. Staff recommends the HPC add a condition requiring the submission of this plan before final approval documents can be issued. *Figure 2*, below, shows the signs in relation to the church and Rockville Pike.

Sign Alteration

Adjacent to the entrance to the property, there is a sign wooden sign, with a plywood board that identifies the church occupant as, "Temple Hill Baptist Church." The applicant proposes to install a vinyl board over the plywood that will be screwed into the existing sign to provide correct information about the current owner. The size of the sign will not be altered.

Staff finds the existing sign is not a historic feature. While the HPC does not consider the text or message of the sign, they do review the dimensions and materials. Staff finds the dimensions of the proposed sign board match the existing and will result in no change. The new vinyl sign board, however, is a material change. Staff generally does not support vinyl signs at historic sites, because it is too reflective to be a compatible substitute for wood. In this instance, Staff finds the proposed vinyl is appropriate because of its limited size and because the proposal will maintain the remainder of the sign in place (per 24A-8(b)(2)). Additionally, Staff finds the site will receive a long-term benefit from the new signage by raising awareness of the site and fundraising toward the rehabilitation, supporting approval under 24A-8(b)(3).



Figure 2: The sign to be altered is circled in yellow. The sign to be replicated is outlined in a red rectangle.

Sign Replacement

To the northwest of the sign at the entrance, discussed above, the applicant proposes to remove and replicate the existing wood sign. The proposed sign will match the size and materials of the existing sign and will not result in a material change on the lot. Staff finds this work is a replacement in kind that does not require a HAWP.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) **approve** the HAWP application **with one condition**:

1. A full site survey shall be submitted to Staff identifying the location of the signs in relation to the historic church building, the road, and any significant landscape/hardscape features before issuance of the final permit documents;
under the Criteria for Issuance in Chapter 24A-8(b)(2) and (3), having found that the proposal will not substantially alter the exterior features of the historic resource and is compatible in character with the Kensington Historic District and the purposes of Chapter 24A;

and with the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation #2 and 9*;

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.



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

FOR STAFF ONLY:
HAWP# _____
DATE ASSIGNED _____

APPLICANT:

Name: _____ E-mail: _____
Address: _____ City: _____ Zip: _____
Daytime Phone: _____ Tax Account No.: _____

AGENT/CONTACT (if applicable):

Name: _____ E-mail: _____
Address: _____ City: _____ Zip: _____
Daytime Phone: _____ Contractor Registration No.: _____

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 of owner or authorized agent

Date

HAWP APPLICATION: MAILING ADDRESSES FOR NOTIFYING
[Owner, Owner's Agent, Adjacent and Confronting Property Owners]

Owner's mailing address	Owner's Agent's mailing address
Adjacent and confronting Property Owners mailing addresses	

