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In 1882, Isham Jackson and Odie Daniel Hazelman purchased a one-acre parcel of land in **Gainesville** for \$10.

Mount Pleasant Baptist Church needed a new home. So, on behalf of the church, the two men secured the site.

The historic African American church began as a "small, log cabin-type structure" on Old Carolina Road, said Lillian Blackwell, the church's clerk and a **Gainesville** resident.

Decades ago, development pressures forced the church to move – literally.

"They put the church on a horse-drawn wagon and moved it to the new site" a little more than a mile away after the state needed the land to construct Route 29, Blackwell said.

Today, Mount Pleasant Baptist Church still stands on Route 29. It is a welcoming, cream-colored brick building with a rust-colored roof, window frames and door. The church and its cemetery are bordered by thick woods to the north, east and west and Route 29 to the south, near Carver Road.

Once again, development is pressuring the church, but with much less drastic consequences.

A proposal is on the table to build about 230 houses around the church and its cemetery on about 82 acres. The Prince William Board of County Supervisors will hear the matter July 22. The site of the project, called Hopewell's Landing, is roughly bounded by Route 29, and Old Carolina and Carver roads. The proposal, by developer D.R. Horton Inc., includes buffers, fencing and easements to separate the development from what's there. The development falls under the county's Interstate 66-Route 29 sector plan, according to a county planning staff report.

Members of the church said they do not have a problem with the proposed development, as long as the density levels are reasonable and there's a plan for keeping up with traffic gridlock. Several church members have sold their properties to D.R. Horton for the project.

"People aren't really opposed to it," Blackwell said. "We realize that things change."

The church's cemetery, which sits behind it, is one of the largest – if not the largest – black cemetery in Prince William County, said Eugene Scheel, a local historian and mapmaker.

Scheel designated the church on an African American heritage map he created in 2000 and has called it an extremely important landmark.

Scheel said he does not think the development is harmful to the church and cemetery as long as there is a good buffer.

"We've had very good cooperation with the church and the neighbors," said Jay du Von, an attorney with Walsh, Colucci, Lubeley, Emrich & Terpak PC for D.R. Horton. "We don't want to do anything that would be detrimental to the church or the graveyard."

Du Von said that the project might entail relocating one grave that is between a quarter-mile and half-mile west of the cemetery.

"It's off by itself for whatever reason," du Von said, adding that his client is talking to Mount Pleasant church members about the situation. "If it doesn't work out, we'll leave it where it is," he said. "If the pieces fall in place, we can do it fine. If not, it'll stay where it is."

The church's history is intertwined with the history of a largely black neighborhood known as "**the Settlement**," where some families trace their lineage back 150 years. Two neighborhoods went by that name, one west of **Gainesville** and the other south of Catharpin.

Blackwell's father – and many others from the church – grew up in **the Settlement** in **Gainesville**.

Blackwell and Nimrod Dade, a deacon with the church and a **Gainesville** resident, said that the church traditionally has been

the center of a tightly knit community. The church's membership, which is still mainly African American, is about 120, Blackwell said.

But, in recent years, people have spread out and some older members have died, she said.

Members are not surprised at the growth that has taken place around them.

"I figured when they got to Linton Hall Road, we were the next one to fill up," Blackwell said. "So it'll be full pretty soon."

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