



# State of New Jersey

## DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION COMMUNITY INVESTMENT AND ECONOMIC REVITALIZATION HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE

501 East State Street

P.O. Box 402, Mail Code 501-04B

Trenton, New Jersey 08625-0420

Tel. (609) 940-4312 • Fax (609) 984-0578

[www.nj.gov/dep](http://www.nj.gov/dep)

**PHILIP D. MURPHY**

*Governor*

**TAHESHA L. WAY**

*Lt. Governor*

**SHAWN M. LATOURETTE**

*Commissioner*

March 8, 2024

HPO Project #24-0428-2

HPO-C2024-050 PROD

Jason Hanusey

Triad Associates

*Via email at [jhanusey@triadassociates.com](mailto:jhanusey@triadassociates.com)*

Dear Mr. Hanusey,

As Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer for New Jersey, in accordance with 36 CFR Part 800: Protection of Historic Properties, as published in the Federal Register on December 12, 2000 (65 FR 77725-77739) and amended on July 6, 2004 (69 FR 40544-40555), I am providing consultation comments for the following proposed undertaking:

**Middlesex County, Edison Township  
Hands of Hope Shade Structure  
US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)  
Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)**

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**Summary:** The subject property, St. James Episcopal Church, was previously found to be eligible for listing in the New Jersey and National Register of Historic Places (C.O.E. 1/17/1990). The HPO finds that the surrounding Piscatawaytown Burial Ground is also eligible for listing in the New Jersey and National Registers of Historic Places under Criteria A and D in the areas of Social History, Ethnic Heritage, and for the potential to yield important new information in history. **This is a new SHPO Opinion.** The proposed undertaking will have no adverse effect on historic properties.

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Thank you for providing the Historic Preservation Office (HPO) with the opportunity to comment on the potential for the above-referenced undertaking to affect historic properties. The comments below are in response to your letter and supporting documentation received by the HPO on February 7, 2024.

### **800.3 Initiation of the Section 106 Process**

The Township of Edison proposes to use HUD CDBG funding to construct a shade structure at 2136 Woodbridge Avenue, Edison, Middlesex County, in support of the Hands of Hope Food Pantry. According to the documentation submitted, this shade structure will be mounted on an existing concrete pad at the rear of the property and will therefore not result in any new ground disturbance.

### **800.4 Identification of Historic Properties**

The subject property encompasses St. James Episcopal Church, located at 2136 Woodbridge Avenue (Block 351, Lot 2). This historic property was previously determined to be eligible for inclusion on the New Jersey and National Registers of Historic Places (C.O.E. 1/17/1990).

Based on the review of available documentation, it is my opinion as the Deputy Historic Preservation Officer for New Jersey that the **Piscatawaytown Burial Ground**, located at 2136 Woodbridge Avenue (Block 351, Lots 1, 2, and 3), is individually eligible for inclusion on the New Jersey and National Registers of Historic Places under Criteria A and D. The Period of Significance for this cemetery is 1693, the date of the earliest known interment, to 1910 the date of the last known interment in the “Colored Burial Ground” portion of the cemetery. This Period of Significance covers the foundation of the municipal cemetery, the events of the 1776-1777 Revolutionary War activities that took place here, as well as the African American component of the burial ground (see specific criteria significance discussed below). The Piscatawaytown Burial Ground is bounded on the northern side by Woodbridge Avenue, on the southern side by Germantown Avenue, and on the eastern side by Park Way. The western edge of the cemetery borders residential lots along Church Street (Block 350, Lots 1.01, 4.02, 6.01, 8.01, and 11.01). The Piscatawaytown Burial Ground cemetery overlaps with the borders of the eligible St. James Episcopal Church property. **This is a new SHPO Opinion.**

