

# Preservation Arlington

*Protecting and Promoting Arlington's Unique Character*

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## ARLINGTON COUNTY'S MOST ENDANGERED HISTORIC PLACES LIST 2014

Preservation Arlington's 2014 list of Endangered Historic Places includes the following buildings and sites:

**Key Boulevard Apartments:** A project most thought was protected is now threatened with demolition to make way for new development

**Arlington Presbyterian Church:** A historic church designed by a prominent architect whose congregation is seeking to build a new structure

**Parkland Open Space:** Beloved local parks and open space are targeted for development

**East Falls Church Commercial:** 20th-century commercial landmarks are disappearing in this important part of the community

**Wilson School:** A 100-year-old school building is being considered for redevelopment

**Mid-Century Arlington Architecture:** A less-celebrated building type that is falling victim to rapid redevelopment

**Family graveyards:** Dozens of little-known burial grounds are in a state of disrepair and neglect



Detailed write-ups about each site follow.

## **Key Boulevard Apartments, 1537-1545 Key Boulevard**

**Historic Significance: Classic garden style housing complex**

**Threat: Demolition and replacement**

Since 2003, when Arlington's outstanding collection of historic garden apartment complexes was recognized by the National Register of Historic Places, the county has lost a significant number of these distinctive housing complexes. Historically and today, these apartments have provided affordable, quality homes for Arlingtonians. Mainly built during the 1930s through the 1950s, garden apartments were an innovative housing type that was perfected here in Arlington.



**Key Boulevard Apartments:** Built in 1943, Key Boulevard Apartments are a nearly perfect garden apartment complex with all the right details and scaling. A Site Plan Amendment application has been accepted by Arlington County to redevelop this site. The proposal seeks to amend the existing site plan and construct a new residential building with 158 units, which will include 82 affordable units and 76 market-rate units. This proposal calls for the demolition of the existing buildings.

The Key Boulevard Apartments are part of an existing site plan, approved in 1981, involving the Atrium Condominium on the south side of Key Boulevard. When the Atrium, a luxury condominium development, was approved, the Key Boulevard Apartments were included in the site plan so that the unused density (a total of 68 units) could be transferred to the Atrium building. Moving this unused density allowed the developer of the Atrium to increase the size of the building from 289 units to a total of 357 units.

This new proposal by the Arlington Housing Corporation (AHC) calls for the transfer of 100 residential units of "unused" density from a project in Ballston to Rosslyn, and the demolition of the existing Key Boulevard Apartments. The Historic Resources Inventory (HRI), which was adopted by the County Board in October 2011 to promote the preservation of important historic buildings, lists the Key Boulevard Apartments in the top third of buildings and includes them in the "Important" category.

The unused density is coming from the Gates of Ballston, also owned by AHC. The Gates of Ballston is a local historic district and has won a national preservation award from the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

*Preservation Arlington is opposed to the concept of a historic property in Ballston enabling the demolition of a historic property in Rosslyn; is concerned that the County is considering upzoning a property to enable this to occur; and, that a property on the Historic Resources Inventory is being put deliberately at risk just three years after it was adopted.*

## Arlington Presbyterian Church, 3507 Columbia Pike

**Historic Significance: Designed by prominent local architect, cornerstone has ties to George Washington and U.S. Capitol**

### **Threat: Demolition and replacement**

The 1931 Arlington Presbyterian Church at 3507 Columbia Pike is threatened with demolition and replacement, despite it being called out in the *2005 Update to the Columbia Pike Redevelopment Plan* as a “noteworthy historic property that contribute[s] to the character and integrity of the Pike.” The county’s Historical Affairs and Landmark Review Board agreed in early 2014 that it meets the criteria for local landmark designation and protection but chose to not designate the property.

The church’s congregation voted in 2013 to pursue a partnership with the Arlington Partnership for Affordable Housing (APAH) that would result in the removal of the historic sanctuary and its replacement with a 6-story, mixed-use building that would house the congregation and its childcare program and provide APAH-managed affordable housing.



Organized by 21 members in 1908, the Arlington Presbyterian Church built its first sanctuary on Columbia Pike in 1910. After that church burned in 1924, the congregation made plans to rebuild on a new lot a short distance to the east at Lincoln Street and Columbia Pike. The church hired local Arlington architect A.F. Thelander to draw up plans for a new church built of local stone. Thelander was an accomplished Arlington architect who designed many single-family homes and garden apartments in the county. The cornerstone for the new church was laid in December 1930, using the same gavel that George Washington used to lay the U.S. Capitol cornerstone in 1793. The building has been enlarged twice—in 1950 and 1961—a reflection of how the community and congregation has grown.

While Preservation Arlington supports the congregation’s and APAH’s laudable goals of providing affordable workforce housing, we believe the current proposal is short-sighted and antithetical to the church’s community-building role. This stone church is a landmark and a symbol of the continuity of that institution and its place in the community. Its loss will alter the landscape of the Pike and destroy a tangible link to the past.

