



Brandon M. Scott
Mayor

PLANNING COMMISSION

Jon Laria, Chair; Eric Stephenson, Vice Chair

STAFF REPORT



Tim Keane
Director

February 26, 2026

REQUEST: City Council Bill #26-0147: Baltimore City Landmark List: St. Peter's Cemetery (2310 Laurens Street and 1301 Moreland Avenue):

For the purpose of designating St. Peter's Cemetery as a historic landmark.

RECOMMENDATION: Approval

STAFF: Rachel Donaldson

INTRODUCED BY: Councilmember Bullock

OWNER: St. Peter Cemetery; St. Peter's Cemetery Restoration

SITE/GENERAL AREA

Site Conditions/Description: St. Peter's Cemetery, which was established in 1851, illustrates key aspects of nineteenth-century cemetery design. It displays elements of the mid-century rural cemetery movement through its large size and location outside of the city limits. However, it also exemplifies the "lawn-park" design that became increasingly popular during the Gilded Age, in which an emphasis on natural elements like trees and other plantings, common to cemeteries of the rural cemetery movement, were replaced with "sculpted memorials," typically obelisks. It also illustrates aspects of nineteenth-century ethnic burial practices, specifically the tendency among ethnic Catholic cemeteries to position individual gravestones in tight line formation.

In addition to headstones, historic iron fencing surrounding family burial plots, and monuments, the property also consists of the original gatehouse (contributing) and a house built by the Jonah House in the late 1990s (non-contributing). The gatehouse, which likely dates to the nineteenth century, is a single-story, three-bay structure clad in stucco with a steep side-gabled roof and a front-gabled wooden portico. The cemetery contains several areas that have been cleared of vegetation but also areas that are significantly overgrown. The land along the southern border is dominated by a large, linear mound of dirt in which broken headstones are visible.

General Area: This cemetery is located in the Bridgeview Greenlawn neighborhood in West Baltimore. It sits on a higher elevation than the surrounding neighborhood (a common siting for cemeteries). St. Peter's Cemetery is bound by an unnamed alley adjacent to N. Bentalou Street to the west, the Rosemont Gardens Apartments and Midtown at Coppin Heights housing complex along Winchester Street to the south, the Melvin H. Cade Armory (a Baltimore City Landmark) and a large industrial site to the west, and an industrial tire complex along Moreland Avenue to

the north. The neighborhood itself is largely comprised of two-story brick rowhouses developed between the 1920s and the 1950s, with a couple of schools and parks. The eastern and northern boundaries of the neighborhood are defined by railroad tracks with adjacent industrial sites.

HISTORY

Established by St. Peter the Apostle Church in 1851, St. Peter's Cemetery first opened in what was then a rural section of Baltimore County and soon became a popular burial site for Catholics in Baltimore. One significant burial occurred in 1898 when the founder of the cemetery and longtime priest of St. Peter the Apostle Church, Monsignor Edward McColgan, was buried in his family's plot. St. Peter's Cemetery hosted Catholic burials through the 1960s that included priests and congregants from other Catholic churches, notably three historically Black Catholic churches: St. Peter Claver (Baltimore City Landmark, 1982), St. Gregory, and St. Francis Xavier, along with St. Martin, a church that formed out of St. Peter the Apostle and primarily served Irish and German Catholics. In addition to churches, the cemetery was also the burial ground for girls who died while in the care of the House of the Good Shepherd. In Baltimore, there were two such institutions: one for white girls and women that opened in 1864 and another for Black girls and women run by the Magdalene Sisters that opened in 1892. According to a historical sketch of the cemetery from 1938, St. Peter's was the burial site for the Magdalene sisters as well.

The most recent burial is also that of perhaps the most famous priest in Baltimore: Philip Berrigan. Berrigan was a Josephite priest who served St. Peter Claver and was most known for his antiwar activism in the 1960s through 1980s. In 1968, Berrigan, along with his brother Daniel and seven others known as the Catonsville Nine, took hundreds of draft files from the Draft Board in Catonsville, Maryland, and burned them in the parking lot with homemade napalm. Berrigan served thirty-eight months in prison for his role in these protests and subsequently spent eleven years incarcerated for his continued activism. Berrigan and Elizabeth McAlister, his wife, co-founded the Jonah House, a faith-based social justice group, which moved into a house constructed in 1996 at 1301 Moreland Ave.

