



MEMO

To: Wendy Harris and Bob Booher
Town of Washington Grove, Historic Preservation Commission

From: Daria Gasparini
Robinson & Associates, Inc.

Date: January 14, 2020

Re: Phase II Viewshed Documentation - FINAL

The purpose of this viewshed documentation is to identify and record the historic properties and landscapes that comprise the broader setting of the Washington Grove Historic District and contribute to its visual character and historic context. The National Register of Historic Places defines setting as the physical environment of a historic property that illustrates the character of the place. Setting often reflects the basic physical conditions under which a resource was built or developed and the functions it was intended to serve. The physical features that constitute the setting of a historic resource can be either natural or manmade, including such elements as topographic features, vegetation, buildings, structures, or open space. The integrity of a historic district's setting can be retained if there are visual buffers that block or screen intrusions into viewsheds, such as modern or incompatible development. This analysis does not address the internal setting of the historic district, which is also crucial to its historic integrity.

With the goal of documenting baseline conditions to help protect the historic district and preserve its broader setting, attached please find a) photographs of each property/landscape that comprise the historic setting of the historic district, b) a map detail showing each of the viewshed areas and the sightlines between the photographer and the subject of the photographs, and c) a short narrative describing the property/landscape and the significance of its relationship to the historic district.

1. WASHINGTON GROVE MEADOW CONSERVATION PARK

Description of Property/Landscape: The 12-acre Washington Grove Meadow Conservation Park is located east of Ridge Road. While the town owns the land, the park is wholly maintained and operated by the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC). The park features a native meadow habitat with forested edges and natural surface trails. Built structures are limited to park signage and an informational kiosk. Along the western edge of the park are remnants of agricultural fencing consisting of wood posts and barbed wire. Documentation of a steatite quarry in the adjacent Piedmont Crossing Local Park suggests the potential for archaeological resources within the park. The park’s open spaces, small-scale features, and views reinforce interpretation of the historic district within the context of Montgomery County’s agricultural heritage. For these reasons, in 2002, the M-NCPPC designated the meadow a Heritage Resource (rather than a Natural Resource) within its Legacy Open Space Functional Master Plan.

Significance of Relationship to Historic District: The original boundaries of Washington Grove once included a 48-acre farm on the east side of Ridge Road. This farm, which encompassed the land now part of the Washington Grove Meadow Conservation Park, was sold in 1890 to Andrew Ragan to help pay off association debt. For decades, this parcel and other agricultural resources on the fringes of Washington Grove defined its rural character and reinforced the idea of the Grove as a “place apart.” The farm contributed to Montgomery County’s strong agricultural heritage, which influenced the region’s settlement and land use patterns well into the twentieth century. Today, the park provides a critical buffer between the town and surrounding high-density residential and highway development and preserves the rural, open vistas and spatial organization of the agricultural fields that historically formed the setting of Washington Grove.



View 1A: Looking northeast from the western edge of the Washington Grove Meadow Conservation Park. The tree lines at the edges of the park have the beneficial visual effect of partially blocking views of high-density residential development on Picea View Court.



View 1B: Looking south from the northern half of the park. Tree coverage partially blocks views of residences along Brown Street and views of the salt barn located within the Montgomery County fleet management depot on Crabbs Branch Way, which has a negative impact on the broader setting of the historic district. Another visual intrusion to the setting is the cellular communications tower (at center of image).



View 1C: Looking west-southwest along a trail within the park toward 102 Ridge Road. The Washington Grove Meadow Conservation Park preserves views of Washington Grove from adjacent areas.



View 1D: Looking northeast from the south edge of the park. Vegetation diminishes modern intrusions that are present within the broader setting of the historic district, including the residential development bordering the park on the north.

2. PIEDMONT CROSSING LOCAL PARK

Description of Property/Landscape: The Piedmont Crossing Local Park is a Montgomery County property that extends from the eastern edge of the Washington Grove Meadow Conservation Park to Interstate 370. Formerly farmland, the stream valley parkland features a meadow habitat with forested edges. A trail through the park provides a local connection between the Shady Grove Metrorail Station and Amity Drive, a residential street in the neighborhood north of the park. (A second trail connecting to Brown Street in Washington Grove is currently cut off by stormwater detention construction.) A break in the tree line along the west edge of the park provides an entry point to the Washington Grove Meadow Conservation Park.

