



## **Mt. Olive Cemetery**

### **Update**

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#### **For Immediate Release**

Contact: Erica Danylchak, Executive Director, Buckhead Heritage Society, 404-467-9447,  
[edanylchak@buckheadheritage.com](mailto:edanylchak@buckheadheritage.com)

On March 15, 2010, the Atlanta City Council voted to deny a developer's application to remove graves at Mt. Olive Cemetery on Pharr Road in the heart of Buckhead's commercial district. Mt. Olive Cemetery is the last physical remnant of Macedonia Park, an African American community that once flourished where Frankie Allen Park is today. Since the filing of the application, Buckhead Heritage has been vigorously opposing the developer's efforts.

In March of 2009, an application was made to the City of Atlanta by Community Renewal LLC for a Certificate of Appropriateness III to remove graves from Mt. Olive Cemetery, located at 431 Pharr Road, adjacent to Frankie Allen Park. Fulton County erroneously sold the cemetery for "back taxes" even though cemeteries are exempt from ad valorem (property) tax. The current owner, Community Renewal LLC, purchased the property for the amount of those back taxes and subsequently filed the application to remove the cemetery.

Of the Atlanta City Council's decision, Buckhead Heritage Society Executive Director, Erica Danylchak, said, "We are extremely pleased by the Council's decision to deny the developer's application to disturb this historically significant site. We view this vote as a win for preservation in Atlanta."

Mt. Olive Cemetery is all that remains of the Macedonia Park neighborhood – one of Buckhead's few historic black communities. The Mount Olive African Methodist Episcopal Church, which was located adjacent to Pharr Road, was formed by newly freed slaves after the Civil War. In 1921, developer John Owens laid out a formal subdivision called Macedonia Park for the African American residents in the area. Macedonia became a thriving community and included 400 residents, three churches, two grocery stores, barbers, a blacksmith, and restaurants.

In the 1940s, Fulton County began to systematically remove residents by condemning and purchasing the properties in Macedonia to make way for a park. Bagley Park, the home of Buckhead Baseball, was built in 1952 and was named after William Bagley, a prominent black businessman and resident of Macedonia Park. Bagley Park was renamed Frankie Allen Park in 1980 after beloved umpire Frankie Allen.

Located at the entrance to Frankie Allen Park, Mt. Olive is a .22 acre historic cemetery containing approximately 45 – 100 marked and unmarked African American graves.

After a series of hearings before the Atlanta Urban Design Commission, the Commission voted on December 9, 2010, to recommend that the Atlanta City Council deny the application. On March 9, 2010, the Atlanta City Council's Community Development / Human Resources Committee voted unanimously to deny the application to remove Mt. Olive Cemetery. On March, 15, 2010, the full City Council voted 11 to 1 to deny the application.

"It has been an honor for Buckhead Heritage to work with Elon Osby, a descendant of William Bagley, to oppose the application before the Atlanta Urban Design Commission and the Atlanta City Council. We hope to

work with interested parties to develop a preservation plan for the cemetery once the ownership issue is resolved. We feel that the cemetery presents a unique opportunity to educate the community about its cultural heritage.”

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**3180 Mathieson Drive, Suite 200, Atlanta, GA 30305**  
**404-467-9447, [www.buckheadheritage.com](http://www.buckheadheritage.com)**