

The Birdwood Mansion Rehabilitation Project

Phase I Archaeological Survey

Management Summary

Rivanna Archaeological Services, LLC
March 20, 2019

In February of 2019 Rivanna Archaeological Services performed a Phase I archaeological survey of an approximately 2.2 - acre portion of the historic core of Birdwood, a property owned by the University of Virginia Foundation located in Albemarle County, Virginia.

Current development plans for the project area call for the rehabilitation of the main residence including the construction of a new southern porch and new utilities. Additional landscape elements include the construction of new hard-surfaced walks surrounding the mansion and an oval shaped path in the south lawn, tent supports in the formal eastern garden, and new road construction and widening (Figure #1). Areas chosen for Phase I survey were based on the proposed plans for the mansion and surrounding grounds and included an approximately 1.5 - acre core area immediately east, west and south of the main residence, and four smaller areas to the north and east totaling approximately 0.7 acres (Figure #2).

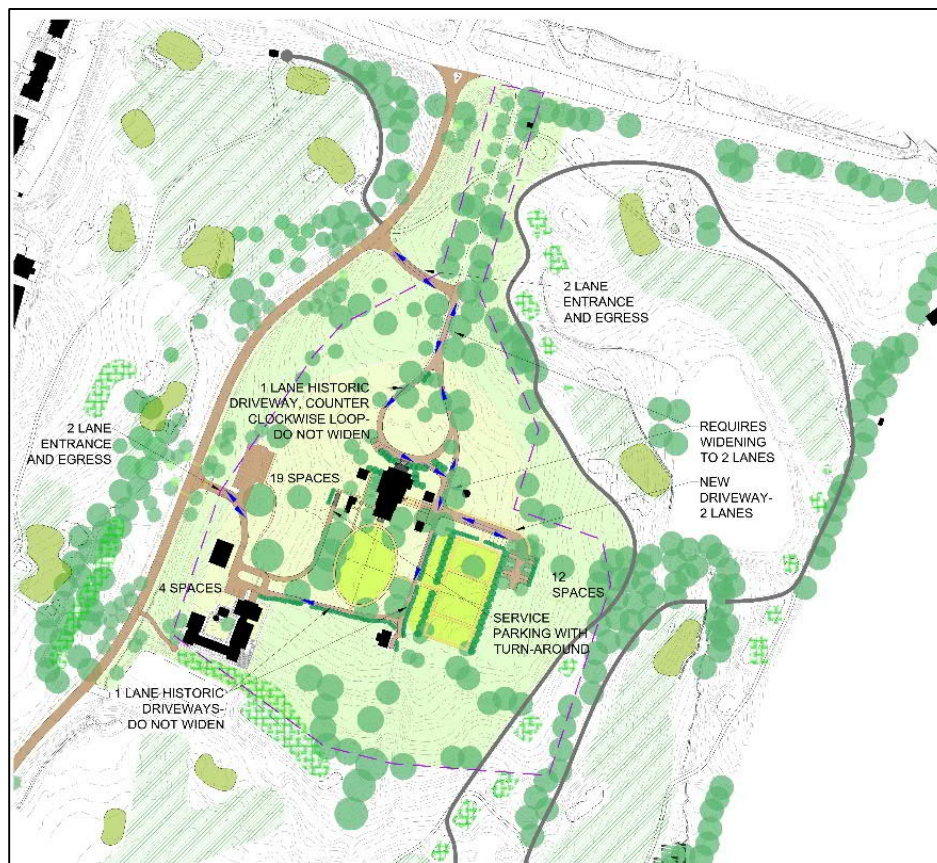


Figure #1: Map showing current development plans for Birdwood.

