

## City of Alexandria, Virginia

## MEMORANDUM

DATE: DECEMBER 12, 2005

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: JAMES K. HARTMANN, CITY MANAGER 

SUBJECT: PROPOSED GIFT TO THE CITY OF STABLER-LEADBEATER  
APOTHECARY MUSEUM

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**ISSUE:** Gift of the Stabler-Leadbeater Apothecary Museum to the City of Alexandria.

**RECOMMENDATION:** That the City Council accept the Gift of the Stabler-Leadbeater Apothecary Museum and its collections, and its endowment contingent upon determination by the City Manager that the Apothecary Museum project has been completed in accordance with plans.

**BACKGROUND:** At its June 14, 2005, legislative meeting City Council agreed in concept to the offer and the proposed gift to the City of the Stabler-Leadbeater Apothecary Museum (Museum) and its collection. The City Manager was asked to conduct necessary planning and due diligence needed to meet requirements for future acceptance of the property and its collection, and the formal acceptance of the gift and its collection was to be docketed for the fall of 2005.

The Stabler-Leadbeater Apothecary Shop was established in 1792 and operated continuously for 141 years until closing in 1933 during the Depression. The contents of the Museum are extensive and date back to the early years of the Apothecary. Over 8,000 original objects including medical ware, fixtures, and furnishings are in the collection which is planned to be transferred to the City. The collection is considered to be one of the most important historic pharmaceutical collections in the United States. A more complete history of the Stabler-Leadbeater Apothecary Museum is attached (Attachment 1). In 1939 an initial restoration was initiated, and in 2004 a major renovation and restoration was undertaken with a combination of City and private funds. This restoration is nearly completed. It is the closest museum to the City's Visitors Center and the central tourism area of the City.

The Stabler-Leadbeater Apothecary Museum has been owned and operated by a non-profit organization, and that organization has increasingly found it more difficult to maintain operations and strong volunteer participation. Since the City operates and maintains museums, and since the Stabler-Leadbeater Apothecary Museum is a unique asset which needs to be kept viable and open

to the public, the Museum Board has felt that the City was in the best position to make sure the Museum remained viable. Under the transfer planning to date, the Stabler-Leadbeater Apothecary Museum organization would be changed into a "Friends of the Stabler-Leadbeater Apothecary Museum" organization and would continue to provide volunteer and financial support to the Museum.

The Stabler-Leadbeater Apothecary Museum Board of Directors began the first phase of the formal process by notifying the members of their organization of the proposed gift and transfer of the Museum to the City. They had a meeting to discuss and act on this on June 2, 2005. The result of the June 2 meeting was that the Stabler-Leadbeater Apothecary Museum membership voted 58 to 0 to convey the Museum to the City, as well as to keep their organization active but change their name to "Friends of the Stabler-Leadbeater Apothecary Museum" to reflect their new support role (fundraising, volunteering, etc.).

Since the report to Council last June, City staff have undertaken a due diligence physical examination of the Museum including its environmental condition and determined that, with the completion of the current major renovation project, the Museum will be in very sound condition, substantially renewed, and that the City should accept the gift of the Museum, its collection, as well as accept management of the Museum's endowment (currently valued at about \$175,000). The Friends of the Apothecary have offered to turn over its endowment to the City for management. The earnings on the endowment would be used to help support the operations of the Museum. The Museum's renovation is nearly complete with just a few necessary but minor items remaining. All structural, electrical and plumbing work is completed and has passed City Code inspection. It is expected that the Museum renovation project will be completed sometime in December or early January. The Planning Commission held its 9.06 hearing on December 6 and unanimously approved the recommendation that the City accept the gift of the Museum.

**FISCAL IMPACT:** The Museum's budget for FY 2007 will total \$108,877 with \$71,177 to be provided by the City, \$15,000 from admission fees, \$7,700 to be funded from Office of Historic Alexandria general income, \$5,000 in net income from gift shop sales, and \$10,000 in earnings from the Museum's endowment. There will be the addition of one full-time position, as well as part-time help, to ensure that the Museum is staffed for its planned hours of operation. These planned hours are Monday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. and Sundays from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. Consistent with the admission fee practice of the Museum prior to its closing for renovation, fees for admission will be charged. The general admission fee would be set at \$3.50 per adult, \$2.50 for children and special rates or waivers for school groups.

