

K—ST. MARY’S CHURCH HISTORIC DISTRICT OVERLAY DISTRICT DESIGN GUIDELINES

The St. Mary’s Church Historic Overlay District was established in 1972 to protect the landmark 19th century church and its environs.

GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS

- St. Mary’s Church dominates Fairfax Station Road. It is a free-standing building on a hill surrounded by a cemetery with fields beside it and across the street.
- Fairfax Station Road is a gently curving two-lane road of rural character that rises along a ridge and then turns and dips down towards the railroad to the south.
- The area southwest of the church has the feeling of a village cluster. The structures around the church are detached buildings oriented toward Fairfax Station Road, Vogue Road, and Tinker’s Lane in a traditional settlement pattern.
- The landscape is natural and informal, with fields in between house lots.
- Route 123 is a strong physical and visual barrier between the land west and east of the highway. The new houses east of the highway have no relationship to the core of the district.
- The shopping center on Route 123 is low to the ground, with unified muted colors and signage. It relates to Route 123, not Fairfax Station.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Two area families donated land to the Diocese of Richmond for a Catholic Church and cemetery in 1838, but construction did not begin on St. Mary’s Church until 1858 when a large number of Irish immigrants settled in the area to work on the Orange and Alexandria Railroad. It was the first Roman Catholic Church in Fairfax County. The church had barely been finished when the Civil War began; its strategic location near the railroad meant that it was often the site of skirmishes. The church’s most prominent role in the Civil War occurred in 1862 when Clara Barton and three assistants came to Fairfax Station to care for the wounded of the Second Battle of Manassas. They cared for 3000 men and assisted with their evacuation while battles raged within earshot. Miss Barton later founded the American Red Cross, a civilian organization dedicated to helping the wounded.

After the Civil War, Fairfax Station was a quiet, rural village with activity centered around the church and the railroad station. As the automobile became more important than the train, Route 123 was realigned to bypass the station; the portion of Fairfax Station Road within the historic district was once Route 123, the main north-south road in the area. Throughout its history, St. Mary’s Catholic Church has remained relatively

unchanged. In 1976, in recognition of its national significance as the site of Clara Barton's heroic ministry to war casualties, as well as its local significance as the center of the Fairfax County Irish Catholic community and its architectural integrity, St. Mary's church was placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

CONTRIBUTING FEATURES OF THE DISTRICT

- **ARCHITECTURE:** The church is the pivotal structure in the historic district. It is a mid-19th century, white painted, clapboard church with Gothic Revival influences. It is one story, gable roofed, with a steeple at the entrance. The window in the steeple and the four windows on the side walls are pointed arch windows. The church is on a small hill and is surrounded by a cemetery. A small, one-story, white, frame parish hall stands south of the church, on the other side of the parking lot; it is a background building.

The houses near the church within the historic district are mostly late-19th and early-20th century structures. They are set forty to sixty feet back from the road on rectangular lots and face the road. Most are one-half to one-quarter as wide as their lot, creating a consistent, though informal pattern of openings between the houses. Subsidiary buildings, such as garages or farm structures, are located behind the houses. The houses have traditional domestic features, such as gable or hip roofs (mostly gable), one-story porches, and regularly-spaced openings. Most originally had wood siding, but are now covered in aluminum siding. Porches, windows, doors and eaves have simple details with depth.

- **HISTORIC AND CONTRIBUTING PROPERTIES:** In the report substantiating the zoning amendment that established the St. Mary's Church Historic Overlay District, only the church and cemetery property (5612 Ox Road, parcel number 77-1-001-29) is listed as historic. The houses at 5703 Vogue Road (77-1-001-32A), 11101 Fairfax Station Road (77-1-001-27), 11103 Fairfax Station Road (77-1-001-144), 11107 Fairfax Station Road (77-1-001-15) and 11111 Fairfax Station Road (77-1-001-17) are considered contributing structures.
- **LANDSCAPE AND SITE FEATURES:** The northwestern corner of the historic district is wooded, which provides an essential buffer between the highway and the historic district. Most of the district is fields and yards, with scattered trees and shrubs. Informal landscaping and fences define the property lines between lots. Fairfax Station Road is essential to the character of the district; it follows a ridge and its curves frame the buildings of the district. It is also the approach road to the pivotal structure, St. Mary's church. The field across from St. Mary's along the major curve of Fairfax Station Road is an important open space which allows unobstructed views to and from the front façade of the church.

- **ARCHAEOLOGY:** The only recorded archaeological site is the church cemetery, which may have unmarked graves. The entire area, particularly near the railroad tracks and on hills, has the potential for archaeological features and artifact scatters from the Civil War era. Near the district, south of the railroad, at least one gun emplacement and camp has been found (44FX 198). The area may also contain archaeological resources related to 19th century domestic life, such as subsurface features and scatters.

