

**CITY OF ROCKVILLE HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION
STAFF REPORT
for
DECEMBER 18, 2008
MEETING NO. 10-2008**

APPLICATION: Courtesy Review
ADDRESS: Fleet Street Senior Housing
ACCEPTED: December 3, 2008
45 DAY LIMIT: 2/6/2008
OWNER: Victory Housing, Inc.
REQUEST: Courtesy Review
STAFF: Jeff Winstel



Approximate project area and historic district, current

OVERVIEW

The applicant is requesting a Courtesy Review of the Fleet Street Senior Housing project, adjacent to the Rockville Heights Historic District. The proposed development project includes a three and one half story multi-unit housing facility located behind the historic district. The façade is diagonally oriented to face northeast onto Monroe Street. The development includes a circulation drive behind the historic district boundary, separated by 2, 3' high retaining walls, and a 26-space parking lot located west of the building. An existing parking area located in the historic district between 150 Maryland Avenue and 107 Fleet Street will be acquired from the County. This parking area, which will accommodate truck turn-around traffic and additional visitor parking, will be redesigned.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Provide preliminary approval of the project as submitted with the following conditions:

1. Landscape screening is placed in front of the parking that faces Fleet Street and Maryland Avenue. Plant materials must be indigenous and be consistent with the historic character of the district.
2. Recommend the properties in the Rockville Heights Historic District be offered for commercial as well as residential use, with information regarding all tax credit financial incentive programs, and the use of Maryland Rehabilitation Building Code also referred to as the Smart Code.
3. Recommend use of the parking lot between 150 Maryland Avenue and 101 Fleet Street is offered to a prospective developer of the Rockville Heights Historic District buildings under a mutually agreeable shared use agreement between Victory Housing

(or a to be formed ownership entity) and the eventual developer of the historic properties.

4. If archeological resources are uncovered during excavation of the site for the Fleet Street Senior Housing, the City of Rockville Historic Preservation staff is to be immediately contacted.

DRAFT MOTION OF APPROVAL

Finding the preliminary site plan for the Victory Housing Inc. Fleet Street Senior Housing meets

City of Rockville Technical Guide #5: New Construction in that the proposed new building fits in with the streetscape and the orientation, rooflines, fenestration, plantings, and other exterior features and is consistent with the surrounding historic resources, and

The Secretary of the Interior's Standard #9 for new construction being compatible with the historic materials, features, size, scale and proportion, and massing to protect the integrity of the property and its environment, and

The Secretary of the Interior's Standard #10 in that the 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.

The HDC recommends further development of the design prior to application for a Certificate of Approval, which will be conditioned on an agreement to provide an option for shared use of the parking lot between 150 Maryland Avenue and 101 Fleet Street for rehabilitation and reuse of the buildings in the Rockville Heights Historic District.

BACKGROUND

Historic, architectural, or architectural value and significance of the site or structure and its relationship to the historic, archeological, or architectural significance of the surrounding area.

- Contributing**
- Non-Contributing**

Historic Significance:

The Rockville Heights Historic District is significant as an intact collection of early 20th century residential architecture that contains a high-style architect designed residence and modest streamlined examples of Colonial Revival and Tudor Revival houses. The district borders the Town Center and conveys small town land use patterns marked by the integration of commercial and residential uses, which characterized Rockville's built environment prior to post WWII expanded suburban growth patterns.

The Rockville Heights Historic District is located at the northern end of the Rockville Heights subdivision, platted in 1890. The high-style Colonial Revival house at 107 Fleet Street was built by local architect Thomas C. Grooms in 1904 and was occupied by local attorney Clifford Robertson and his family for 65 years.

Thomas C. Grooms (1845-1937) began his career in the Mechanicsville (Olney) area as a carpenter and undertaker. In 1888, after constructing four large houses in Rockville, he relocated to the town. Grooms opened an office on Commerce Street near the Courthouse. The lettered display windows identified the proprietor as “T. C. Grooms, Architect.” He was the first builder in Rockville to identify himself as an architect.

