

22
4-14-09

City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: APRIL 14, 2009

TO: COUNCILMAN JUSTIN WILSON

THROUGH: ROSE WILLIAMS BOYD, DIRECTOR, CITIZEN ASSISTANCE

FROM: KIRK KINCANNON, DIRECTOR, RP&CA
LANCE MALLAMO, DIRECTOR, OHA

SUBJECT: FORT WARD PARK COMMUNITY CONCERNS – CITY COUNCIL
REQUEST NO. 09-31W

The following information is supplied in response to Councilman Wilson's request and in response to community concerns and correspondence related to Fort Ward Park, its historic resources, existing facilities and current park operations. Since the December 13, 2008, Council public hearing when concerns were raised by neighbors to Fort Ward, the Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities (RPCA) and the Office of Historic Alexandria (OHA) have been conducting a series of community meetings to gather public input regarding the park. The first two public meetings were held on February 18 and March 4 of this year with approximately 80 attendees. A follow-up meeting with the community and other stakeholders was held on March 18. Staff has also received 74 emails and letters in response to a request for public comment.

The following summarizes the key findings from the public discussion and comments, which include the following significant priorities, highlighted by the neighbors of the park and other concerned citizens:

- Preservation and promotion of historic and cultural resources, including Civil War, African American and American Indian resources (see Attachment 1 for detailed, current findings and archeological activity to date);
- Protection of gravesites: includes known, marked and unmarked gravesites, as well as potential area with additional sites (see Attachment 2 for information regarding recent findings);
- Management of park uses: includes ensuring appropriateness of events, overuse of facilities and maintenance of the park;
- Noise: especially amplified sound;
- Alcohol use at rental facilities; and
- Future budget and master plan for the park.

With the presentation of these findings, staff on March 18 discussed both short and longer term actions the City could take to address the identified issues and concerns. Staff presented possible immediate actions for discussion that included:

- Establishing a staff and community working/stewardship group;
- Phased plan for relocation of the park maintenance facility and horticultural operations;
- Community notification of plans for horticultural operations;
- Short-term, temporary moratorium on rentals, with longer term reductions in site availability;
- New scheduled entry to gravesites;
- Signage and enforcement of “no alcohol” and “no amplified noise” without permit policies; and
- OHA-led early April walking tours with working group and public.

Those community members and stakeholders attending the March 18 meeting endorsed the above action list. The next step will be a future discussion of issues by the Park and Recreation Commission at its April 16 meeting, as well as an opportunity to discuss Fort Ward issues at Council’s May 26 work session with the Park and Recreation Commission.

Following continued community outreach and coordination, OHA and RPCA contemplates working to start drafting, with ongoing community input, a long range maintenance and use plan for Fort Ward Park that takes into account the sensitive historic areas and special event use of the park, daily recreational uses, summer picnicking use, and City events. The goal will be to find a balance between the important historic aspects of the park and the recreational uses, along with providing a stable environment for the residents that live around the park.

In the meantime, the use of the horticultural maintenance area has been and will continue to be reduced as staff finds other locations for horticultural activity. The parks maintenance vehicles and equipment have already been moved from that area, and future horticultural deliveries and storage for April and beyond will be diverted to other temporary locations.

It is important to note that considerations for a long-term relocation of the park maintenance and horticultural facilities must include due diligence regarding any proposed new site (i.e., determining existing site conditions and obtaining all necessary approvals) prior to moving those operations. It should also be noted that knowledge of possible gravesites within the long existing horticulture maintenance facility, but outside the fenced graveyard areas, was until recently not known by RPCA and OHA staff. Now that additional grave site locations probability exists, RPCA is taking steps to eliminate and wind-down RPCA’s long-term use of the horticultural maintenance facility until such time as it is clear what appropriate uses at this site should and should not be.

Finally, OHA will seek grant funds, as well as to look at internal resources, to determine how to best research and document the location of gravesites at the Fort Ward Park. FY 2010 Budget

Memorandum #76 estimates a first phase funding need of between \$50,000 and \$75,000 for this effort.

