



## STAFF RECOMMENDATION

September 18, 2007

**TO:** Historic District Commission

**FROM:** Jeffrey Winstel, AICP, Historic Preservation Planner III

**SUBJECT:** Evaluation of Significance of 801 Hungerford Drive

**DESCRIPTION:** Subdivision 0201 Parcel # P368

**OWNER:** G. D. Armstrong Co. Inc.  
PO Box 5098.  
Laytonsville, MD 20882

---

**STAFF RECOMMENDATION:** Based on an assessment of the history and architecture of the site, Staff finds that this property meets the adopted Rockville criteria for a local historic district under Criterion B, architectural and design significance, as it embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction. The building at 801 Hungerford Drive is the only modern “car culture” gas station left in Rockville and one of the very few buildings associated with Rockville Pike’s role in the town becoming a car-dependent suburban community of Washington DC in the 1950s and 1960s. The Period of Significance for the property is limited to the date of construction -- 1963. Although the building is less than 50 years old, it is considered a “Fragile or Short-Lived Resource.” According to the National Register Bulletin No. 22 “changing transportation routes, and shifts in consumer tastes have jeopardized many early ...roadside buildings. Their rate of survival with integrity from the post World War II era is very low”.<sup>1</sup>

The current owner of the site has applied for a demolition permit for the station and has received approval for a Special Exception, Use Permit and minimum lot size variance for a proposed new gas station with convenience store. The current owner is not in favor of historic designation. Consideration could be given to exploring the preservation of the building through relocation, given the “building-as-brand” nature of the building and challenges presented by the parcel size for almost any type of development.

---

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.nps.gov/nr/publications/bulletins/nrb22/nrb22\\_IV.htm](http://www.nps.gov/nr/publications/bulletins/nrb22/nrb22_IV.htm), National Register Bulletin: “Guidelines for Evaluating and Nomination Properties that have Achieved Significance within the Past Fifty Years” Section IV. Fragile or short Lived Resources.

## Architectural Significance

The building at 801 Hungerford Drive is a cement block gas station/ auto repair commercial facility constructed in 1963 and sited between a six-lane section of Hungerford Drive and the tracks of the MetroRail and MARC. The west and south elevations face the roadways. Frederick Road dead-ends immediately at the end of the subject lot. At the end of Frederick is the access ramp to the pedestrian bridge over the Metro and MARC tracks that connect to Stone Street and the Lincoln Park neighborhood.



Subject property

The one-story building is located on a corner lot and has a square footprint. The massing consists of a square set into a L-shaped corner attached to the north and east sides of the square. The L-shape rectangular sections contain repair service bays for the garage. The station is set toward the back corner of the lot, providing paved frontage. Two landscape islands, one on the corner and the other fronting Hungerford Drive, are the exception to the pavement.



801 Hungerford Drive, corner of Hungerford and Frederick, Hungerford is located at bottom of image

The building has a flat composition roof and a projecting plain cornice. The corner L-shaped section is 1-2 feet higher than the roof of the square section that fronts the building. The cornice on the square section projects out further than the cornice on the taller section of the building, providing a canopy effect. The cornice lists the type of automobile repair done by the shop: tune-ups, brakes, exhaust, tires, etc.

The square customer lobby has west and south elevations consisting of large plate glass windows that are canted forward at the top about 15 degrees. Recessed entrances are located in the center of the elevation with large angled, single-sheet glass sidewalls. The windows reach from the projecting cornice down to a one-foot high poured concrete foundation wall. Each of the two elevations contains four window panels, with the recessed entry dividing them into groups of two. The panels that are closest to the garage repair bays are not single panes – they are

jalousies. These could be replacement windows to provide additional circulation. The jalousies windows are broken and plywood sheets now cover the openings.



801 Hungerford, west (facing Hungerford Drive) and south elevations.

Along the front corner of the building are two cement planting containers, fronted by the sidewalk that appears to be the outer edge of the building's concrete pad.



801 Hungerford Drive, west repair bay

The repair bays are marked by single bay aluminum overhead garage doors divided into paired horizontal lights with two bottom aluminum panels. The rear elevations of the repair bays contain two, 6-light vent windows set side-by-side near the top of the wall. The north elevation has a corner cement block half wall abutting the wall and fronting a side door.