There are no previous legislative or Planning Commission actions regarding this site.

CONFORMITY TO PLANS

The request conforms to the goals and objectives of the Baltimore City Comprehensive Master Plan, specifically Historic Resources Goal 1: Expand the use of historic preservation programs and services across the City to revitalize neighborhoods and better protect more parts of our historic City, and Historic Resources Goal 2: Increase engagement with residents to tailor historic preservation programs and supports to community needs.

ANALYSIS

Background: On February 9, 2026, Councilmember Bullock introduced legislation to designate St. Peter's Cemetery as a Baltimore City Landmark. This legislation is pursuant to a request from Ms. Jennifer Johnson, founder of the Friends of St. Peter's Cemetery. This is an immediate but temporary protection for historically significant properties. This designation received dozens of letters of support from descendants of persons buried on site along with community and preservation organizations.

This is the second public hearing for this property as part of the Baltimore City Landmark designation process. The first was the Commission for Historical and Architectural Preservation (CHAP) hearing on February 10, 2026, during which the Commission reviewed and recommended approval of Landmark designation because it meets criteria 1, 2, and 3 of CHAP's criteria for designation.

Equity Analysis

1. Short- or long-term impact on surrounding community: The designation of this property as a Baltimore City Landmark will have a physical impact on the surrounding community, as this designation generally results in the preservation of significant historic sites in perpetuity. It will impede the encroachment of the property from adjacent industrial sites and lead to further efforts to rehabilitate the property—a fact that was noted in the public testimony during the CHAP hearing from a property owner whose house is adjacent to the site.
2. Impact on Baltimore's existing patterns of inequity: Because St. Peter's Cemetery was an important burial location for Black Catholics in Baltimore, the preservation of it will help to address longstanding problems of the neglect and destruction of Black burial sites that have occurred on both the local and national levels. This designation will also help to increase representation of Black history among Baltimore City landmarks.
3. Has the community been meaningfully engaged: Community members—especially those in the immediate vicinity of this property—have been engaged since the Fall of 2025 regarding the possibility of landmark designation by Planning staff. This follows from the significant efforts of Ms. Jennifer Elsie Johnson, who formed the Friends of St. Peter's Cemetery and has been working since 2023 to restore the cemetery and raise community awareness of its significance.
4. How are residents who have been historically excluded from planning processes being authentically included in the planning of the proposed policy or project: This designation will ensure that any major proposed alterations to this property, including major additions, significant alterations, or proposed partial or full demolition, would require a

public hearing in front of the Commission for Historical and Architectural Preservation (CHAP). This hearing would offer an opportunity for public testimony and input into any design proposal. There is currently no requirement for public input regarding proposed alterations to, or sale of, the property.

Community Notification:

The following organizations have been informed of this landmark designation hearing: Baltimore Heritage, Baltimore National Heritage Area, Preservation Maryland, and Bridgeview Greenlawn Community Association.

As of now, we have twenty-four letters of support for the nomination, including letters from Jennifer Elsie Johnson, advocate for this designation and founder of Friends of St. Peter's Cemetery, and her mother Sandra A. Johnson; State Delegate Sandy Rosenberg; the Maryland Commission on African American History and Culture; Johns Hopkins at Baltimore Heritage; Sammie Samuels, Director of the Irish Railroad Workers Museum; Dr. Elgin Klugh, President of the Laurel Cemetery Memorial Project; Dr. Gabrielle Dean with Johns Hopkins University; Jesse Bennet, Jr., the research coordinator at Mount Auburn Cemetery, another cemetery that is designated as a Baltimore City Landmark; Colleen Rafferty, Executive Director at Rose Hill Cemetery in Hagerstown; Zanes Cypress, President of the Omega Baltimore Foundation; Dr. Hari Close, Senior Pastor of the New Union Baptist Church; Kate Berrigan, Phillip Berrigan's daughter, who lived at Jonah House at the Cemetery in her youth; Patricia Quayle, the wife of Vincent Quayle who founded St. Ambrose Housing Aid Center and was deeply involved in the stewardship of the cemetery; and others who have ancestors buried in the cemetery or are neighbors to the cemetery.



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Director