He continued to design, construct and remodel more than forty homes, businesses, and churches. He designed and built the grand house at 100 Forest Avenue for Hattersly Talbott (attorney and state senator) and Laura Talbott (niece of Judge Bowie) in 1890 at a cost of \$4,950. Grooms left Rockville in 1922 to live in Washington.

The Robertson House is a prominent example of early 20th century Colonial Revival residential architecture. Stylistic elements include full entablatures on the columned porch and corner pilasters, the Georgian tracery window on the second story, and the broken scroll molding surrounding the attic light in the pedimented gable. In addition, elements of the late 19th century Queen Anne style are evidenced by the wrap-around porch, the shallow two-story bay on the east side and the large one-over-one windows.

The other four houses were built between 1926 and 1936 for Robert C. Warfield, the only dentist in Rockville for many years. Robert C. Warfield was “raised on a farm on the edge of Laytonsville and attended University of Maryland Dental School.”¹ “Robert C. Warfield was the only dentist in Rockville for many years.”² His first dental office was located over Vinson’s Drug Store.³ According to his son, Gaither P. Warfield, Robert Warfield was on call twenty-four hours a day practicing all aspects of dental work including pulling teeth and making dentures. Dr. Warfield often gave credit to patients and took food in exchange for services provided.⁴

The Warfields had a large house at 200 Maryland Avenue (non extant) along with a small 2-acre farm consisting of horses, cows, chickens, icehouse, smokehouse, well and pump. Dr. Warfield invested in land across the street from his house. He purchased lots 6, 8, and 10 in lock 2 of Rockville Heights.⁵ Although Robert L. Warfield and Robert C. Warfield purchased the property on 9 April 1915, the houses were not built until 1926.⁶

¹ Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties form, Warfield Houses on Fleet Street and Maryland Avenue; The Robertson House, McConihe houses, citing Peerless Rockville, interview with Gaither P. Warfield, 19 August 1986.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties form, Warfield Houses on Fleet Street and Maryland Avenue; The Robertson House, McConihe houses, citing Montgomery County Land Records, Liber 242/259 (1914).

⁶ Ibid. The property lines as purchased by Robert C. Warfield on stated Montgomery County Land Record Liber 250 folio 11 is corrected on deed liber 408 folio 404 (1926).

Between 1926 and 1927 Dr. Warfield financed the construction of the three houses across the street from his home at 101 and 105 Fleet Street and 150 Maryland Avenue, which were then sold to Rockville families. The houses at 101 Fleet and 150 Maryland Avenue were purchased by Rowan and Madelaine Erb in 1926 and remained in that family until its sale to Montgomery County in 1969. The 105 Fleet Street lot and house became the property of May E. Fisher in 1927 and was later owned by Rockville lumber merchant Leland Fisher until its sale to Montgomery County.⁷ In 1936, a smaller cottage with a steep pitch Tudor style front gable was built between the two earlier houses on Fleet Street. This house remained in the Warfield family, who used it as a rental property until Rev. Gaither P. Warfield sold it to the County in 1966.

Together these houses represent an early 20th century streetscape and illustrate period architectural styles. This district also provides a buffer between the pavement and masonry dominated government offices and parking structures, and the residential area to south.

PREVIOUS ACTIONS

On June 16, 2005, the Historic District Commission unanimously voted to recommend the "Rockville Heights Historic District" with a boundary consistent with the deeded lot lines of the five properties associated with the buildings at 101, 103, 105, 107 Fleet Street and 150 Maryland Avenue.

At the July 2, 2008 Planning Commission meeting, preservation staff supported the historic district and boundary recommended by the HDC as it retains the environmental setting that includes accessory structures, rear yards and mature trees that help to identify the early 20th century time frame during which these residential properties were developed. Representatives of the property owner and Victory Housing, Inc. testified that optimal siting of the senior housing facility necessitated a reduction of the historic district environmental setting and removal or relocation of three garages to allow for the main drive aisle into the proposed new development.

The Planning Commission agreed with staff that the proposed historic district is generally consistent with relevant master plans, but voted to recommend the truncated boundary proposed by the property owner and the Victory Housing developer and, in addition, to exclude the entire 150 Maryland Avenue property. The Planning Commission found that removing 150 Maryland Avenue from the proposed historic district would provide a more viable historic streetscape focused on Fleet Street, allow for options to the developer for siting the senior housing facility including preservation of green area, and encourage the County to correct deferred maintenance on the four Fleet Street houses.