The Piscatawaytown Burial Ground is eligible under Criterion A in the area of Social History for its association with the earliest historic-period development of Edison Township, New Jersey. The cemetery meets Criteria Consideration D for cemeteries due to its great age (circa 1693 or earlier) and direct association with the seventeenth-century European settlement of the immediate Edison Township area. This area, originally founded in 1666 and known as “Piscataqua”, was formerly encompassed by Piscataway Township before being subdivided and renamed Edison Township in 1954. Documentary evidence notes that the Freeholders of the Township of Piscataqua were originally granted two tracts of municipal land, one for a municipal burial ground, at this location in 1695. The same documents also note that the earliest known headstones in the cemetery date to 1693, indicating that the land was already in use as an unincorporated burial ground before its official 1695 appropriation. This makes the Piscatawaytown Burial Ground one of the earliest municipal burial grounds in the state. Note that while the property currently encompasses the eighteenth-century St. James Episcopal Church, the cemetery pre-dates the church and has since its inception been unaffiliated with any one religious organization.

The Piscatawaytown Burial Ground is additionally eligible under Criterion A in the area of Ethnic Heritage: Black for its association with the historic African American community in the region. Documentary evidence, as well as a historical marker, indicates that there is a segregated “Colored Burial Ground” section



of this cemetery, located in the southwestern corner. A limited number of headstone dates in this section range between the 1830s and the 1910s, although the precise number and range of burials has not been confirmed. This represents one of the few segregated cemeteries in the region, an important part of Edison history reflective of African American experiences and mortuary expression in New Jersey in the pre- and post-Civil War eras. Although the “Negro Burial Bill” of 1884 banned racial discrimination in all New Jersey cemeteries, the presence of several African American burials in this section dating to the 1890s and later may speak to the presence of family plots or perhaps to continued segregation after the passing of the bill.

Further Criterion A significance for the Piscatawaytown Burial Ground is based on the presence of unique Revolutionary War burials on site, as evidenced through documentary records associated with St. James Episcopal Church. One of the original buildings on the property, the circa-1724 church that predated the current church on site, was documented to have been used as a barracks for the 42<sup>nd</sup> Regiment of the British Army from December 1776 to June 1777. Historic documentation indicates that a skirmish took place in this general area during the Revolutionary War, and defensive earthworks were excavated somewhere at the northern edge of the property. Documentary sources evince that British casualties of that skirmish were interred in a mass grave within this earthwork trench, although the precise location of this trench would need to be confirmed by formal research and analysis performed by a professional archaeologist or historic preservation professional.

The Piscatawaytown Burial Ground is eligible under Criterion D for its potential to yield important new information regarding the early development of Edison (formerly Piscataway) Township. Previous archaeological survey by the Archaeological Society of New Jersey within the boundaries of this resource has demonstrated the archaeological potential of the property, including evidence for the possible structural remains of an earlier seventeenth-century church or municipal meeting house within the northeast section of the cemetery grounds. Historic documentation of the property notes that the original “Town House” dating to the late seventeenth century may also remain archaeologically within the northwestern corner of the cemetery, although this has never been subject to formal excavation. Please note that sources differ on the precise nature and location of these two potential archaeological resources, although the remains of a structure were identified in the northeastern corner of the cemetery, along with an associated historic-period artifact assemblage. Consequently, the Piscatawaytown Burial Ground has demonstrated potential to yield important new information in history regarding the organization of municipal town centers in the late 1600s in New Jersey and the archaeological characteristics of seventeenth- through nineteenth-century public spaces.

Further background research and archaeological investigation within the Piscatawaytown Burial Ground may identify additional Criterion D significance. For example, formal archaeological survey could confirm the location of the aforementioned mass grave of the British 42<sup>nd</sup> Regiment within remnant Revolutionary War-era earthworks. The use of military earthworks as expedient mass graves for soldiers has been previously documented at other Revolutionary War sites in New Jersey, specifically Red Bank Battlefield Park in Gloucester County, and represents a distinct wartime burial practice. Confirmation of such a feature within the Piscatawaytown Burial Ground could be achieved through additional professional archaeological survey informed through ground-penetrating radar (GPR) survey. If present, this mass grave would comprise a potentially individually eligible component of the larger burial ground due to its discrete, single-



episodic nature and as a unique burial type. Exploration of this resource could provide significant new information in history regarding expedient mortuary practices during the Revolutionary War, especially in the context of small, rural cemeteries and minor skirmishes.

