

**MEMORANDUM**

August 26, 2010

TO: Mayor and Council

FROM: Historic District Commission

SUBJECT: HDC2010-00511 408 Great Falls Road

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**Recommendation by Historic District Commission**

The Historic District Commission (HDC) recommends historic district re-zoning for the house and part of the property at 408 Great Falls Road through the City's Map Amendment process. The HDC agreed that the property is significant under Criterion II-A (Architectural style) because it is a good example of the Colonial Revival style constructed in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; and for Criterion II-E (established neighborhood feature) because of its prominence due to the topography and siting overlooking Great Falls Road.

**Evaluation of Historic Significance by the Historic District Commission**

The Historic District Commission (HDC) considered the proposed Evaluation of Historic Significance at its July 15, 2010 meeting. The property is a single-family residence in the R-90 zone in West End. A request for Historic Significance Evaluation of Property for Demolition was submitted by the owner on May 21, 2010, and brought to the HDC in accordance with Section 25.14.d.1.(c) of the Zoning Ordinance. The HDC evaluation is based on the adopted Criteria for Historic Designation (see page 3), and our review is restricted to historic considerations. The HDC does not consider building condition, costs for rehabilitation, or future proposed uses in this deliberation. The Historic District Commission, the Planning Commission and/or the Mayor and Council could consider such issues at a future date, should the property be designated.

**Background**

The subject house was built for James and Elizabeth White Nicholson soon after their marriage in 1936, on property given to them by his mother, Mary Trail. His brother was given the adjacent property and built a home at 406 Great Falls Road. James and Elizabeth Nicholson lived at 408 Great Falls Road until their death; Mrs. Nicholson outlived her husband and died in 2007. Her nephew, Mr. Richard Culp, is the current property owner.

In 2005, the owner of 406 Great Falls Road and Mr. Culp jointly requested an Evaluation of Historic Significance on both 406 and 408 Great Falls Road, in anticipation of a residential subdivision. Staff documented both properties with MHT Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties forms, but the property owners withdrew the evaluation request prior to the HDC review.

406 Great Falls Road was evaluated for historic significance in April 2007 as a single-site historic district. While staff found significance for its history, cultural associations and architecture, staff recommended that 406 Great Falls Road had lost architectural integrity due

to alterations on the front elevation. The HDC agreed and did not recommend this for historic designation.

In 2010, Mr. Culp requested an Evaluation of Historic Significance for 408 Great Falls Road with the expectation that a potential buyer will either expand the residence or demolish it in order to build one or more houses on the property.

### **Discussion by the Historic District Commission**

A brief staff report was followed by owner and public comment. Because notices for a June hearing had been sent out, people were encouraged to send in their remarks by email or letter, and these were included in the Brief Book for the July meeting. Several people elected to also speak at this July meeting, and Mr. Culp presented his testimony with a PowerPoint for illustration.

Staff noted that there are underlying record lots that could accommodate a total of four houses on the property, although the existing house straddles a lot line. The property could undergo a resubdivision to establish new lots based on the R-90 zone.

Questions about architectural integrity were addressed, with the acknowledgement that some alterations had been made at the property, but some of these were reversible such as the use of artificial siding in the gable end. There was also discussion about the relation of this property to the original platting of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Rockville Heights subdivision, and staff noted that this related more to subsequent re-development of this original plat and therefore had 20<sup>th</sup> century significance, as an example of the edge development of Rockville at that time.

The HDC noted that the significance of the property lay, in part, in its deep setback from Great Falls Road, and that redevelopment of the property along Monument Avenue would not affect that vista. They agreed that the house was a good example of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century Colonial Revival style house, which style had evolved from its turn-of-the-century appearance.

### **Historic District Commission motion**

On a motion by Commissioner van Balgooy, seconded by Commissioner Neal Powell, and with Chair McCool voting against, the Historic District Commission voted 4 – 1 to recommend historic district designation of the property at 408 Great Falls Road on the basis of Criterion II-A and II-E, with the reduced environmental setting to include that part of Lot 6 and Lot 7 that fall within the boundaries of tax parcel 667.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Chair was concerned that a bungalow at 425 Anderson Avenue was not recommended for designation, while the Colonial Revival house at 408 Great Falls was so recommended. The Chair was not convinced that the unique topography and siting of the subject property was compelling reason, but the other commissioners felt that the property met two criteria for historic designation.

## HISTORIC DESIGNATION CRITERIA

*The following checklist to used to assist in evaluating the significance of nominated properties. Standing structures and sites, including archaeological sites, must be determined to be significant in one or more of the following criteria to be found eligible for historic designation:*

### I. Historical and cultural significance:

- A. Event: the site of a significant historic event
- B. Person: identified with a person or a group of persons who influenced society
- C. Pattern of Events: exemplifies the cultural, economic, social, political or historic heritage of the County and its communities
- D. Cultural Value: has character, interest, or value as part of the development, or cultural heritage of the City, County, State, Nation

### II. Architectural and design significance:

- A. Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction
- B. Represents the work of a master
- C. Possesses high artistic values
- D. Represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction
- E. Represents an established or familiar visual feature of the neighborhood, community or county due to its singular physical characteristic or landscape

### Historic Integrity of structure and site:

*Original site and setting largely preserved* (lot size, environmental character, trees, setbacks, streetscape)

*Outbuildings present and largely preserved*

*Original or near original condition* (all changes reversible)

*Minor alterations* (porch removal or enclosure, roof material replacement, siding added over old siding, basic mass and fenestration intact)

*Substantially Altered* (basic shape, original façade plan, windows and doors have been obscured or changed)

Level of site significance: Local; State; National