Four historic district boundary options were then forwarded to the Mayor and Council for consideration: the HDC-recommended boundary (Option 1), the property owner/Victory Housing, Inc. proposed boundary (Option 2), and the Planning Commission recommended

⁷ Ibid. According to Gaither Warfield, the first house, 105 Fleet, was sold to Frank Richardson. Peerless Rockville, interview with Gaither P. Warfield, 19 August 1986.

boundary (Option 3). In addition, the Mayor and Council have the discretion to not approve any historic district or to define another boundary (Option 4). On October 13, 2008 the Mayor and Council approved adoption of a Historic District Overlay Zone with a district boundary (Option 2) that excludes the garages, but includes the house at 150 Maryland Avenue.

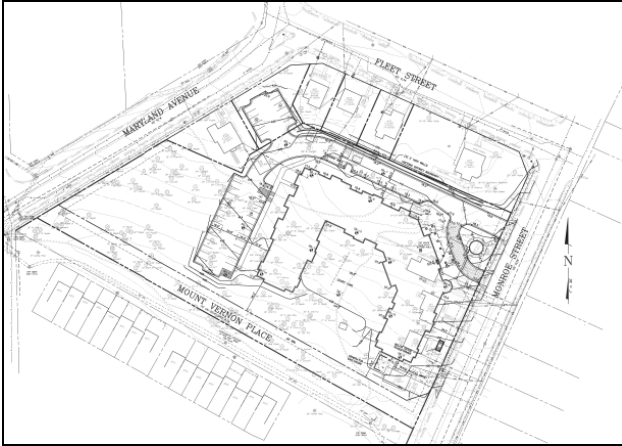


Rockville Heights Historic District Boundary

The historic district is owned by Montgomery County as are all the parcels defined by Maryland Avenue, Fleet Street, Monroe Street and Mount Vernon Place. The houses were acquired by the county in the 1960s and have been used for a variety of office uses. Several have been vacated. Approval of the historic district coincided with the County and Victory Housing Inc. finalizing an agreement to construct low-to-moderate income housing for independent seniors. Currently the county is repairing and repainting the houses in the historic district and plans to offer them for sale.

PROPOSED PROJECT

The proposed 3 1/2 story Fleet Street Senior Housing has a U-shaped plan with a diagonal front entry facing onto Monroe Street at a 45-degree angle. A circular drive will front the entry bay, connecting to an access drive that is abutted on the northeast side by two 3' high retaining walls that will form the majority of the southwest boundary of the historic district. The drive will wrap around the building and connect to 30-space parking lot next to the northwest leg of the U. The drive will also access a 12-space parking lot in the Rockville Heights Historic District, between the houses at 150 Maryland Avenue and 101 Fleet Street.



Fleet Street Senior Housing, Site Plan

The housing facility sits on an elevation lower than the historic district, enabling it to accommodate the 3-½ stories without towering over the adjacent older houses. The elevations of the building are capped by hipped and gable roofs and faced with a variety of differently textured materials. Intersecting gables and conical towers project and recede from the elevations planes, providing visual interest and creating the effect of several buildings rather than a monolithic institutional building that would stand out in the residential surroundings. Stylistic elements are taken from early 20th century residential architecture, such as eyebrow windows, Tudor front gables, Queen Anne corner towers, and a battered post front porch.



Monroe Street façade of Senior Housing facility.

The project will result in the demolition of residential properties along Monroe Street. Although these properties were originally included in the historic district, they were removed from the district prior to designation and are not considered historic.

CITY OF ROCKVILEL TECHNICAL GUIDES AND THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR’S STANDARDS

The impact of the proposed senior housing facility on the Rockville Heights Historic District will be determined by how well the building fits in with the Fleet Street and Maryland Avenue historic district streetscape. Technical Guide #5: New Construction requires “that a proposed new building fits in with the rest of the streetscape. The orientation, fenestration, plantings, and other exterior features should be consistent with the surrounding historic resources.” The guidelines further recommend that the roof heights be consistent with heights of the historic

buildings, and mature trees be retained to the extent possible as they contribute to the overall historic setting.