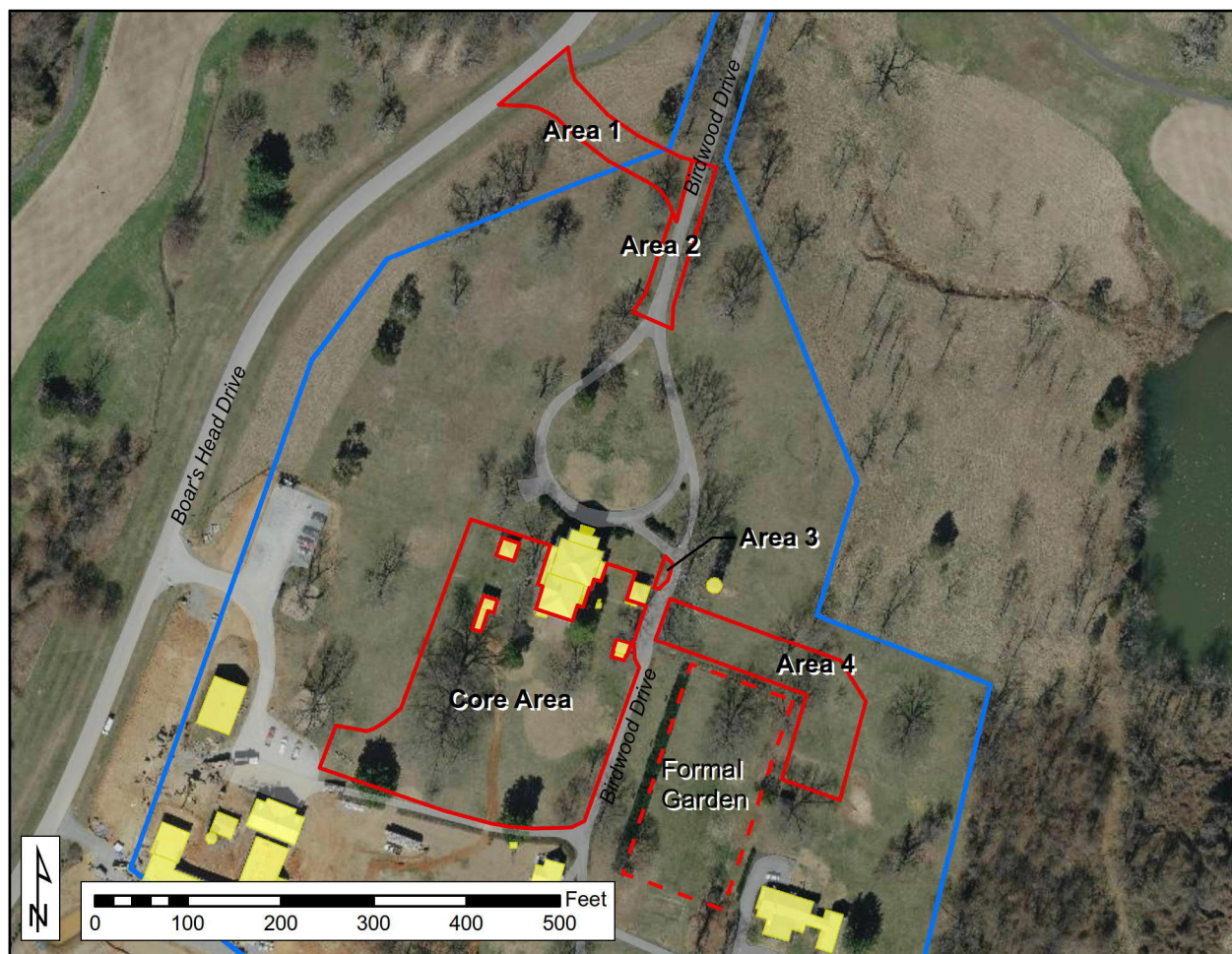


Figure #2: Birdwood Rehabilitation project area showing red-outlined areas targeted for Phase I survey and construction monitoring. Blue outline is 11-acre National Register property.