Further Criterion D significance could be achieved through additional professional archaeological survey and analysis of the historic-period burials within the Piscatawaytown Burial Ground. This has the potential to reveal important new information regarding the demographics of the population interred here, the social organization of the burial ground, and the sequence and stratification of interments over 300+ years of active use. Additional research could help to further illuminate the “Colored Burial Ground” section and its contributing characteristics. Further, archaeological analysis of the burials within the Piscatawaytown Burial Ground can answer any number of potential research questions regarding mortuary practices, burial and skeletal degradation over time, and the varied osteological characteristics of the individuals who have lived in Edison Township over the course of its long history. Any additional survey to address these research questions would need to be conducted by professional archaeologists with previous experience in cemetery excavation and the analysis of human remains who meet the Secretary of the Interior’s *Professional Qualifications Standards* for Archaeology (48 FR 44738-9).

Finally, additional research can clarify if the Piscatawaytown Burial Ground and the associated St. James Episcopal Church comprise a larger potential historic district. This historic district may encompass both the Piscatawaytown Burial Ground and St. James Episcopal Church, as well as the former Piscataway Commons (also referred to in available documentation as the “Town Green” and the “Training Ground Commons”). The Piscataway Commons is historically public open space located directly south of the two properties, in the present-day Swales Park. According to documentation on file at the HPO, this town center may have at one time encompassed the public green, the church, the burial ground, and other buildings including a schoolhouse, a meeting house, and a jail in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. As an early example of a nucleated municipal square in the region, this district may possess Criterion C significance as a designed landscape, as well as Criterion A significance in the area of Social History. Some of these former historic resources may be extant as archaeological remains within Swales Park and the surrounding residential lots, suggesting a possible Criterion D significance for the district, as well. Additional formal research by a historic preservation professional would be necessary to confirm the presence of this potential historic district.

### **800.5 Assessment of Adverse Effects**

Edison Township intends to utilize HUD CDBG funding for the construction of a new freestanding shade structure at the rear of the subject property. The proposed project will make use of an existing concrete foundation at this location and will result in no new ground disturbance. Therefore, the installation of the shade structure is unlikely to impact any archaeological remains related to either the St. James Episcopal Church or the Piscatawaytown Burial Ground. The HPO finds that the proposed project meets the Secretary of the Interior’s *Standards for Treatment of Historic Properties* and has determined that the project as proposed will have **no adverse effect** on either the eligible St. James Episcopal Church or Piscatawaytown Burial Ground. Pursuant to 800.5(c), if no consulting parties object to this finding within the 30-day review period, the project may proceed, as proposed, unless resources are discovered during project implementation, pursuant to 800.13.



### **Additional Comments**

Thank you for providing an opportunity to comment on this proposed project. If additional consultation with the HPO is needed for this undertaking, please reference the HPO project **24-0428** in any future calls, emails, submissions or written correspondence to expedite your review and response. If you have any questions regarding historic architecture, please contact Emma Connolly of my staff at [emma.connolly@dep.nj.gov](mailto:emma.connolly@dep.nj.gov). For any questions related to archaeology, please contact Lucy Bianchi of my staff at [lucy.bianchi@dep.nj.gov](mailto:lucy.bianchi@dep.nj.gov).

Sincerely,



Katherine J. Marcopul  
Deputy State Historic Preservation  
Officer

KJM/VM/JBL/LB/ECC

Copy: Metuchen Edison Historical Society (metuchenedisonhistory@gmail.com)