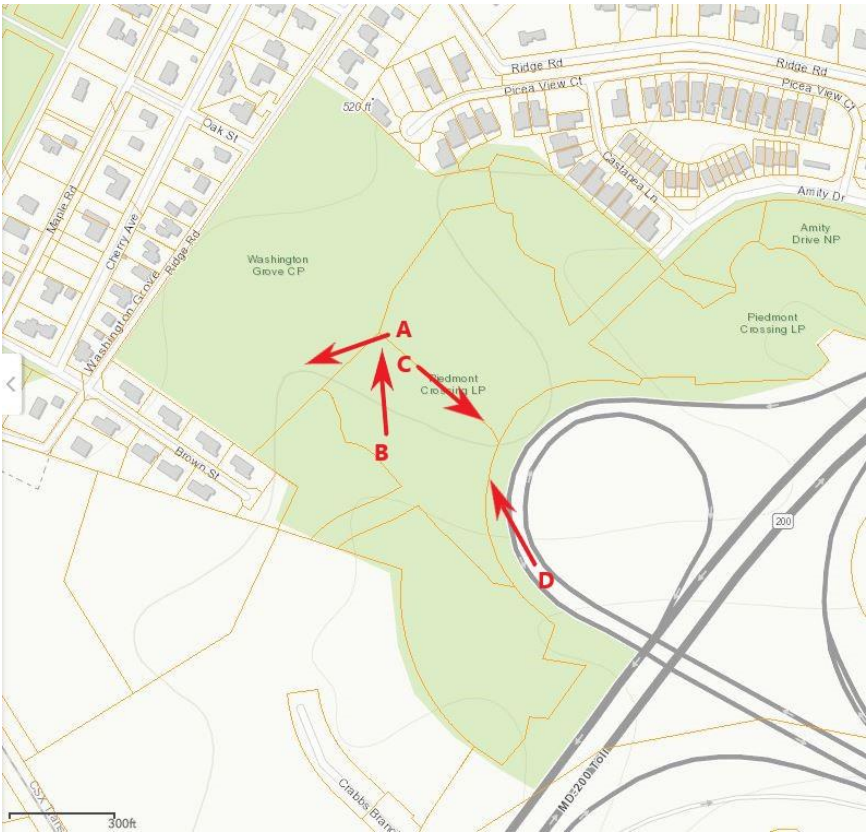
Significance of Relationship to Historic District: The park's meadow habitat and forested edges reinforce the historic rural setting of the historic district, and the tree-lined edge along the western perimeter of the park blocks noise and screens views of nearby highway and residential development. The Piedmont Crossing Local Park contains an archaeological site listed on the Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties (Site # 18MO6221, Washington Grove Steatite Quarry). The site, located within the forest buffer along the western edge of the park, is comprised of five distinct areas of archaeological interest that represent evidence of Euro-American and possibly Native American use of the area as a quarrying site. The quarry may have been used as a source of building materials for local farmers and early residents of Washington Grove.



View 2A: Looking west-southwest toward Brown Street from the break in the tree line between the Washington Grove Meadow Conservation Park and the Piedmont Crossing Local Park.



View 2B: Looking north from one of the natural surface trails within the Piedmont Crossing Local Park. The park's meadow habitat and forested edges reinforce the historic rural setting of the historic district.



View 2C: Looking southeast from the break in the tree line at the western edge of the park. Grading and vegetation screen views of the entrance/exit ramp to Interstate 370 (at center of image). Due to distances and sightlines, the interstate is not visible from Washington Grove.



View 2D: Looking northwest toward the Washington Grove Historic District from the entrance/exit ramp to Interstate 370. The Piedmont Crossing Local Park creates a buffer between highway development and the historic district.

3. METROPOLITAN BRANCH OF THE BALTIMORE & OHIO RAILROAD

Description of Property/Landscape: The Metropolitan Branch of the Baltimore & Ohio (B&O) Railroad opened to passengers and freight on May 25, 1873. It stretched from the northwest corner of Washington, D.C., to the mouth of the Monocacy River and revolutionized transportation and trade in Montgomery County. The railroad served as a corridor for growth and brought an immediate increase in county land values. It provided convenient, reliable access from Washington, D.C., to Washington Grove and facilitated the Grove's growth and development. The Washington Grove Station features a small, frame station house, waiting platform, and pull-in parking areas. The Metropolitan Branch of the B&O is listed on the Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties (MIHP # M:37-16) and was determined eligible for the National Register of Historic Places in 2000 due to its significance in the areas of architecture, community planning, economics, engineering, exploration/settlement, industry, transportation, and local history.

