

I--POHICK CHURCH HISTORIC OVERLAY DISTRICT DESIGN GUIDELINES

The Pohick Church Historic Overlay District was established in 1970 to protect this landmark of colonial history. It was the first Historic Overlay District designated by Fairfax County.

GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS

- o Pohick Church, located on the highest point in the area and adjacent to heavily traveled US Route 1, is both a visual and historic landmark. Its large wooded site with substantial open space is in stark contrast with much of the surrounding developed land.
- o US Route 1--locally known as Richmond Highway--is a major four-lane arterial that traverses the center of the district from east to west.
- o South of Route 1, the district is primarily wooded open space. To the North, it is a mixture of roadside commercial structures of marginal quality along the highway with medium-density apartments and townhouses dominating the rest of the district. Most residential structures were built within the last twenty years; some of the commercial structures are older but have been substantially remodeled over time.
- o Directly east of Pohick Church is the heavily used, offset intersection of Route 1 and Telegraph/Old Colchester Roads with a distracting jumble of signs, poles, and cable mounted lights.
- o Old Colchester Road (the extension of Telegraph Road to the south of Route 1) is a winding, two-lane, tree lined road that retains a decidedly rural character. It separates the Pohick Church grounds from Fort Belvoir which, within the district, is wooded open space.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In 18th century Virginia, the parishes of the established Church of England carried out many essential civil responsibilities such as caring for the poor, processioning of land, and collecting levies. Truro Parish, the administrative office serving Pohick Church, was founded to serve Virginians north of the Occoquan River in 1732, ten years before the founding of Fairfax County. The builder of Pohick Church, Daniel French, began construction of the church in 1769 and may have based his work on a design by architect James Wren. The brick church, which replaced a wood building on a different site, was typical of the colonial Anglican churches of the time--rectangular, plain, and finely crafted. George Washington and George Mason, both church vestrymen, played prominent roles in the location and building of Pohick Church.

After the 1785 disestablishment, the Episcopal Church fell on hard times as membership declined and the various church buildings deteriorated. During the

Civil War, both Union and Confederate troops occupied Pohick Church, damaging the interior, which was repaired later in the 19th century. In the early years of this century, the interior was restored in a Georgian style thought to be similar to its original appearance. In 1968, the church was placed on the National Register of Historic Places and the Virginia Landmarks Register as an outstanding example of 18th century church architecture and because of its association with important trends, people, and events in Virginia history.

CONTRIBUTING FEATURES OF THE DISTRICT

- o ARCHITECTURE: Pohick Church, one of the nation's landmarks of colonial architecture, is a two-story, hip-roofed brick structure with stone quoins and door surrounds composed of Ionic pilasters, entablatures, and pediments. South of the church, sited so that most of its bulk is away from it, is the parish house built in 1957; its design and materials are compatible with the church. Also next to the church, to its east, is the small brick vestry house, built in 1932 from plans made in 1774. These buildings, in conjunction with the gates, walls, and cemetery, combine to make a unified complex which compliments the colonial church. Also on the church property is the brick rectory, built in 1963, located several hundred feet southwest of the church and screened from view by trees.
- o HISTORIC AND CONTRIBUTING PROPERTIES: In the report substantiating the zoning amendment that established the Pohick Church Historic Overlay District, only the church itself (Pohick Church, 9315 Richmond Highway, parcel number 108-1-001-27) is specifically listed as a historic property. No contributing properties are listed although the design of the adjacent parish and vestry houses compliment that of the church.
- o LANDSCAPE AND SITE FEATURES: Most of the district is wooded. At the crucial intersection of Route 1 and Telegraph/Old Colchester Roads, the northeast and southeast corners are wooded and form a visual frame for Pohick Church on the southwest corner. Plant materials on the southeast corner are a mixture of mature native deciduous trees, while those on the northeast are younger white pines planted as screening. Most of the Pohick Church property is wooded with mature deciduous trees as is all of the Fort Belvoir and Lower Potomac Sewage Treatment Plant properties in the district. Formal landscaping is in place in the cemetery and near the church buildings including mature hedges, shrubbery, and specimen trees in a variety of traditional species. Small branches of Pohick Creek stretch into the church property.