801 Hungerford, Rear (north and east) elevations.

## Building Type

The first gas station in the country was built in 1907 when a Standard Oil of California bulk station used an old water heater mounted on a stand to dispense gasoline. By 1910 gas was dispensed from underground tanks and curb pumps started appearing all over the country.<sup>2</sup> The first off-street filling station was built in Pittsburgh in 1913. Early gas stations were designed to look like small houses. By mimicking the current architectural styles they fit in with the community and became accepted parts of the built environment. An early gas station in Montgomery County was the Kensington Service Center (1926) a Bungalow type form that is a contributing resource in the Kensington Historic District.<sup>3</sup> The Takoma Park Historic District contains two historic gas stations: a Tudor Revival model with stone trim openings and a half-timbered gable, and the only remaining Art Deco gas station in the county.

After the Interstate Highway Act of 1956 there was a great emphasis on high-speed visibility. When GM designer Harley Earl took airplane tailfins and put them on the Cadillac, these dramatically angled forms became an icon of American design and architecture. This design idiom is found locally on the 1948-54 Twin-brook subdivision houses.

Even in this small gas station, the angled forward pitch of the windows suggest an era when automobile related buildings reflected the thrill of speed that new cars and the new highways provided. With increased speeds, these buildings needed taller and brighter signs, and buildings that had forward aerodynamic forms.

## Historical Development

In 1959, Arthur H. Bowie and Kenneth T. Sullivan conveyed the piece of land that is now 801 Hungerford to the Thriftway Oil Corporation. The state property tax records show the current gas station was built in 1963. The 1961 City of Rockville directory has 23 listings for gasoline stations, most of which were on Rockville Pike.<sup>4</sup> The 1968 Rockville City Directory also identifies 23 Gas Stations. Most of these are affiliated with the large oil companies of the time, such as Adams Gulf Station, or Cannon's Esso, or Crouch's Texaco. Many listed themselves as places to service the car, rather than gas stations. Listings include Johnson's Esso Servicenter (a popular hybrid descriptor), Beall's Esso Servicenter, Dilworth's American Service Center, and Dodson's Texaco Service.

The 1968 Rockville directory lists a Rockville 66 Auto Service at 801 N. Washington Street. Based on the surrounding addresses and directory notations, it appears that the 801 N. Washington gas station now has the address of 801 Hungerford. The directory listings for Washington note that Frederick Avenue intersects at 800 N. Washington, and Frederick Road begins after 802 N. Washington. This section of Hungerford Drive was once known as Washington Street. In 1975, the roadway was widened to six lanes. The Metrorail came through in 1984 and the area around the gas station became increasingly built up.

---

<sup>2</sup> Wayne Henderson, Gas Stations: Landmarks of the American Roadside (Osceola, Wisconsin; Motorbooks International, 1994), 5.

<sup>3</sup> Claire Lise Cavicchi, M-NCPPC, Places from the Past: The Tradition of Gardez Bien in Montgomery County (Silver Spring, Maryland; M-NCPPC, 2001), 45.

<sup>4</sup> The Peerless Rockville collection of 1960s Rockville City Directories only has 3 editions, 1961, 1968, and 1969.

In 1975, Carolyn and Morton Alper were the owners of the station at 801 Hungerford. In 1995 Morton O. Alper passed away and the property was handled by Robert J. Tyrell, Trustee for the Melvin G. Alper Charitable Remainder Unitrust. In 1997 the property was sold to G.D. Armstrong Co. Inc. which handles bulk oil and precision urethane products.

### **Cultural and Social Significance**

The Phillips Petroleum Company began in 1917 and became Phillips 66 in 1927 when the company test drove a vehicle running on its new fuel along Rt. 66 and the car's speed was 66 mph. The first Phillips 66 gas station was built in that year in Wichita Kansas, and has been preserved as a historic site. The original shield logo was in black and orange, which was changed to a red, white and black color scheme in 1959.

During the 1950s and 1960s, Phillips expanded its gasoline marketing nationwide and entered the West Coast market in 1966 when it purchased Tidewater Oil Company's Flying A stations in several states along with a refinery. In 1967, Phillips became the nation's second oil company to sell and market gasoline in all 50 states with the opening of a Phillips 66 station in Anchorage, Alaska. Phillips 66's era in 50-state marketing was short-lived due to a number of factors. The company withdrew from gasoline marketing in the northeastern U.S. in 1972 and sold off the former Tidewater/Flying A properties in California and other West Coast states in 1976.

In *Rockville: Portrait of a City* Eileen McGuckian describes early 1960s Rockville Pike as the “ancient thoroughfare” that became a four-lane divided roadway with commercial enterprises of every type.<sup>5</sup> Businesses identified include a general store, Montrose Motors and Dixie Cream Donut Shop, followed by drive-in restaurants Morrell's and McDonalds. The Rainbow Motel, Hank Dietle's tavern and Wheeler's funeral home completed the mix of old and new, until the strikingly different Congressional Shopping Center was constructed with its 4,000 car parking lot. This area of Hungerford Drive (formerly North Washington Street) developed similarly to Rockville Pike south of Town Center upon completion of Hungerford Drive in the early 1950s.

