

**MEMORANDUM**

October 14, 2010

TO: Planning, Housing, and Economic Development Committee

FROM: Jeff Zyontz, ~~Legislative~~ Attorney

SUBJECT: Draft Amendment to the Master Plan for Historic Preservation: Animal Industry; Higgins Cemetery

This worksession will only address the recommendation to include Bureau of Animal Industry Building #35/119 and Higgins Family Cemetery #30/25 in the master Plan for Historic Preservation. **The Committee will not make any recommendation on the Greenwich Forest Historic District at this worksession.**<sup>1</sup>

**Background**

On April 27, 2010 the Montgomery County Planning Board transmitted to the Council the Planning Board Draft Amendment to the Master Plan for Historic Preservation: Greenwich Forest; Animal Industry; Higgins Cemetery. The amendment recommends including one historic district and two individual historic sites in the Master Plan for Historic Preservation:

- Greenwich Forest Historic District #35/165
- Bureau of Animal Industry Building #35/119
- Higgins Family Cemetery #30/25

On June 16, 2010 the Executive submitted comments on the Planning Board Draft Amendment. He fully supported the inclusion of the Bureau of Animal Industry Building and the Higgins Family Cemetery in the Master Plan for Historic Preservation.

The Council held a public hearing on the Amendment on September 28, 2010. All public hearing testimony favored the historic designation of the Bureau of Animal Industry Building #35/119 and Higgins Family Cemetery #30/25.

**Staff Recommendation**

There were no issues raised against designation in the public hearing. The Bureau of Animal Industry Building is owned by M-NCPPC. The cost of maintenance is currently and will continue to be part of their operating expense.

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<sup>1</sup> The Council has until December 16, 2010 (180 days after the receipt of the Executive's comments) to act or to defer action on the Greenwich Forest Historic District. Under Article 28 of the Maryland Code, **failure of the Council to act in any manner before December 16 will constitute approval of the amendment as submitted by the Planning Board.**

Staff recommends approving the designation of the Bureau of Animal Industry Building and the Higgins Family Cemetery as submitted.

The following are the amendments submitted by the Planning Board, including a description of the property, the reasons for designation, and the environmental setting.

### **The Bureau of Animal Industry building**

The Bureau of Animal Industry building, known as the Norwood Recreation Building, is located in the Norwood Local Park. Designed in the Renaissance Revival style, the building was constructed in two parts. The basement and first story were built in 1906. Due to budget constraints, the remainder of the building wasn't finished until 1909. The building housed the administrative headquarters and laboratories for the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Bureau of Animal Industry, which conducted research designed to advance animal husbandry.

The period of significance for the resource is 1906-1936. The nomination encompasses the historical and architectural significance of the federal Bureau of Animal Industry building. The nomination does not address the history of the site after 1936 when it became a park resource. This Amendment recommends the park buildings in the Norwood Local Park be evaluated in the future as part of a comprehensive review of park buildings in the context of the history of the Parks Department.

The resource meets the following criteria:

#### **(1) Historical and Cultural Significance**

The historic resource:

- a) **has character, interest, or value as part of the development, heritage, or cultural characteristics of the County, State, or Nation**

The Bureau of Animal Industry building is the sole surviving structure from the federal government's foremost agricultural experiment farm in the late-19th and early-20th centuries.

- d) **exemplifies the cultural, economic, social, political, or historic heritage of the County and its communities**

During a time when the nation was still significantly rural and agrarian, the experiments conducted at the farm had a direct impact on millions of Americans whose livelihoods depended on agriculture. In the building and its surrounding pastures, government scientists conducted research into animal diseases and breeding, and made discoveries that improved the nation's animal stock.

**(2) Architectural and Design Significance**

The historic resource:

- e) represents an established and familiar visual feature of the neighborhood, community or county due to its singular physical characteristic or landscape**

Located in a largely residential area and serving as a community center, the brick Renaissance Revival office building is a local landmark. Since the building is little altered and the landscape around the building still remains largely undeveloped park land, the site retains its original bucolic character.

**ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING**

The recommended environmental setting is 1.65 acres (72,005 sq ft) ... The setting includes the historic drive from Stratford Road alignment and contains mature trees west and north of the historic structure. The setting does not include playgrounds located north of the historic drive and west of the historic building.

**The Higgins Family Cemetery**

The Higgins Family Cemetery is located near the intersection of the B&O Railroad line (now CSX line) and Twinbrook Parkway, near the Rockville Pike (Rt 355) and Twinbrook Metro station. Luraner Becraft (1744-1819) and her spouse James Higgins (1733-1816) settled on this land in the 1760s, and presumably were the first buried here. For most of the 20th century, the cemetery was abandoned and vandalized, but in recent years the resource has been rescued and protected by local preservationists and Higgins Cemetery Historic Preservation Association, which includes family descendants.

The resource meets the following criteria:

**(1) Historical and Cultural Significance**

The historic resource:

- b) has character, interest, or value as part of the development, heritage, or cultural characteristics of the County, State, or Nation**

Associated with a prominent local family, the Higgins Family Cemetery survives as a reminder of the early settlements and farms that once lined the main road between Georgetown and Frederick, now known as Maryland Route 355 and the Rockville Pike.

- c) is identified with a person or a group of persons who influenced society**

The cemetery includes the grave of Revolutionary War soldier James Higgins who served as a private in the Fifth Company of the Lower Battalion of the Montgomery

County Militia. Also buried here are George and Luraner Higgins Knowles, who founded Knowles Station, which later became the Town of Kensington.

**d) exemplifies the cultural, economic, social, political, or historic heritage of the County and its communities**

James and Luraner Becraft Higgins lived on the Higgins farm and raised their twelve children here. Following the Civil War, descendants raised a sandstone monument to their ancestors and reserved the cemetery land by deed. The cemetery includes at least eleven known burials. This part of the Higgins Farm was subdivided in 1891 as Spring Lake Park, with the cemetery plot reserved. Visions of grand houses near the railroad were not realized, and the area grew into a community with modest houses in the early 20th century, and then industrial-commercial later in the 20th century.

**ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING**

The recommended environmental setting is 14,400 square feet, being Part Lot 7, Block 6. The resource is in a TMX zone, a mixed used pedestrian environment calling for 8-10 foot sidewalks and street trees. The HPC and Planning Department will need to work with MCDOT to ensure compatibility of pedestrian facilities with the historic resource.