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	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
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Buckhead Heritage Society fights grave removal

By **Laura Braddick**
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A public hearing on an application to remove graves from a historic Buckhead cemetery will be held at 4 p.m. June 10 at Atlanta City Hall.

The application was made to the Urban Design Commission for a Certificate of Appropriateness III to remove graves from the Mount Olive Cemetery located at 431 Pharr Road adjacent to the entrance of Frankie Allen Park.

The .22-acre plot contains about 45 marked and unmarked African-American graves. The cemetery, which was a part of Mount Olive Methodist Episcopal Church, is the only remaining landmark of the once thriving African-America community known as Macedonia Park.

Originally settled by freed slaves after the Civil War, the community grew in 1921, when developer John Owens created an African-American subdivision and named it Macedonia Park. The community was home to about 400 residents. In the 1940s, Fulton County began condemning and buying property in the neighborhood until only two original residents remained.

The Buckhead Heritage Society has stepped forward to oppose the application.

"We don't want to see that last remnant lost," said Executive Director Christine McCauley.

She said she saw the application as an attempt at "a systematic removal of the history of the area."

Sally Silver, a Neighborhood Planning Unit B board member, began investigating the situation after she was contacted by the landowner, Brandon Marshall.

She discovered that the cemetery was sold to Marshall by Fulton County in December 2006 for \$58,627 because the property apparently has a tax lien on it.

"I believe the land was mistakenly sold," said Ms. Silver, "because the property was still owed by Mount Olive Church."

Because they are nonprofits, churches do not pay taxes.

Ms. Silver said she did not know what Marshall originally planned to do with the land when it was purchased, but after she informed him of the history of the landmark, his concerns turned to whether the graves were being desecrated or maintained properly.

Marshall could not be reached for comment via phone or e-mail at press time.

Possibilities for preserving the land and setting the county's potential mistake with Marshall are being sought said Ms. Silver.

"It would always be maintained as green space under parks and recreation," she said, "but they say they don't have the means to keep up another cemetery."

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