The gas station at 801 Hungerford is one of the last remaining 1950s – 1960s automobile oriented buildings in Rockville. It does not appear to have any important association with a particular gasoline company, or significant person. The owners, Morton and Caroline Alper, do not appear in city directories from the 1960s and 70s, the Montgomery County Historical Society's biography files, or obituary files. The gas station is one of the few remaining gas stations in Rockville that hasn't been renovated or updated.

---

<sup>5</sup> Eileen McGuckian, *Rockville: Portrait of a City*, (Hillsboro Tennessee, Franklin Press, 2001), 153.

A gas station at 1910 Rockville Pike dates from 1966 and could be categorized as Neoelectic with its stone facing and cedar shake shingled mansard roof.<sup>6</sup>



1910 Rockville Pike

Another gas station that was surveyed as part of Peerless Rockville's Recent Past initiative is found along Veirs Mill Road.



1907 Veirs Mill Road

This is 1968 station is constructed of brick and has vertical aluminum panels. The double shallow gable front and the tall wide brick chimneystack are reminiscent of a modern ranch house from the 1960s and 70s. Jackle and Sculli's *The Gas Station in America* refers to a very similar station as "The results of 'face-lifting' and 'top-hatting': an oblong box modified in the Shell's 'ranch' style".<sup>7</sup>

Both the Veirs Mill and Rockville Pike stations differ from the 801 Hungerford Station in that their architecture has more in common with popular residential architecture of the time as opposed to being distinctly a part of "Car Culture".

<sup>6</sup> Virginia and Lee McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses*, (New York, NY, Alfred A. Knopf, 1986), 487.

<sup>7</sup> John A. Jackle and Keith A. Sculle, *The Gas Station in America* (Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 150, Figure 5.24.



21615 Laytonsville Road,  
Laytonsville

A gas station in the Montgomery County crossroads of Laytonsville is owned by G. D. Armstrong, who also owned the station at 801 Hungerford from 1997 until recently. Although the building is almost an exact duplicate of the 801 Hungerford station, it was built two years later in 1965 and was always owned by G.D. Armstrong. Mr. Charles Owen, long time resident of Laytonsville and current Mayor, said that he remembered this station as a Phillips 66 station and thought it had been there since the late 1950s or early 60s.

An archivist for the ConocoPhillips Corporation was consulted about the 801 Hungerford Drive station. Judging from a current photograph of the station, Archivist Jenny Brown stated that she believes the station type was used in the 1960s but the style looks more like a 1950s station. She sent the following photos illustrating the use of the floor to ceiling slanted glass windows.



Bartlett, Oklahoma, 1953



Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, Will Rogers  
Airport, 1956

In addition to the similarity of the slanting or canted display windows, the service garage doors have the identical two-tier horizontal panes with bottom panels. The similarities with the Laytonsville and Hungerford Drive stations extend to the buildings' massing. The 1950s buildings depicted in the ConocoPhillips archives clearly have one principal façade – they don't seem to be located on a corner lot. The Laytonsville and Hungerford Drive stations are located on corner lots. The corner lot prototype appears to be the same building, except for the two-bay service garage being split, with one bay being attached to the far sides of the square customer service area with the big slanted windows.

The prototype building associated with a specific business or product is sometimes referred to as franchise architecture. Part of the package purchased by individual entrepreneurs, the

architectural style helped maintain a chain identity in a highly competitive market place.<sup>8</sup> After WWII a massive franchise industry developed. Returning veterans and displaced farmers had the opportunity to realize the American dream of owning and running their own business, achieving personal and financial independence. Signature architecture became the cornerstone of the franchise business in the 1950s and early 60s. In the mid 1960s, the most successful franchise business, McDonalds, did away with signature architecture, separating the signature feature (golden arches) from the actual building. Franchise identity became portable and the buildings were more conventional and easier to recycle into other commercial uses

The “Rockville Historic Buildings Catalog” identifies only one building associated with the roadside architecture along Rockville Pike -- a different type of a structure that also dates from the 1960s. Dixie Cream Donuts was constructed in 1965 – a rectangular 1-story building with large display windows, a pyramid roof and a small Colonial Revival style cupola vent with a pyramid roof. The building currently houses a Subway franchise.



1402 Rockville Pike, former Dixie Donuts

The building fronts a small parking area of an access road along the pike and is surrounded by other commercial real estate.