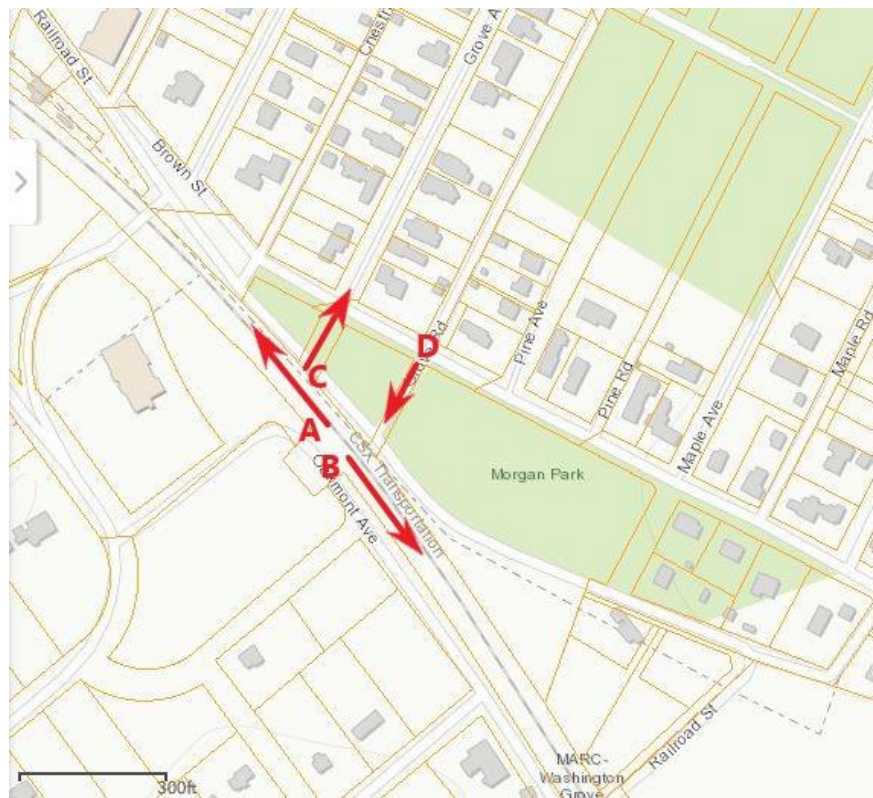
Significance of Relationship to Historic District: The Metropolitan Branch of the B&O played a central role in the establishment of Washington Grove and its evolution from a Methodist campground into a thriving suburban community of year-round residents. It carried excursionists and residents as well as building materials and camp supplies. The Washington Grove Station (in all its various iterations) was an important offloading point for residents and visitors traveling to and from Washington Grove. Views north and south along the railroad tracks from the station and views of the station from Grove Avenue were important to the experience of arriving at or departing from Washington Grove, and these views continue to contribute to the broader setting of Washington Grove. The railroad corridor extends along the southern boundary of the historic district and is a significant part of its setting due to its association with transportation and settlement in Montgomery County.



View 3A: Looking northwest from the Washington Grove Station platform toward the Humpback Bridge. The long view north along the tracks from the station was meaningful to the experience of arriving at or departing from Washington Grove.



View 3B: Looking southeast from the Washington Grove Station. Views along the rail line encompass nearby commercial buildings (including Hershey's Restaurant at right of image), engineering structures (such as the Humpback Bridge), and raiiside agricultural buildings.



View 3C: Looking northeast from the east side of the tracks across Railroad Street toward the entrance to Grove Avenue. For decades, Grove Avenue was the principal pedestrian route into Washington Grove. Its southern length followed along the crest of a ridgeline that provided a relatively dry path for residents and excursionists entering the camp meeting grounds on foot from the railroad station.



View 3D: Looking southwest from Grove Road. Grove Road historically served as the principal vehicular entrance into Washington Grove. Morgan Park, which flanks the south end of Grove Road, was officially decreed a park in 1890 due to its significance as the "front door" of Washington Grove.