**ATTACHMENT:** Stabler-Leadbeater Apothecary Museum Summary History

**STAFF:**

Mark Jinks, Deputy City Manager

Jean Taylor Federico, Director, Office of Historic Alexandria

## Stabler-Leadbeater Apothecary Museum

### Summary History

Prepared by Sarah Becker (3/4/05)

The privately-owned Stabler-Leadbeater Apothecary Museum is one of Alexandria, Virginia's most important, yet least known historic sites. The Apothecary Shop's history encompasses four wars, rampaging epidemics and the remarkable history of its founder, Quaker and abolitionist Edward Stabler. The Shop functioned as a community pharmacy...serving such notable patrons as the George Washington family, James Monroe and Robert E. Lee; a wholesale druggist...providing raw materials and finished products to apothecaries, physicians and dealers; and a manufacturer...preparing finished medicines for patients, customers, other apothecaries and pharmacies. The Apothecary Shop was established in 1792 and operated continuously under the auspices of the Stabler-Leadbeater family until it closed in 1933.

The Stabler-Leadbeater Apothecary Museum is the only Alexandria museum with an original collection in its original location. The Apothecary Shop's one hundred and forty one years of operating history are completely documented...day and prescription books, ledgers and formula books, diaries, recipe and minute books, orders, invoices, stock certificates and labels. Said the Library of Virginia, "the collection appears to be one of the most impressive and continuous archives...extant."

The Museum's educational benefits accrue to both young and old alike. The city of Alexandria Public Schools' Science teachers are pleased with the development of its Children's Science Education Program. The children's program was developed in accordance with the State of Virginia's Science Standards of Learning. For example Shop founder Edward Stabler died of scarlet fever in 1831; scarlet fever is an infectious disease now treatable with the antibiotic, penicillin. Penicillin is derived from mold which children can grow.

At present the Museum's interpretive period is limited to the period 1792-1820 and incorporates the legacy of George Washington; the era of natural products in pharmacy, as well as the Quaker heritage of founder, Edward Stabler. Program opportunities include: Collections Management, Public Education [including Black history] and Children's Science Education. The Virginia Foundation for the Humanities recently designated the Museum as an African-American heritage site.

The Stabler-Leadbeater Apothecary Museum is located in two partially restored Federal-style, attached, row house buildings at 105-107 S. Fairfax Street. Most of the buildings' architectural features are original, dating from Stabler's purchases (1829 and 1805 respectively). The Museum's initial restoration effort began in 1939; John Milner Associates, Inc. completed its first Historic Structures Report in May 2000.

In its current state of repair, the buildings do not meet modern building codes. The Museum can neither adequately serve its patrons [including children and Americans with disabilities] nor safely store the collections. The Museum's collection is of three types: pharmaceutical and medical ware, herbs, and archival records.

The Museum's 2002 visitor count was 15,178 persons. Visitation has increased steadily, but for safety reasons the city of Alexandria's Code Enforcement capped visitation at 15,000 visitors annually. The city of Alexandria now prohibits access to the upper floors and guests no longer are permitted to use the second floor assembly room.

Restriction will be lifted when buildings restorations is completed, in part, because code enforcement has approved construction of a single, new exit stairway to access program and interpretive spaces throughout the buildings.

Four recent marketing surveys confirm the Museum's economic contribution to the city. Sixty-five percent of admissions paying museum-goers stated that the Apothecary Museum was their first ever visit to an Alexandria museum. Visitors (in rank order of the top five localities) are from Virginia, California, Pennsylvania, United Kingdom and New Jersey. Eighty percent of admissions paying Museum-goers lodge overnight, requiring 3.86 room nights and 5.62 restaurant meals.

The 9/11 experience likely has changed the mix but on average 56% of Museum-goers are between the ages of 35-54, 37% have a college degree and 41% have a post-graduate degree. The Museum participates in several marketing efforts – only 26% of visitors list their occupation as pharmacist or medical – and it is featured in the Alexandria Convention and Visitor's Association's *A Remarkable and Courageous Journey: A Guide to Alexandria's African American History*.

The Apothecary Museum has been designated as Historic Landmarks by both the State of Virginia and the National Register of Historic Places. The National Register considers The Apothecary Shop to be "among the oldest preserved Apothecaries in the United States." Smithsonian officials have described The Apothecary Museum as unique in that it is the only Apothecary Shop in the United States with an intact nineteenth century wholesale and manufacturing facility.

The Apothecary Museum is a 501c3 nonprofit organization. It receives no city, state or federal operating subsidy. In 2000, the Museum pledged to raise an endowment within five years to assist with daily operations. The Museum raised \$231,300.

Day to day operations is the responsibility of the Museum Manager, her part time assistant, volunteer educators and docents. Until its closing in February 2004, the Museum was open daily. Admission applies including participation in the Market Square Block ticket.

The Stabler-Leadbeater Apothecary Museum supports research into Virginia's early history. No other local property has the potential to explain the city's early history as effectively as The Apothecary Museum. Two pear-shaped show globes, circa 1850, soon will be returned to their windows inviting all to enter and learn.

The city of Alexandria has appropriated \$620,000 for the Museum's restoration effort.