The gas station at 801 Hungerford Drive is a Phillips 66 prototype station from the 1950s and early 1960s. These “buildings as advertisement” have strong association with the franchise era and economic boom of the 1950s and 1960s. There are very few commercial buildings on Rockville Pike or in the City of Rockville that have this historic association and have not been modified. In addition, the iconic value of the “vintage” gas station has great association with America’s “car culture”.

#### Existing Planning Documents

A review of the City of Rockville Comprehensive Plan and the Historic Resources Management Plan does not discuss roadside architecture nor does it reference this commercial area as containing historic resources. In addition, the building is not only less than 50 years old, the 2002 City of Rockville, Comprehensive Master Plan places emphasis on buildings constructed prior to 1945.

---

<sup>8</sup> Barbara Rubin, “Ideology and Urban Design” Annual of the American Association of Geography, (Vol. 69, No. 3, September 1979), 353-5.

The Comprehensive Plan goes on to state that “the desires of the community within the proposed districts, the advantages and disadvantage of designation, and financial or fiscal benefits or burdens associated with designation, and other factors” should be considered when creating new districts.<sup>9</sup> The 801 Hungerford Drive address has received numerous citations for abandoned cars, trash, and overall lack of maintenance. Redevelopment of the site could easily be seen as being in the community’s best interests. The financial and fiscal burden of designation could be viewed as not only what the property owner has already put into planning for the redevelopment of the site – including city approvals, but the limitations that designation would place on the already limited development potential of site. Redevelopment of the site requires variances given the small size of the parcel.

The significance of the property is the primarily due to its building type, as opposed to its setting. The prefabricated gas stations of this era were designed so they could be assembled easily and salvaged easily if they proved unprofitable.<sup>10</sup> The design intent was not rooted to a regional culture or sense of place. Relocating the building could serve the purposes of preserving the building type. In order to respect the planning that the owner has put into the site, the commission could recommend that the owner allow the property to be offered for removal for a 30-day period.

Archeological resources: Low potential

The property and adjacent properties have been used for commercial strip development and have undergone extensive roadway repairs and repairs. The potential for significant soil disturbance is great and any context for artifacts would have likely been negated.

---

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Jakle and Sculle, 150.

CHAIN OF TITLE

**801 Hungerford Drive**

1959 Arthur H. Bowie and Kenneth T. Sullivan to Thriftway Oil Corporation L 2591, F 185

1975 Thriftway Oil Corporation to Morton O. Alper, et al L 4660, F 141

1994 Melvin G. Alper and Jane L. Alper to Robert J. Tyrrell, Trustee, L 13266 F 434

1997 Robert J. Tyrrell, Trustee to G.D. Armstrong Co., Inc. L 15090 F 228

### Historic Designation Criteria Checklist

The Historic District Commission (HDC) uses the following checklist to assist it in evaluating the significance of nominated multi-resource and single-site historic districts. Standing structures and sites, including archeological sites, must be determined to be significant in one or more of the following criteria to be found eligible for designation:

#### A. Historical and cultural significance:

- A. Is the site of a significant historic event
- B. Is identified with a person or a group of persons who influenced society
- C. Exemplifies the cultural, economic, social, political or historic heritage of the County and its communities
- D. Has character, interest, or value as part of the development, heritage or cultural characteristics of the City County State Nation

#### B. Architectural and design significance:

- A. Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction

The gas station at 801 Hungerford is a 1950s Phillips' 66-prototype station that reflects the aerodynamic styling of roadside architecture of the era and the branding as building practices of franchising Phillips 66 to all 50 states in the country.

- B. Represents the work of a master
- C. Possesses high artistic values
- E. Represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction
- F. Represents an established or familiar visual feature of the neighborhood, community or county due to its
- G. Singular physical characteristic or landscape

#### Historic Integrity of structure and site:

"Substantially Altered" (basic shape, original façade plan, windows and doors have been obscured or changed)

Minor alterations (porch removal or enclosure, roof material replacement, siding added over old siding, basic mass and fenestration intact)

Exterior alterations to the property appear to be limited to replacement of the solid pane windows on the ends adjacent to the garage bays with jalousie windows, which have been broken and are boarded from behind.

Original or near original condition (all changes reversible)

Outbuildings present and recognizable

Original site and setting largely preserved (lot size, environmental character trees, setbacks, streetscape)

Environmental character has been altered due to encroachments from the widening of Hungerford Drive and the addition of Metro tracks and pedestrian bridge over tracks. Historically, the B & O RR tracks would have been at grade and Frederick would have continued through to Lincoln Park.