The Birdwood mansion (002-0003), including an 11-acre parcel surrounding the main residence, was listed on the Virginia Landmark Register and the National Register of Historic Places in 2003. A single archaeological resource, a low-density sheet midden of nineteenth-century material culture located west and southwest of the Birdwood mansion (44AB0690) and identified during Phase I investigations associated with the University of Virginia Indoor Golf Practice Facility,¹ is known to be present within and adjacent to the 11-acre National Register listed Birdwood core. Beyond Birdwood proper, only three previously identified archaeological sites are located within a one-mile radius including a low-density prehistoric site containing non-diagnostic lithics (44AB0265), a small site containing sparse nineteenth to twentieth-century domestic material culture (44AB0264), and the remains of an early twentieth-century springhouse (44AB0419).

The goals of the Phase I archaeological survey were to identify archaeological deposits and features located within the project area, to collect information on site size and function, date of occupation,

¹ See Steve Thompson, Phase I Archaeological Survey of the University of Virginia Indoor Golf Practice Facility, Birdwood Tract, Albemarle County, Virginia. Report Submitted to the University of Virginia Foundation. (Charlottesville: Rivanna Archaeological Services, LLC, 2018).

and preservational integrity, and to make a preliminary assessment of significance and evaluate the need for additional archaeological investigations. Phase I survey relied on the manual excavation of systematically placed test pits. Test pits measured approximately 1.25 feet in diameter and were excavated to culturally sterile subsoil. All soils were screened through ¼-inch mesh hardware cloth to ensure consistent artifact recognition and recovery. Field forms were completed for each shovel test pit recording location, depth, stratigraphy and artifact content. Shovel test pits were excavated at 20-foot intervals within the sensitive 1.5 - acre core area west, east and south of the mansion, and at 40-foot intervals elsewhere. A total of 166 shovel test pits were excavated during the Phase I survey (Figure #3).