View from 150 Maryland Avenue



View from 101 and 103 Fleet Street

The renderings above show the rooflines to be consistent with the historic structures from the vantage point of Fleet Street between houses 101 and 103, and the view of the proposed housing structure from 150 Maryland Avenue. In addition, the massing reads like part of neighborhood due to the varied elevation planes and the retention of mature trees and vegetation.

Technical Guide #5 also recommends screening mechanical systems, being alert to possible archaeological resources that may yield historic information for the City and utilizing the courtesy review process before formal application of a Certificate of Approval. The facility's generator and trash dumpster will be located adjacent to the southwest elevation of the eastern leg, along Mount Vernon Place on the opposite side of the parcel from the historic district. The Natural Resource Inventory/ Forest Stand Delineation (NRI/FSD) was previously submitted to the city of Rockville forestry staff and was approved on October 9, 2008.

The proposed parking lot between 150 Maryland Avenue and 103 Fleet Street will be built on an area that is currently gravel and broken pavement parking lot without curbs or any type of hard edging. As drawn on the plan, the lot will accommodate 12 spaces and has no screening from the street. City of Rockville Technical Guide #8: Off-street Parking, usually requires some type of screening for parking areas visible from the public right-of-way. Live plant material is typically preferred, and the landscape plan must reinforce the historic character of the district. In addition, the City's landscaping, screening and lighting manual will require parking lot and perimeter landscaping.

The Secretary of the Interior's Standards #9 for new construction mandates that historic material is not destroyed, and the new construction "be compatible with the historic materials, features, size, scale and proportion, and massing to protect the integrity of the property and its environment." Standard #10 states that new construction "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." The proposed senior housing facility will meet Standards 9 and 10 regarding impacts on the delineated environmental setting and historic buildings of the Rockville Heights Historic District overlay zone.

An additional standard that should be considered is Secretary of the Interior's Standard #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. The proposed development includes acquisition of the existing parking area in the historic district for the senior housing facility's use. Outside of a few spaces behind 103 Fleet Street, and the garages, which are not in the district and will be razed, this is the only parking area available for any reuse of the buildings in the Rockville Heights Historic District.

For single unit detached dwellings, the base number of parking spaces required is 2 per unit, meaning that ten spaces would be required. If the houses in the district were returned to single family residential, the delineation of the historic zone would accommodate two parking spaces per house provided on the lot, but the parking spaces would consume the entire rear yards of these houses. Given the amount of traffic on Maryland Avenue and Fleet Street, these houses may have limited appeal to single-family purchasers, as there would be no usable yard space. In addition, pulling in and out of the parking spaces off of Maryland Avenue and Fleet Street, especially during rush hour, would be difficult. There is insufficient space for an access drive to be built off of Monroe Street to the back of these houses.

A shared parking lot could be built between 107 and 105 Fleet Street that would accommodate 12-14 spaces. If all the houses were used for single family residential this would accommodate all the required spaces in a common parking facility, but would be inconvenient for the three residences that do not flank this area; the residents of 150 Maryland would be 350' from their cars. Another concern with residential use for the buildings is the surrounding uses. These five residences would be completely surrounded by commercial, institutional and multi-family – all higher density uses. They would have no abutting compatible land uses and would become an isolated land use.

If the houses were used for commercial office space, such as those in the South Washington Street Historic District, or the West Montgomery Avenue Historic District along North Adams, they would be adjacent to the county office buildings and ½ block away from the proposed 6 story new County Courthouse on Jefferson and Maryland. Parking needs for this use would be determined by the square footage of the buildings. Because of their current historic district status, and potential for National Register Historic District listing, commercial use of these buildings would provide access to very attractive rehabilitation financial incentives.