A low brick wall along the south side of Route 1 physically separates the church property from the highway, but does not obscure the view of the church or its grounds. The land just beyond the wall is more open and includes the church complex, the cemetery, and a large grassy field used for overflow parking. More densely wooded land to the south curves around and gives a visual frame to the church grounds.

The north side of Route 1 has a completely different feeling. Rather than a green area with a clearly defined separation from the road, this portion of the district is a barren jumble of commercial structures and parking lots which seem to sprawl over the shoulder of the highway. Some berms and planting along Route 1 help to separate the townhouse development further to the north and west of Pohick Road from Route 1, but the effort is minimal and does not match the effective definition of the church property south of Route 1.

- o **ARCHAEOLOGY:** No comprehensive survey has been done of the Pohick Church property. The site has the potential to contain 18th century features associated with its use as a church site and as an important crossroads. Most of the land south of Route 1 has not been greatly disturbed. Burials have been occurring in the Pohick cemetery since the late 18th century and unmarked graves may exist. Several prehistoric sites have been found on the Fort Belvoir property east of Old Colchester Road, outside the district. It is likely that others may exist within the district itself.

DISTRICT GOALS

By formally establishing the Pohick Church Historic Overlay District, the County sought to preserve the physical integrity of the church itself and to enhance the visual quality of the environs of this historic focal point by encouraging compatible design for future development and a maximum amount of open space and natural landscape treatments.

STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES

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

STANDARD 1--Natural topographic characteristics of the district should be preserved and enhanced.

GUIDELINES

- 1.1 Retain natural land contours.
- 1.2 Protect Pohick Creek in a natural state.

STANDARD 2--Natural landscape features--particularly traditional plant materials and tree cover--should be preserved and enhanced.

GUIDELINES

- 2.1 Maintain wooded buffers at corners of Route 1 with Old Colchester Road (NE corner) and Telegraph Road (SE corner) across from Pohick Church.

- 2.2 Preserve as much open space and tree cover as possible when considering additional development on the Pohick Church property itself.
- 2.3 Replace diseased or damaged trees with those of the same or similar species.
- 2.4 Maintain substantial landscape buffering between the Pohick Church property and the Lower Potomac Sewage Treatment Plant, Fort Belvoir, and other adjacent properties.
- 2.5 Provide longer lasting and more diverse landscaping by using species that are the same or similar to native plant materials, not merely fast-growing species.

STANDARD 3--Streets and highways within the district should be attractive routes of access both to and through the historic core.

GUIDELINES

- 3.1 Avoid encroaching upon the Pohick Church property itself for any necessary road widenings or intersection realignments; preserve the already limited land buffer between the church and the roadway.
- 3.2 Avoid constructing a grade-separated interchange at the intersection of Old Colchester and Telegraph Roads with Route 1 adjacent to the church.
- 3.3 Preserve Old Colchester Road's traditional rural and scenic character by maintaining its two-lane configuration, high roadbed relative to the surrounding terrain, tree canopy, and limited signage.
- 3.4 Consolidate road signage and replace the cable strung lights with standard mounted lights to reduce the cluttered appearance of the Route 1 and Old Colchester/Telegraph Roads intersection. Locate these standards on the corners opposite Pohick Church.
- 3.5 Maintain the tree framed vista seen from Telegraph Road south toward the Pohick Church property.
- 3.6 Provide attractive built or landscaped edges along all streets and highways within the district.

STANDARD 4--The physical integrity of the historic Pohick Church structure and its surrounding cultural landscape should be protected and enhanced.

GUIDELINES

- 4.1 Continue the visual and architectural compatibility of newer structures that are part of the Pohick Church complex.
- 4.2 Consider the potential for archaeological resources early in all construction plans and mitigate actions that would cause their loss.

- 4.3 Preserve and extend where feasible the low brick wall along Route 1.
- 4.4 Follow the standards found in Section Two of these Guidelines for all work affecting the exterior appearance of the older and newer structures that comprise the Pohick Church complex.

STANDARD 5--New construction and site development on the Pohick Church property should preserve the physical integrity of historic structures and cultural landscapes as well as protect and enhance their visual character and setting.