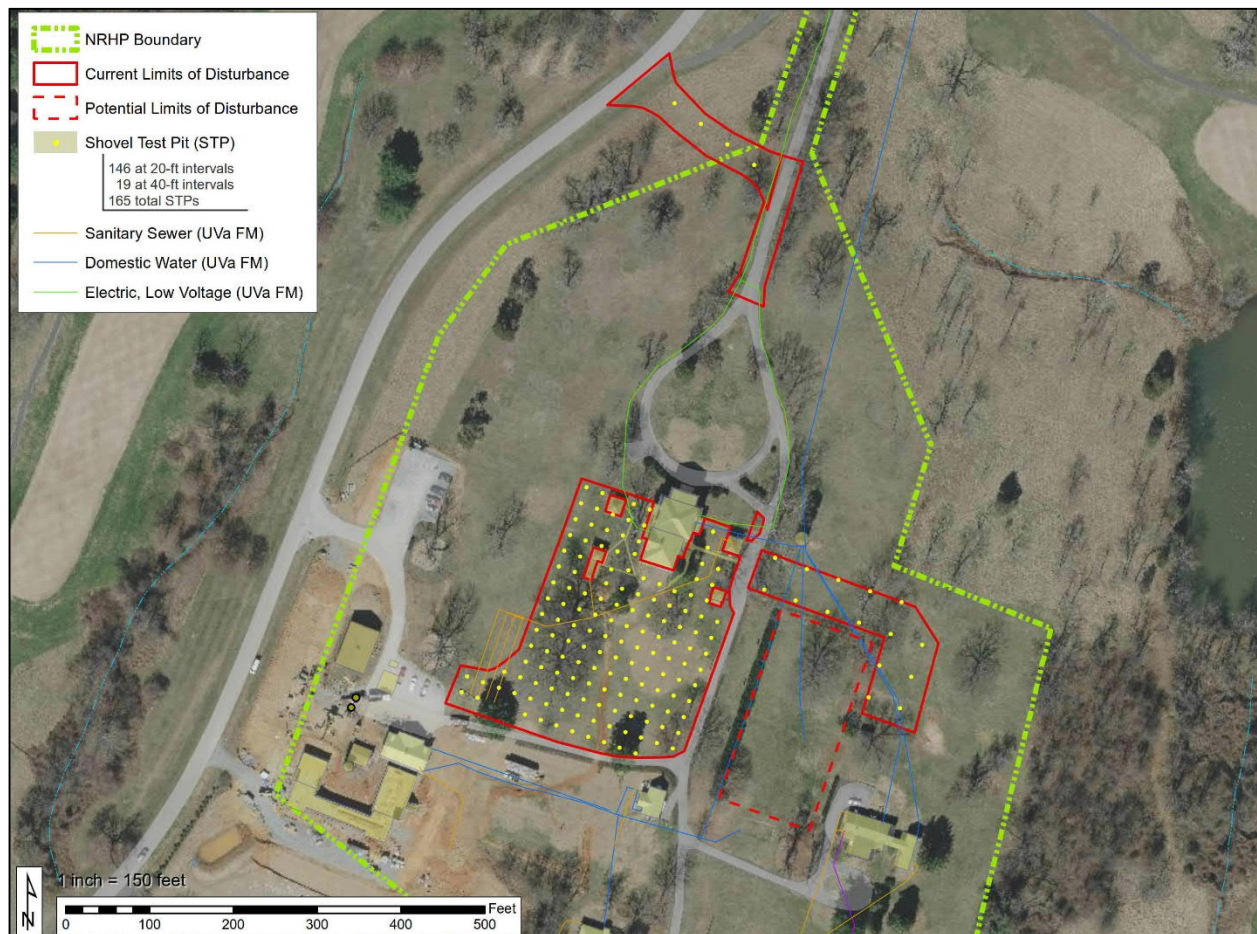


Figure #3: Birdwood Rehabilitation project area showing location of shovel test pits.

Soils within the project area were quite variable in color, texture, and depth and were dependent upon location. For much of the core area south of the mansion three strata were identified including an approximately 0.4 to 0.7-foot thick brown silty loam and root mass, an approximately 0.3 to 0.6-foot thick underlying light red-brown sandy silt interpreted as a leached eluvium, and subsoil occurring at between 0.9 and 1.15 feet below grade. Towards the extreme southern end of the core area soils appeared to be truncated, possibly due to road construction, widening or surfacing in this area, with sterile red clay subsoil occurring at between 0.5 and 0.7 feet below grade.

West of the line of hickory trees southwest of the mansion, deeper and more complex soils were identified. Disturbed strata in the form of redeposited subsoil and heavily mottled fill soils were identified within the southern half of this area. A mottled red-brown sandy loam, approximately 0.6 to 0.7 feet thick and interpreted as a potential plowzone, was also identified overlying a red clay subsoil at approximately 0.9 – 1.5 feet below grade. Towards the north end of this area, and particularly west of the southwest outbuilding, numerous test pits contained concentrations of brick bats and rock with an overlying dark red-brown loamy midden of varying thickness containing many artifacts.

Modern disturbances, in particular trenches and fill deposits associated with the construction of a sanitary drain field, were identified in numerous test pits in the extreme southwest portion of the core area particularly in lines B and C.

East of the core area, and in the proposed new parking lot, soils were also variable. Closer to the entrance road and the northeast and southeast outbuildings, soils possessed a 0.7 to 0.8 foot red-brown silty loam topsoil underlain by a paler red-brown sandy silty leached eluvium. Subsoil occurred at a depth of between 1.1 and 1.25 feet below grade. Significant quantities of artifacts were found in line P adjacent to and east of the entrance road. Further east and surrounding the northeast corner of the formal garden, soils were shallower with evidence for a thin plowzone and a truncated subsoil identified at between 0.5 – 0.7 feet below grade.

North of the mansion and in the area where a new road connecting Birdwood Drive with Boar's Head Drive will be constructed, soils were also shallow and less well-developed with a potentially deflated red-brown loamy plowzone. Subsoil was identified at between 0.4 to 0.8 feet below grade. No material culture was recovered from this area.

A total of 1184 artifacts were recovered from the Birdwood Mansion Rehabilitation project area reflecting a nineteenth to early twentieth-century domestic assemblage including significant quantities of architectural materials (brick, pane glass, nails) and tableware ceramics and glass, heavily weighted to the second half of the nineteenth century. As anticipated, the predominant quantity of material culture was recovered from within approximately 60 - feet of the Birdwood mansion² with artifact density falling off steeply to the south (Figure #5). Of note, an 1849 U.S. gold dollar coin was recovered from test pit E15 (Figure #4).