*Preservation Arlington would like to see a sensitive solution that involves preservation and reuse of portions of the historic facility. We feel that a creative solution can be forged that would meet the owners’ goals and provide an interesting, human-scale, and relatable new facility that preserves a piece of the past while moving forward.*

## **Parkland Open Space**

**Lubber Run Community Center and Park, 300 North Park Drive  
Potomac Overlook, 2845 North Marcey Road**

**Historic Significance: Lands tied to recent and past history of Arlington; valuable open space**

**Threat: Redevelopment for community "good" and/or monetizing community assets**

Arlington's public parks and open spaces provide relief from our urban environment. They are a sanctuary for those who use and enjoy them but they also they provide visual and mental relief for those who just pass by.

As our county continues to grow and develop, Preservation Arlington believes we must protect our parks and un-programmed natural spaces for people to enjoy. However, proposals have been submitted for redevelopment of several spaces including: Lubber Run, Potomac Overlook Park, and the Wilson School open space.



**Lubber Run.** The original house that sat on this property was built in 1894 by the son of Senator John B. Henderson, who co-authored the 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. The house and land were given to the county to use as a community center. The house burned down in the 1950s and the current recreation center building was built in the 1960s. It has continued to serve its original purpose serving the community for 50 years.

The site has been proposed [by Arlington County](#) as a possible location for both a 600-student school or affordable housing residential project. The school proposal has been shifted to other sites, for now, and the affordable housing proposal has the site listed as a Tier 2 option, requiring more study. Both of these proposals would destroy all of the natural rolling accessible parkland around the current building and put undue burdens on the adjacent parkland.

*Preservation Arlington would like to see an archaeological study done of this park and the retention of this park and community center as a welcome oasis in our urban community.*

**Potomac Overlook Regional Park.** Owned by the Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority (NVRPA), this regional asset is completely in Arlington but controlled by the regional authority. The 67-acre park was created 50 years ago, as the first property for NVRPA, to protect quickly disappearing parkland at a time when Arlington County was undergoing rapid development. Potomac Overlook's original mission as a wildlife preserve, environmental education center, and low-impact recreational park has only become more important over time. Potomac Overlook Park was designed by a planning team from the National Audubon Society.

In early 2013, responding to budgetary pressures, the NVRPA issued a development plan for Potomac Overlook that called for the construction of several high-impact rental facilities, all designed to generate revenue, including a tree-top lookout platform, a zip line concession, and more. Although those proposals were withdrawn, concern remains that the NVRPA needs to generate more income from Potomac Overlook Park in order to offset expenses.

*Preservation Arlington wants NVRPA to continue to maintain the Potomac Overlook Park in its current natural landscape.*

**East Falls Church – Remnants of an Industrial-Commercial Hub**  
**Shreve Oil Company Retail Building, 6873 Lee Highway**  
**W&OD Siding, Fairfax Drive**

**Historic Significance: Disappearing 20th-century commercial architecture, including an example of "Googie" style building**

**Threat: Demolition in the face of commercial redevelopment**

In East Falls Church, the intersection of Lee Highway and the W&OD Railroad was once a bustling commercial and industrial hub, before the arrival of I-66 and the Metro. While much of the buildings and streetscapes associated with the 20<sup>th</sup> century industrial and commercial growth of the area was wiped away by highway construction, East Falls Church is a great community with wonderful remnants of its commercial past.



With the coming of the Metro's Silver Line, however, the East Falls Church Metro station area will be redeveloped into a major transportation hub with greater density, as outlined in the recently adopted East Falls Church Sector Plan. While redevelopment and additional density are appropriate, some of the remaining 20th-century buildings and sites should be creatively integrated into new projects. These buildings include the remaining W&OD siding, the Shreve Oil Co. building, and Cars USA, among others. The older buildings offer interesting opportunities to retain architectural landmarks, links to our past, and a pedestrian-friendly scale.

Here are some of the places that could be retained and worked into the new development:

- The last **Washington & Old Dominion Railroad track** in Arlington needs to be designated a local historic site along with stabilization efforts and an interpretive center explaining the history of the railroad and Arlington County.
- Built in 1950, the **Robert Shreve Fuel Co.** at 6873 Lee Highway is an excellent example of the small-scale detached commercial style from the early- to mid-twentieth century. It incorporates an integral sign that is typical of its era and could easily be retained for a new small business as the site redevelops.
- The **Cars USA building** at 6847 Lee Highway sits on a hemmed-in lot with limited redevelopment options. Once the location of Snyder Hardware, this building could be repositioned for a use that takes advantage of its location on the W&OD trail. Built in 1948, the building is also an interesting mid-century example of what some call the fun "Googie" architecture of the 1940s and 1950s.
- Other solidly built local landmarks include the 1930s **Verizon Switching Station** and the **Suntrust Bank** (formerly the **Arlington-Fairfax Savings & Loan**).

*Preservation Arlington is hopeful that redevelopment of the area will embrace the old buildings instead of obliterate them, their story, and the history of East Falls Church.*

## **Wilson School, 1601 Wilson Boulevard**

**Historic Significance: Designed by prominent local architect, rare example of early 20th-century institutional architecture**

**Threat: Probably demolition and redevelopment as part of a new school on the site**

The future of the Fort Meyer Heights School (aka the Woodrow Wilson School), an early Arlington County school originally built in 1910 and located at 1601 Wilson Boulevard in the Fort Myers/Rosslyn neighborhood, continues to hang in the balance.