Exhibit A – Addresses of Residents Adjoining BMH Property

Robert W. and M.E. Dickie, 4900 Elsmere Avenue, Bethesda, MD 20814

Mike Ghias, 4902 Elsmere Avenue, Bethesda, MD 20814

Andika M. and Diah E. Perkasa, 5001 Cedar Croft Lane, Bethesda, MD 20814

Mary Ann Mannes Sack Revocable Trust, 5003 Cedar Croft Lane, Bethesda, MD 20814

Peter Demizio, 5007 Cedar Croft Lane, Bethesda, MD 20814

Harry K. Wolpoff, 5009 Cedar Lane, Bethesda, MD 20814

Mike Ghias, 5013 Cedar Croft Lane, Bethesda, MD 20814

Mike Ghias, 9321 Corsica Drive, Bethesda, MD 20814

Joshua Schmand Living Trust, 9323 Corsica Drive, Bethesda, MD 20814

Paul R. And S.R. Barrett, 9401 Corsica Drive, Bethesda, MD 20814

David Zientara, 9403 Corsica Drive, Bethesda, MD 20814

Guy Wolcott, 9405 Corsica Drive, Bethesda, MD 20814

Mary Loretta Rainey, 9407 Corsica Drive, Bethesda, MD 20814

Mary L. Rainey, 9409 Corsica Drive, Bethesda, MD 20814

Brian P. Christie, 9411 Corsica Drive, Bethesda, MD 20814

Jordan H. Rickles, 9413 Corsica Drive, Bethesda, MD 20814

Peter W. and Heather B. Sullivan, 9415 Corsica Drive, Bethesda, MD 20814

Simone S. Schofer Decedent's Trust, 9417 Corsica Drive, Bethesda, MD 20814

Ian K. Richardson, 9419 Corsica Drive, Bethesda, MD 20814

Bethesda Presbyterian Church (Cemetery), 7611 Clarendon Rd, Bethesda, MD 20814

Description of Property: Please describe the building and surrounding environment. Include information on significant structures, landscape features, or other significant features of the property:

Description of Work Proposed: Please give an overview of the work to be undertaken:

Work Item 1: _____	
Description of Current Condition:	Proposed Work:

Work Item 2: _____	
Description of Current Condition:	Proposed Work:

Work Item 3: _____	
Description of Current Condition:	Proposed Work:

**HISTORIC AREA WORK PERMIT
CHECKLIST OF
APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS**

	Required Attachments						
Proposed Work	I. Written Description	2. Site Plan	3. Plans/ Elevations	4. Material Specifications	5. Photographs	6. Tree Survey	7. Property Owner Addresses
New Construction	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Additions/ Alterations	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Demolition	*	*	*		*		*
Deck/Porch	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Fence/Wall	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Driveway/ Parking Area	*	*		*	*	*	*
Grading/Excavation/ Landscaping	*	*		*	*	*	*
Tree Removal	*	*		*	*	*	*
Siding/ Roof Changes	*	*	*	*	*		*
Window/ Door Changes	*	*	*	*	*		*
Masonry Repair/ Repoint	*	*	*	*	*		*
Signs	*	*	*	*	*		*

Exhibit B

The Small Sign at the Entrance to the Bethesda Meeting House Site

The Sign as It Appeared Last Year



The Proposed New Message



Material Specifications

The sign is made of wood (probably pine or oak), painted white.

The old message was painted directly on the sign.

The new message will be a laminated vinyl sheet applied to a piece of dia bond that will be attached to the existing sign with screws. Like the old message, it will be 72" wide and 27" high.

Site Plan

An ALTA survey of the site is being prepared. It will include the sign location. We will forward the survey with the sign marked when we receive it.

Exhibit C

The large sign along the driveway to the Meeting House

The Old Sign in 2006



The Old Sign in 2024



The Proposed New Sign



Material Specifications

The sign will be constructed of exterior grade plywood and will measure 16' x 4', which were the dimensions of the original sign. It will be attached to 5 pressure-treated 4x4's that will be set in concrete and wrapped. The back of the sign will be reinforced with pressure-treated 2x4's to provide additional rigidity and assure a long life. The lettering will be heavy duty industrial vinyl, designed for outdoor use, which will be coated with an industrial clear coating to prevent fading even after years of exposure to the elements.

Site Plan

An ALTA survey of the site is being prepared. It will include the sign location. We will forward the survey with the sign marked when we receive it.



DEPARTMENT OF PERMITTING SERVICES

Marc Elrich
County Executive

Rabbiah Sabbakhan
Director

HISTORIC AREA WORK PERMIT APPLICATION

Application Date: 3/23/2024

Application No: 1063979
AP Type: HISTORIC
Customer No: 1487657

Comments

We have pictures of the small sign showing the previous message and the new message. We have pictures of the old large sign (which fell down) and a mockup of the proposed replacement, showing that they are essentially identical. And we have specifications of the materials used in both signs.

Affidavit Acknowledgement

The Homeowner is the Primary applicant
This application does not violate any covenants and deed restrictions

Primary Applicant Information

Location Property located at 9400 Rockville Pike in Bethesda, MD 20814. The property consists of 3 acres, and includes two buildings (a church and a parsonage). This application is for two signs located near the entrance to the property on Rockville Pike.

Homeowner Bethesda Meeting House Foundation (Primary)

Historic Area Work Permit Details

Work Type RESREP

Scope of Work The application covers (a) changed message on a small sign near the entrance to the BMH site; and (b) replacement of the large sign identifying the site with a replica