Figure #4: 1849 U.S. gold dollar recovered from test pit E15.

² The original core of Birdwood is believed to have been built by William Garth ca. 1832. No evidence of an earlier residential structure within the project area is known.



Figure #5: Distribution of all artifacts recovered from the Birdwood Rehabilitation Phase I archaeological survey. Darker colors represent greater numbers of artifacts recovered from each shovel test pit.

Four potentially significant cultural features associated with the nineteenth to early twentieth-century use and occupation of Birdwood were identified during Phase I fieldwork (Figure #10). Feature 1, a network of brick paved walks limited portions of which were exposed at ground surface, was identified adjacent to the eastern, western and southern facades of the Birdwood mansion. The paths connected the mansion with its surrounding outbuildings. The predominant paving pattern was a running bond laid perpendicular to the direction of the walk with border bricks laid on their side. One section of paving possessed a herringbone pattern. All of the brick-surfaced paths were dry-laid and most were identified only 2 – 4 inches below grade (Figures #6 and #7).

Feature 2, a broad stone-surfaced area, was identified between the northwest outbuilding and the mansion. The stone surfacing, first identified in shovel test pit G15 (Figure #8), was composed of medium sized tabular stones placed in soil identified at approximately 1.0 feet below grade. Probing of adjacent soils in all directions indicated that this feature possessed a formal northern edge equivalent with the northern façade of the northwest outbuilding, and extended to the eastern façade of the northwest outbuilding, to approximately 20 feet west of the west façade of the mansion, and approximately 10 feet to the south. The apparent east-west orientation and limited extent of the stone surfacing suggests it may represent a formal path linking the northwest outbuilding with the mansion. The fact that it underlies the brick paved paths in the area suggests that it also predates them.

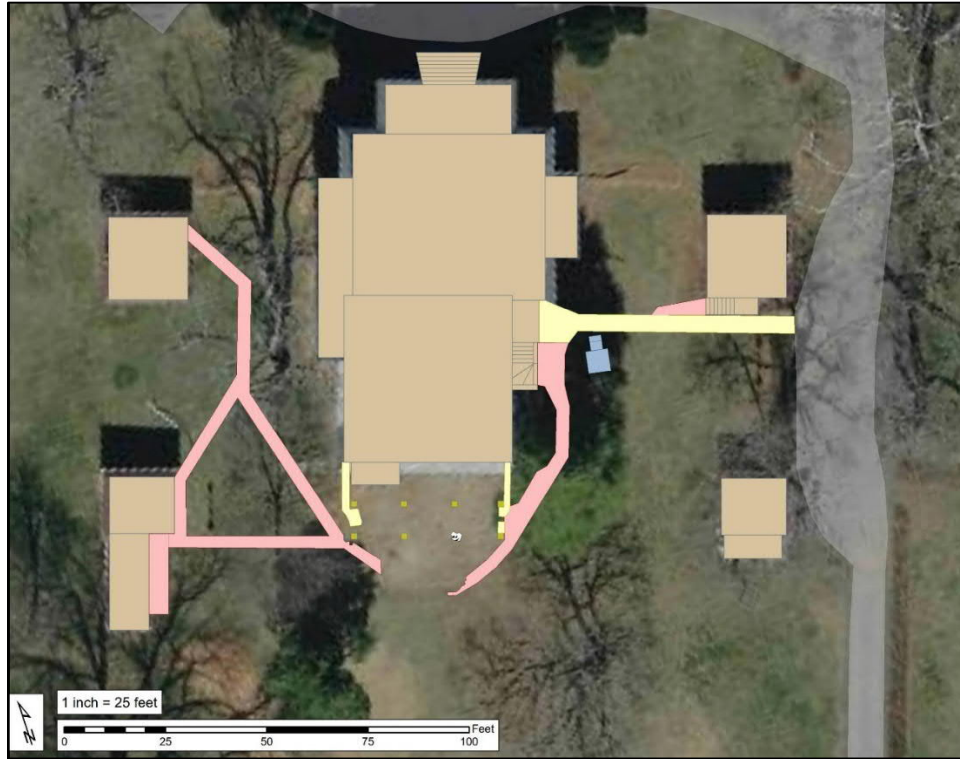


Figure #6: Feature 1 historic brick paths (pink shading), and concrete paths and drainage features (yellow shading) surrounding the mansion. A buried cistern (blue shading) is located off the east façade of the mansion.