The Wilson School, designed by prominent Richmond architect Charles Morrison Robinson, survives as the oldest extant school building in Arlington County that is still owned and maintained by Arlington Public Schools. Although it has been altered, it is the last remaining example of early 20<sup>th</sup>-century institutional architecture in the Rosslyn and Fort Myer Heights neighborhood.



In June 2013 the Arlington County Board appointed and charged the [Western Rosslyn Area Planning Study Working Group \(WRAPS\)](#) to develop a Conceptual Plan and related policy recommendations that will guide future development for the collection of parcels. In May 2014 the County Board amended the charge of the group to primarily include consideration of "a multistory school for 1300 students." The historic preservation component of the plan was changed so that it only says that the parties involved will "consider the feasibility" of incorporating architectural elements of the Wilson School building in the overall development.

Preservation Arlington encourages the county to continue its evaluation of this historic school building and its associated open space. The future utilization of the Wilson School as a community gathering place could once again provide recreational, educational, and fitness programs, activities, and services to the community. This would be essential not only to preserving an important neighborhood landmark, but also to help maintain a quality of life that is so essential to Arlington. We would like to see this handsome and solid building reused in a manner that contributes to the community and to the preservation of the site.

*Preservation Arlington believes that a building designed by a prominent Virginia architect over 100 years ago is worthy of preservation and hopes Arlington County will lead by example on this high-profile building and site.*

## Mid-Century Arlington Architecture

**Historic Significance: Examples of post-World War II modern architecture that flourished both in Arlington and across the country**

**Threat: Lack of appreciation for these buildings leads to widespread demolition and alterations**

Although it is not as celebrated and well-known as Colonial revival or Victorian era design, mid-century modern architecture reflects a very pivotal time in our nation and in Arlington County. Mid-century modernism, and its 1960s and 1970s off-shoots, reflects the optimism of post-WWII America and the impulse to move toward modernity. These designs espoused important architectural values that are now retrofitted back into buildings, such as simple, clean lines, considerable daylight, and open floor plans. Arlington has numerous classic buildings of mid-century architecture that need to be preserved before it is too late.

It might be helpful to consider that other buildings that we now treasure--Victorian homes, craftsman bungalows, and elaborate train stations--were all deemed disposable at one time, but are now highly coveted for their design as much as for their history. We need to think that way about mid-century modern, too. Examples are all over Arlington, and include such buildings as the Arlington Education Center & Planetarium at 1426 N. Quincy Street; the Charles Goodman-designed sanctuary for the Arlington Unitarian Universalist Church at 4444 Arlington Boulevard; and the Architect's Building at 1400 Wilson Boulevard in Rosslyn.



*Preservation Arlington asks that the county get ahead of the curve and conduct a formal survey of mid-century modern architecture and determine which examples are worthy of protecting as landmarks of our community's history and development. Arlington will never have 100-year-old historic landmarks if we continue to tear down all the 50-year-old buildings.*

## Family Graveyards

### **Historic Significance: Repositories of early Arlington family history**

### **Threat: Neglect, disrepair, and lack of recognition and interpretation**

Arlington County is best known for the major national cemetery at its heart, but the county also boasts dozens of little-known family graveyards. As time passes and family members and descendants grow more distant from their buried ancestors, many of these graveyards are falling into a state of disrepair and neglect. They also suffer from a lack of recognition and interpretation and some may fall prey to encroaching development.



One family graveyard of particular concern is the old Ball Family Burial Ground, located at 3427 Washington Boulevard between North Lincoln Street and North Kirkwood Road. Dating to 1814, the graveyard contains the final resting place of Ensign John Ball (1746-1814), a veteran of the American Revolution (Sixth Virginia Infantry). John Ball was the son of Moses Ball, who settled the Glencarlyn area of Arlington. Also buried in the cemetery are many of John Ball's descendents and relatives, including John Wesley Boldin, a Civil War soldier (Company D, Third Pennsylvania Cavalry), and members of the Marcey, Stricker, Donaldson, and Croson families. Today, this significant site is almost invisible, sandwiched between commercial developments along busy Washington Boulevard.

The cemetery at the Calloway United Methodist Church on Lee Highway is a perfect example of what can be done when attention is given to these neglected repositories of family and county history. The cemetery includes the graves of Civil War soldiers and former slaves of the Arlington Estate, and was an active burial site through 1959. In the decades since then, however, the graveyard had slowly deteriorated. Tombstones fell over or were lost, and burial records were difficult to discern.



The church approached the County Historic Preservation Program, which performed research, including oral history reports and census data, to determine who was buried at the Calloway Cemetery. Program staff also contracted with an archeologist who probed the site and found dozens of other lost graves and tombstones. With the church actively engaged in fundraising to repair and restore the graveyard, in 2012, the county designated the site as a local historic district, providing the strongest possible protection against harmful future

alterations or demolition.

*Preservation Arlington encourages other stewards of family graveyards to similarly seek investigation and preservation for their properties, before any more of these family histories are lost.*