All locally designated historic properties are eligible for a 10% county property tax credit for exterior rehabilitation and maintenance work. The State of Maryland provides a 20% Historic Homeowner income tax credit and a 20% commercial income tax credit for pre-approved interior and exterior pre-approved rehabilitation work. Although the state commercial tax credit is a competitive program, geographic distribution is strongly considered and Montgomery County is well positioned to take advantage of this criteria.⁸ Commercial use of the properties could result in an additional Federal income tax credit of 20% of the cost of pre-approved rehabilitation work.

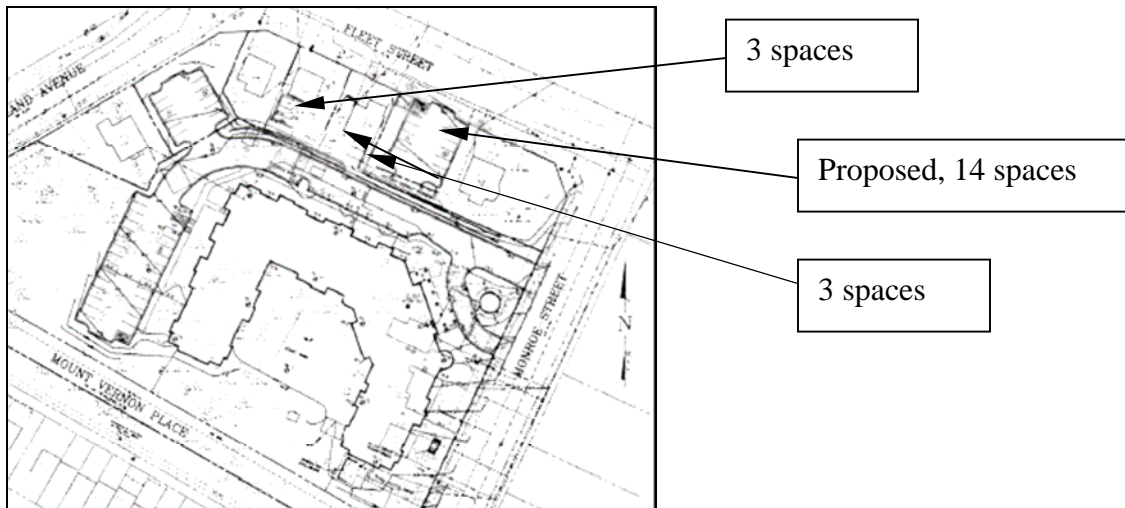
⁸ Maryland Commercial Tax Credits for historic rehabilitation in Baltimore are capped resulting in money being left on the table in recent years, due to the lack of applications from other areas of the state.

A primary provision of the state and federal rehabilitation tax credits is that the qualified rehabilitation expenditures exceed the adjusted basis of the property. For 107 Maryland Avenue, the adjusted basis (value of the property minus the land) equals approximately \$225,000. The extent of work needed on this structure to bring it to a state of occupancy for either a commercial or residential use would likely exceed this amount. The tax credits (up to 50% of rehabilitation costs) make a strong case for offering these properties for commercial office use. Rehabilitation of these properties for commercial use would also benefit from the Maryland Rehabilitation Building Code, or the smart code.

The largest building, 107 Fleet Street has a square footage of 2,332, according to property tax records. An estimated average for the other buildings is 1,800 square feet per building. The proposed MXT (mixed use transition) zone for the area requires 1 parking space per 300 gross square feet of building space, for a professional office use. The required total parking for buildings for this use classification comes to approximately 32 spaces.

Access to the existing parking lot's proposed 12 spaces, along with building a similar parking lot between 107 Fleet and 105 Fleet with 14 spaces would accommodate 24 vehicles. In addition, 3 spaces could be accommodated behind and beside 105 Fleet Street and 3 behind 103 Fleet Street Avenue, equaling the required 32 spaces.

The proposed parking lot between 150 Maryland Avenue and 101 Fleet Street is intended for back-up visitor parking for the senior housing facility and to accommodate delivery truck turn-around in the small driveway connecting the lot to the facility's access drive. A shared use agreement between a "to be formed ownership entity" and a potential developer of the historic district houses would be needed to implement this option.



Concept parking for accommodating commercial use

Attachments:

- Application
- Site Plan
- View shed graphics