Figure #7: Brick path just below sod leading to doorway in east façade of northwest outbuilding.



Figure #8: Shovel test pit G15 showing large tabular stone laid in a formal surfacing approximately 1.0 foot below grade.

South and west of the southwest outbuilding a deep and artifact-rich midden deposit was identified in an approximately 20 by 80-foot area in test pits D9 through D13, and E9 through E13. In addition, significant concentrations of stone and/or brick bats, possibly representing a formal hard surfacing, were identified in shovel test pits E7 (Figure #9), E10 and E12. Taken together, the midden and areas of stone and brick concentrations overlapping with one another are designated feature 3.

Figure #9: Shovel test pit E7 showing concentration of stone and brick, possibly a formal surfacing approximately 0.8 foot below grade.



South of and adjacent to the southeast outbuilding a deep and artifact-rich midden deposit, feature 4, was identified in four adjacent test pits, M9 – M11, and N9. The midden was characterized by rich, organic soils extending to depths of 1.3 to 1.8 feet below grade. In test pit M9 a potential dug feature was identified, while in test pit N9 a possible post-hole feature in line with the east façade of the southeast outbuildings was also identified. A total of 146 artifacts were recovered from these four test pits (avg. = 36.5 artifacts per hole).

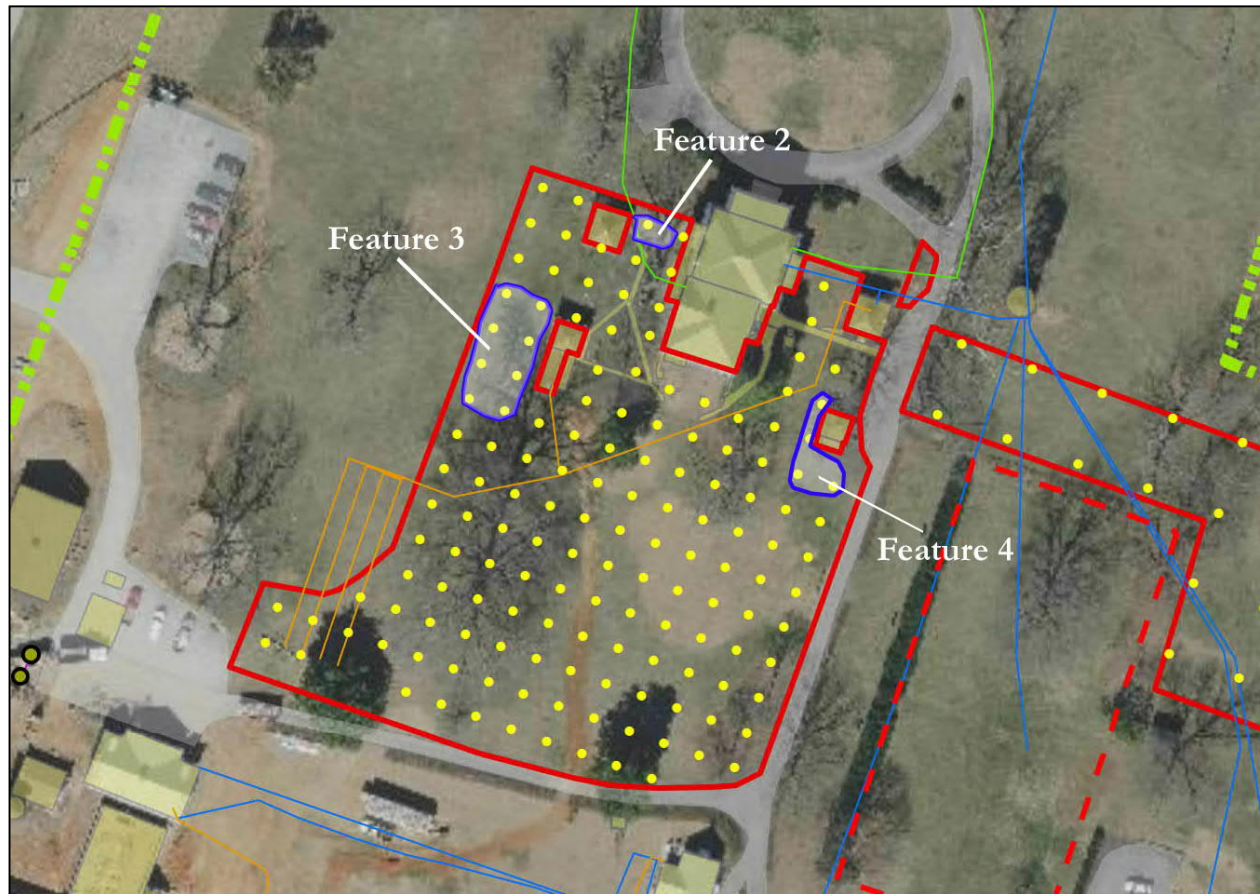


Figure #10: Birdwood Rehabilitation project area showing location of potentially significant cultural features identified during Phase I shovel testing.

In summary, Phase I shovel testing within the approximately 2.2-acre Birdwood Mansion Rehabilitation project area identified four areas containing potentially significant cultural features that will require sensitivity during future planning and construction phases: feature 1 a network of brick paved paths located between 3 and 5 inches below grade and running east, west and south of the mansion; feature 2 a broad area of stone surfacing located 1.0 foot below grade between the northwest outbuilding and the mansion; feature 3 an area composed of artifact rich soils and isolated portions of brick and stone concentrations; and feature 4 an artifact rich midden deposit with potential dug features located south of the southeast outbuilding (Figure #10).

Based on initial communication of the findings of the Phase I survey with the University of Virginia Foundation on March 5, 2019, it was determined that only feature 3 located west and south of the southwest outbuilding may potentially be impacted by proposed future development. In this location