4. HUMPBACK BRIDGE

Description of Property/Landscape: The Humpback Bridge crosses the Metropolitan Branch of the Baltimore & Ohio (B&O) Railroad at East Deer Park Drive. Originally built in the 1870s, it was a timber, pony truss bridge located about 600 feet northwest of the Washington Grove Station. By 1945, the bridge had become dilapidated, and the nineteenth-century structure was replaced with a three span, timber bridge with a humpback shape. In 1986, CSX Transportation Inc. took over ownership and authority of the B&O line and two years later carried out a major rehabilitation that replaced the timber beams with steel I-beams. Additional changes occurred in 2001 and in 2009. The most recent rehabilitation occurred in 2014. At that time, the bridge superstructure was disconnected from the approaches and substructure and demolished. The cap timbers of the bents were replaced with new cap timbers to raise the height of the bridge and support five new curved, steel I-beams. New wood decking and laminated guardrails were also installed. The Humpback Bridge is listed on the Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties (MIHP # M:21-220) and was determined eligible for the National Register of Historic Places in 2009 due to its significance in the areas of transportation, community planning, and architecture/engineering.

Significance of Relationship to Historic District: As one of only two bridges built by the B&O over the Metropolitan Branch, the Humpback Bridge contributes to the history and significance of the railroad. The Metropolitan Branch played a central role in the founding and development of Washington Grove, and the bridge was a significant element of the local transportation network, providing a vital east-west connection between the towns of Oakmont and Washington Grove. It provided a safe above-grade crossing for passengers and goods and facilitated communication, travel, and trade across the railroad tracks. Located immediately south of the historic district, the Humpback Bridge is an important element of its setting that reinforces its historic association with the themes of transportation and suburban growth.



View 4A: Looking northwest from the deck of the Humpback Bridge. This view encompasses a historic feed mill/silo and service yards that were constructed along the route of the railroad and are important vestiges of the area's agricultural heritage.



View 4B: Looking north-northwest from the Humpback Bridge toward the southwest corner of the historic district. Historically, Washington Grove's commercial buildings and the Odd Fellow's Hall (visible through the tree line at right of image) were clustered near the intersection of Railroad Street and Washington Grove Lane, close to the railroad tracks.



View 4C: Looking southeast toward the Washington Grove Station and the entrance to Grove Avenue.



View 4D: Looking southeast from the Humpback Bridge. Historically and today, Morgan Park provides a wooded buffer between the railroad tracks and the residential development within Washington Grove.

5. RAILROAD STREET CORRIDOR

Description of Property/Landscape: Railroad Street skirts the southern edge of the Washington Grove Historic District. For over half its length, it follows a slightly curved route that roughly parallels the alignment of the B&O Railroad tracks. The southern length of Railroad Street turns sharply southwest where it crosses the tracks of the Metropolitan Branch before coming to an end at Oakmont Avenue. This intersection is known as Aitchison Crossing. The street is level along most of its length with the notable exception of the approach to the Humpback Bridge, where it features a sharp rise and drop. Historically, the street provided access to the railroad station from points north and south. The street also linked the station with roads south of the tracks via the Humpback Bridge.

Significance of Relationship to Historic District: Railroad Street was an important offloading point for residents and visitors traveling to and from Washington Grove and a vital part of the local transportation network used by farmers and tradesman. Several buildings and structures associated with the area’s agricultural past are located along the north end of Railroad Street and on East Diamond Avenue. In addition, although originally platted for residential development, the lots at the corner of Washington Grove Lane and Railroad Street (today’s Commercial Corner) have historically been used for a mix of nonresidential purposes. The Railroad Street corridor, including its associated views, its landscape features, the buildings and structures that represent the area’s agricultural heritage, and Aitchison Crossing evoke the area’s rural past and contribute to the setting of the historic district.



View 5A: Looking southeast along Railroad Street from its intersection with Brown Street. The Railroad Street corridor encompasses the Humpback Bridge and its approaches (center of image).



View 5B: Looking west from the intersection of Railroad Street and Hickory Road. The feed mill and silos (center of image) at 671-681 East Diamond Avenue reinforce interpretation of the historic district within the context of Montgomery County’s agricultural and transportation heritage. The East Diamond Avenue property has been documented by Gail Littlefield and Judy Christensen in a draft Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties Form titled, “Gaithersburg Farmers’ Supply, Wayne Feed, Sunshine Feed, Thomas I. Fulks Store.”



View 5C: Looking southwest along Washington Grove Lane toward Railroad Street. The historic feed mill/silo along Railroad Street forms a focal point within the view from Washington Grove Lane.



View 5D: Looking east-southeast from East Diamond Avenue toward Washington Grove. Where Railroad Street ends and East Diamond Avenue begins, modern development introduces visual elements that are incompatible with the character of the historic district’s setting.