DISTRICT GOAL

The original goal of the historic district was to protect the landmark church and to ensure that new structures and uses are compatible with it. An additional goal should be the preservation and enhancement of the village of Fairfax Station. Though Fairfax County once had many of these small villages built around centers of activity, such as railroad station, few tangible remains of these settlements exist. The focus of the historic district should be dual: the church and the remains of the rural settlement around it.

STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES

The following section lists standards that should be maintained and promoted in order to achieve the goals of the district. Specific guidelines suggest ways to maintain those standards.

STANDARD 1—Preserve the alignment and character of Fairfax Station Road, Vogue Road, and Tinkers Lane.

GUIDELINES

- 1.1 Maintain roads as two-lane curving roads without curb and gutter.
- 1.2 Do not alter slope or curve of Fairfax Station Road.
- 1.3 Blend new driveways with the material, scale, and design of existing roads.

STANDARD 2—Preserve settlement pattern and village cluster character.

GUIDELINES

- 2.1 New construction should be in the form of detached structures set back from the road and facing the road.
- 2.2 Lots should be rectangular with street frontage.

2.3 Setbacks should be in scale with the new construction and existing structures. Existing setbacks vary from forty to sixty feet; usually the larger the house, the larger the setback.

2.4 Avoid large expanses of pavement.

STANDARD 3—Maintain and enhance existing natural features and landscaping.

GUIDELINES

3.1 Retain natural land contours.

3.2 Retain wooded areas along Fairfax Station Road at its intersection with Route 123.

3.3 Maintain and enhance existing landscaping which screens Route 123 and the shopping center from the church.

3.4 Encourage the retention of existing fields, particularly across from the church on Fairfax Station Road.

3.5 Retain informal landscaping along roadsides and property lines.

3.6 Deciduous trees, which provide canopy, are preferred along roads, while evergreens are appropriate for screening and landscaping immediately around structures.

3.7 Avoid removal of existing healthy trees. Replace trees with like material.

STANDARD 4—Protect the historic integrity of St. Mary’s Church and its site.

GUIDELINES

4.1 Follow the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for all preservation, rehabilitation, and restoration of the church.

4.2 Protect the integrity of the grave sites and markers in the church cemetery.

4.3 Maintain the area north of the church (parcel 28) as open space and a buffer between the church and Route 123.

4.4 All exterior lights should be of simple design, without attempts at reproduction of nineteenth-century light fixtures.

- 4.5 An identifying sign should be painted wood or metal, mounted on the ground, and of simple design. It should not overwhelm or contrast with the simplicity of the church.
- 4.6 Consider the potential for archaeological resources early in the development and construction plans and mitigate adverse effects.

STANDARD 5 – New residential construction should be compatible with the existing houses and neighborhood scale and not detract from St. Mary’s Church.

GUIDELINES

- 5.1 Keep massing simple and ordered.
- 5.2 Houses should be one or two stories.
- 5.3 Houses should be low to the ground, without a high foundation or water table.
- 5.4 Compatibility may be enhanced by utilizing some of the features of the existing buildings; gable roofs, rectangular multiple-pane windows, one-story functional porches, simple chimneys.
- 5.5 Horizontal wood or artificial siding is preferred. Do not use more than one material in one building.
- 5.6 Additions should not overwhelm the scale of the street or the original building. The side or rear of the building is often the most appropriate place for additions.
- 5.7 Building heights should not exceed 35 feet.

STANDARD 6 – Subsidiary structures should compliment and not overwhelm the existing structures or landscape.

GUIDELINES

- 6.1 Subsidiary structures, such as in garages, sheds, and barns, should be located behind the main building and of a simple, functional design.
- 6.2 Fences should be wood picket fences. Do not use tall, solid privacy fences.
- 6.3 Gate posts, if used at all, should be small, simple, masonry or wood structures.

STANDARD 7—The design, materials, and signage of the nearby shopping centers, Fairfax Station Square Shopping Center and Burke Centre Condominium Offices, should be as unobtrusive in its visual relationship to St. Mary’s Church and Fairfax Station as possible.

GUIDELINES

- 7.1 The primary orientation of the shopping center will be to Route 123.
- 7.2 Do not raise heights of buildings.
- 7.3 Maintain unpainted wood-shingled roofs.
- 7.4 Maintain and enhance buffer of evergreens between rear of shopping center and Vogue Road.
- 7.5 All businesses will have similar, white, internally lighted signs consisting of the letters of the sign attached directly to the roof (as currently exists).
- 7.6 Free-standing signs shall not exceed 10 feet in height.