GUIDELINES

- 5.1 Site new structures in a way that the natural topography and landscaping screen them from the historic church.
- 5.2 Design parking lots and vehicular service areas to be well-screened, broken into smaller units, and of gravel or other non-hard surface material where appropriate.
- 5.3 Use neutral, muted colors for new structures that compliment rather than contrast with those of existing structures.
- 5.4 Design new structures to be visually compatible with but not copy the historic style of Pohick Church.
- 5.5 Use existing roads within the site, maintaining their modest scale, whenever possible. Locate new roads away from the old church, repeating the scale, materials, and edge treatments of the existing roads.

STANDARD 6--New development, rehabilitation, or remodeling of the commercially zoned properties across Route 1 from the Pohick Church site should compliment the historic architecture and cultural landscape of the church.

GUIDELINES:

SITE PLANNING AND LANDSCAPE DESIGN

- 6.1 Reduce the number of curb-cuts by consolidating site access with shared, well-defined entries.
- 6.2 Minimize the width of curb-cuts and locate them as far to the west of the intersection of Route 1 and Telegraph Road as possible.
- 6.3 Define the edges between the roadway and development, particularly along Route 1 and Telegraph Road, with plantings and low walls. As an example, see how the church property is differentiated from the roadway.
- 6.4 Locate storage and service areas away from public view and screen them with plant materials and/or berms if necessary.

- 6.5 Avoid large expanses of parking lots by breaking them into smaller units, using the sides and rear of building sites, and providing landscaping.
- 6.6 Consider providing pedestrian amenities, such as sidewalks and crosswalks of contrasting paving materials within and linking sites. Pedestrian access to the Pohick Church property is particularly encouraged.

ARCHITECTURAL MASS AND SCALE

- 6.7 Create a hierarchy of massing by placing lower buildings closer to the road and higher buildings toward the rear of the site, away from the church.
- 6.8 Consider compositions made up of smaller units that give a greater sense of human scale rather than one large, undifferentiated building facade.

ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN AND STYLE

- 6.10 Design new structures to be visually compatible with but not copy the historic style of Pohick Church.
- 6.11 Avoid designs associated with national franchises or chains and which are intended to serve as a sign or trademark.
- 6.12 Orient buildings to face the road; side elevations visible from the roadway should receive as much design attention as the primary facade.
- 6.13 Avoid large expanses of blank walls.
- 6.14 Design awnings, windows, roofs, entrances, and other building elements to be integral parts of the structure and not appear pasted on.

MATERIALS AND COLORS

- 6.15 Consider colors and materials similar to those used in the Pohick Church complex--primarily red brick and beige stone--to enhance the compatibility of new construction.
- 6.16 Use only two or three materials in any one structure or complex.
- 6.17 Keep color schemes simple and use medium- to low-intensity hues.

STANDARD 7--Signage should not overwhelm approaches to or views of the Pohick Church and its site.

GUIDELINES:

- 7.1 Limit the height of freestanding signs to not more than 10 feet.
- 7.2 Consolidate the identifying signage and historic markers on the Pohick Church property onto as few sign posts as possible.

- 7.3 Incorporate freestanding signs into their site's landscape plan.
- 7.4 Place signs as far away from the intersection of Route 1 and Telegraph Road as possible.
- 7.5 Minimize the size and number of both public and private signs.
- 7.6 Consider compatible signage design for commercial developments with more than one business.
- 7.7 Use simple, subdued color schemes; consider dark backgrounds with lighter lettering or figures.
- 7.8 Use external sources of illumination that do not spill beyond the sign.

STANDARD 8--Residential development on vacant parcels adjacent to the Pohick Church site, on other vacant sites within the district, and within existing residential areas should enhance both the approaches and views to Pohick Church and its grounds.

GUIDELINES

- 8.1 Maintain a continuous landscape buffer to continue the effect of a "green gateway" at the western entrance of the historic district from the Pohick Church site along the south side of Route 1 for not less than 200 feet.
- 8.2 Screen new construction from the Pohick Church site by preserving the existing topography and tree cover.
- 8.3 Minimize the number and width of entrances to lots or developments.
- 8.4 Screen rear elevations, rear yards, and offstreet parking from the roadway and from the Pohick Church site.
- 8.5 Use medium or low intensity colors.
- 8.6 Design infill structures to fit with the site design and architecture of surrounding development to help provide a consistent visual frame for the historic site.