6. OAKMONT AVENUE

Description of Property/Landscape: Oakmont Avenue extends from Central Avenue on the north to just beyond Shady Grove Road on the south outside the boundaries of the Washington Grove Historic District. For a portion of its length near the Washington Grove Station, Oakmont Avenue parallels the railroad tracks. Originally a private lane, the avenue was developed as part of the subdivision of Oakmont, one of many suburban communities developed along the Metropolitan Branch of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad in the late nineteenth century. Its developers took advantage of the popularity of Washington Grove and the conveniences of the railroad station to sell lots. The parcels were smallest near the railroad station and grew progressively larger as the subdivision extended west.

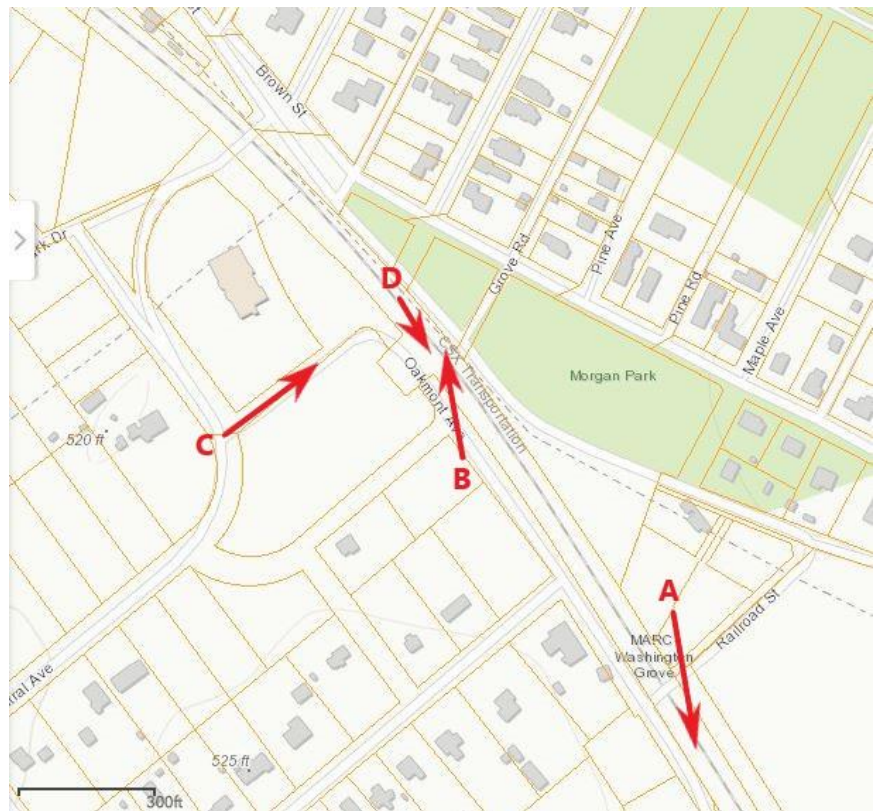
Significance of Relationship to Historic District: The subdivision of Oakmont on the west side of the tracks from Washington Grove was platted in 1888 by Henry Beard and James G. Craighead of Washington, D.C. Oakmont's development is closely tied to the history of Washington Grove. The initial plat for Oakmont included a public park that was located directly across from the Washington Grove railroad depot. The property at 17030 Oakmont Avenue (now Hershey's Restaurant) has served the Washington Grove and Oakmont communities since the late nineteenth century. For decades, it was the location of the Washington Grove post office. While many of the residential and rural settings that existed along the corridor were erased after Oakmont Avenue was rezoned from residential to light industrial, the route retains some vestiges of the past that contribute to the broader setting of the historic district.



View 6A: Looking south-southwest toward Oakmont Avenue from the forest retention area at the intersection of Railroad Street and the B&O Railroad tracks. Creating a forest buffer at this location will help minimize visual intrusions of modern development on the setting of the historic district.



View 6B: Looking north-northwest from Oakmont Avenue (in front of Hershey's Restaurant) toward the Washington Grove Station.



View 6C: Looking northeast along Oakmont Avenue from the intersection of Oakmont and Central avenues. The open space and views that define the park area at the eastern end of Oakmont contribute to the rural setting of Washington Grove. The sidewalk, recently installed by the county, reinforces the residential connection between Oakmont and the train station.



View 6D: Looking southeast from Washington Grove Station. Oakmont Avenue (at right of image) runs parallel to the railroad tracks at this location. The businesses operating from the commercial building on the right (now Hershey's Restaurant) have served the Washington Grove and Oakmont communities since the late nineteenth century, and the property is an important element of the broader setting of Washington Grove.