

My name is Charles Kent. I live on North Overlook Drive in Alexandria. And I'm speaking on behalf of the North Ridge Citizens' Association (NRCA), for which -- as of March 15 -- I am the Immediate Past President. The initial concern about this subdivision proposal arose among the neighbors nearest to 506 N. Overlook Drive. It is clear to all concerned that the proposed subdivision will necessitate the demolition of this historic house. The Board of NRCA decided to support the requested deferral when it was scheduled to come before you on March 2. We met with Planning and Zoning staff to make sure we understood the issues, and sent the letter that you find in the supplemental materials to this item. I will not read the letter -- it stands on its own -- but simply emphasize some of the key points as to why we feel so strongly about this house and its history.

On a personal note, my first experience in North Ridge was in 1972. I was a young summer intern living in a nearby apartment when I walked past the intersection of Old Dominion Boulevard and E. Glebe Rd. In the sweltering heat of that summer, I saw the Beverley Hills United Methodist Church and yellow wooden house on the hill behind it, shaded and cooled by the mature oak canopy of the neighborhood. I said to myself, "I could live in this neighborhood."

In 1985, my wife and I bought a house on N. Overlook Drive. We knew this was a special place to live, and we learned more about it from reading "North Ridge Lore". For the past 36 years, every time I drive up the hill past the historic house, I have been proud to live in a neighborhood that retains and celebrates part of its history.

NRCA has invested a great deal of time and effort to better understand its history. Our predecessors produced the original "North Ridge Lore" in 1981 and updated that volume with "North Ridge Lore -- Revisited" in 2000. Much of the research in those books is well documented. Other parts include stories relayed by long-time residents of the neighborhood. Some of the stories in those volumes led to the nickname "Civil War House" for the house at 506 N. Overlook Dr. Other local history sources refer to the house as the "Hampshire Fractious

House.” Regardless of nickname, this house has long been a symbol of the neighborhood history – featured in both volumes of the book, and on the history page of our NRCA website.

The recent proposal to demolish this house has galvanized new energy among the neighbors to more fully understand its history. With the help of the City Archaeologist and many skilled researchers, we have learned quite a bit.

**Here’s a brief summary of what we have learned so far:**

- The dates of construction in City property records listing 1840 or 1850, have not been documented or verified.
- Civil War military maps show several roads and tracks leading to the location of the house, but do not show a structure until G.M. Hopkins identified the Hampshire Fractious house on his 1878 map. That would make the house at least 143 years old.
- We are still searching for a survey and plat by Thomas N. Carter done 26 April 1869 that may be informative as to structures in the area.
- In May of 1876, Hampshire Fractious bought 12+ acres of land including what is now 506 N. Overlook Dr at auction for \$264. This was recorded in a deed dated 18 June 1878.
- Tax and insurance records indicate that there was a structure on the property by 1878. This suggests that Mr. Fractious built the house, but there is more to be learned.
- We find Hampshire Fractious and his family living in Alexandria as early as 1865, and in the US Census of 1870 and 1880. We also have a record for Hampshire Fractious’ death in 1888.
- We do not know if Mr. Fractious was ever a slave, but the City Archaeologist found records of Sy Fractius being shipped as a slave from Alexandria to New Orleans in 1834. If Sy was related to Hampshire, then this would suggest that he and other members of his family may have been slaves at one time. This could explain why they don’t show up in earlier census records.

- Arnold Zimbros lived in the house as one of 13 children from 1926-1933. A City of Alexandria study showing the date of construction as 1933 is therefore most certainly wrong.
- We have aerial photos of the house from 1927 and 1937 showing a well-established farm surrounded by many roads and tracks, and few other structures around it.
- In the early 1930's, the house was used by the developer of the neighborhood as an office.
- In the North Ridge Small Area Plan for Historic Preservation of 1992, "506 N. Overlook Drive, House (1878), H. Fractious Estate" is specifically listed as a documented historic site.
- Finally, the previous owner, Paul Gilman, informed us that he believes the 2" pine flooring in the main hallway and dining room to be original to the house. He also mentioned that there are exposed beams in the basement that might be of value to the architectural historian.

### **Why is this important?**

As City Archaeologist says in his letter, "The house at 506 N. Overlook Drive is one of the only postbellum dwellings built by Black residents still standing in Alexandria." This makes the house more historically significant than we ever imagined. The Northern Virginia Conservation Trust has expressed strong interest in helping to protect this property. The Historic Alexandria Resource Commission and the Historic Alexandria Foundation have also expressed their support for preserving the story of this house.

There is much more to be learned about this interesting man and his family who built a house on this hill overlooking the Potomac just as the Reconstruction Era was ending and federal protections for the civil and political rights of black Americans were being withdrawn. It is important for the City of Alexandria to be allowed to further research the story of Hampshire Fractious, his family and the house that he built.

**The neighbors have made a simple request:** allow access and time for City experts to conduct an assessment of the structure and property to determine its historical significance before any irreversible changes are made to the property. The neighbors made that request in a petition submitted prior to the original March 2 hearing, and again for today's meeting.

Also, NRCA made a similar request of the owner on March 1, March 6, and April 1, suggesting that an assessment could be carried out at his convenience and not cause additional delays. This assessment could have been conducted between March 15 and 24 when the owner was out of the country. To date, the owner has not offered the access we have requested.

We ask that the Planning Commission defer a decision on the re-subdivision of this property until a proper historical assessment can be completed. If you feel you must approve this request, then please include the above-mentioned conditions – that the owner be required to allow access and time for City experts to conduct an assessment of the structure and property to determine its historical significance before any irreversible changes are made to the property. Thank you.