a service road is proposed to be constructed linking the parking area north of the indoor golf facility with the mansion. It is anticipated that construction of the road corridor will adversely impact any cultural features located within its path. Because of the anticipated impact, it is recommended that additional limited large unit excavation take place in this area prior to construction. The goal of the large unit excavation would be to define, identify and determine the significance of the artifact-bearing midden and isolated portions of hard surfacing south and west of the southwest outbuilding.

The new brick pathways proposed to be built in the yard areas to the east, west and south of the mansion are anticipated to be shallow constructions extending no greater than 8 – 12 inches below grade. Because of the low impact, no additional archaeological investigations are warranted in the locations of the new brick pathways. It is recommended however that if construction of the new brick pathways have the potential to impact soils below 12 inches, that additional large excavation units be placed in the location of the feature 1 stone surfacing located between the northwest outbuilding and the mansion to document and further identify the function and age of this broad area of paving.

Based on communication from the University of Virginia Foundation, it is believed that the historic cistern located between the mansion and the northeast outbuilding may need to be partially demolished to enable the construction of a pedestrian friendly corridor linking the new parking area with the eastern entrance to the main residence. If the cistern is partially demolished, it is recommended that archaeologists be present to document the historic structure and any associated features with photographs and maps.

Upon the initiation of construction activities anticipated in the Fall of 2019, RAS will visit the site periodically to monitor excavation for the southern porch, new road construction and widening, and all new buried utilities. The goal of archaeological monitoring will be to document any cultural features or deposits that may be discovered during the construction process. Following the end of the monitoring phase and processing of all material culture recovered from the field, work on the production of a final technical report will begin. All material culture recovered from the current survey is considered property of the University of Virginia Foundation and will be returned at the project's completion along with hard and electronic copies of the final report.