Attachments

Attachment 1: Fort Ward Historic Park Cultural Resources 2009 Update

Attachment 2: Fort Ward Gravesites – 2009

Attachment 3: April 14, 2009, letter from the Parks and Recreation Commission

cc: The Honorable Mayor and Members of City Council
James K. Hartmann, City Manager
Mark Jinks, Deputy City Manager
Debra Collins, Assistant City Manager for Human and Community Services
Rich Baier, Director, Transportation and Environmental Services

Fort Ward Historic Park Cultural Resources 2009 Update

City of Alexandria
Study, Preservation and Education
Fort Ward Historic Park Cultural Resources
2009 Update
Pamela J. Cressey, City Archaeologist
Office of Historic Alexandria

Fort Ward Park is designated as a significant American historical site by its placement on the National Register of Historic Places. The visible focus of the property is the reconstructed Northwest Bastion of the Civil War fort, reconstructed officers' quarters and Fort Ward Museum. Also, still visible today are the remnants of the original perimeter embankments, bombproofs, outlying gun battery, and rifle trench.

Yet, there are many historic features which are not obviously visible in Fort Ward Park. The entire park is a historic site and highly significant for both its cultural resources of different time periods and open space that provides a setting which enhances the historic character of the reconstructed Civil War fort, landscape features and museum. The open space has also protected many of the other cultural resources associated with American Indians and an African American community.

Archaeological work has been conducted at Fort Ward Park by the City of Alexandria for almost 50 years. The 1961 investigation's goal was the collection of accurate information for the reconstruction of the bastion. In 1979, the City archaeologists completed a reconnaissance-level survey of the park resulting in the discovery of an American Indian site. In 1991, the City archaeologists returned to conduct a 30-year anniversary excavation to uncover forgotten evidence of the Civil War period -- the ditch and a barracks on the east side of the fort.

In the process of the 1991 exploration, domestic artifacts post-dating the Civil War were found. This discovery led to archival and oral history research documenting the African American settlement established here after the War. This community developed when African Americans purchased the land in the 1880s and built homes. The area became known as "The Fort" and included other buildings such as a schoolhouse/church and family cemeteries. Some of the families living at The Fort were founders of the Oakland Baptist Church -- now at the crossroads of Braddock, King and Quaker streets. The church's cemetery is still maintained and is almost entirely surrounded by Fort Ward Park. On an ongoing basis, the City archaeologists survey parts of the park slated for construction to insure that no significant cultural resources are disturbed.

African American cultural resources known to exist are: the foundations of Clara Adam's home and her gravestone*, a semi-circular driveway on Braddock Road near the Adam's home; cedar trees forming a tree-lined drive to the schoolhouse/church; Robert Adams grave*; three other gravestones; and the Oakland Baptist Cemetery.

It is expected that many additional archaeological resources can be identified with further survey, such as: house foundations of African American homesteads, the community's school/church, unmarked graves near the extant gravestones outside the Oakland Baptist Church Cemetery, additional graves near the Adams family cemetery*; the Jackson family cemetery; and American Indian sites.

The artifacts recovered from all the archaeological work at Fort Ward are maintained and curated by the City of Alexandria's Office of Historic Alexandria using contemporary museum practices and archaeological standards in the Fort Ward Museum (1961 collection) and the Alexandria Archaeology Collection Facility (post-1961 collections). Archaeological field data, historical research and oral history tapes are archived at the Alexandria Archaeology Museum.

In order to more fully understand the African American community, four oral history interviews of long-time residents were conducted by Alexandria Archaeology volunteer, Patricia I. Knock in the 1990s. The memories of Mary Crozet Johnson, Elizabeth Douglas, Edmonia Smith McKnight and Charles McKnight recount The Fort community, school, church and families as an important and vital part of African American life. The interviews were transcribed by volunteers and are now available on the City of Alexandria/OHA website. Additional research conducted by Dave Cavanaugh in 2008 of the Seminary area highlights the significance of The Fort community, the Oakland Baptist Church, another black school (the Seminary School which once stood at the present location of T.C. Williams High School), and its benefactor, Douglass Wood, Sr.

Interpretive tours were developed in the 1990s by Alexandria Archaeology to increase public awareness of the cultural landscape and resources of Fort Ward Park. These tours were given for events such as Earth Day and City employee picnics. Annual Alexandria Heritage Trail bike tours have also increased public awareness of Fort Ward Park's often forgotten cultural features.

Long-term plans call for:

1. Archaeological survey of the park based upon predictive analysis using GIS overlays developed from historic maps, aerial photographs and oral history.
2. Stewardship plan protecting cultural resource locations which are sensitive as well as proper care and maintenance of the resources.
3. Interpretive plan for signs, web development and other educational methods about the full cultural history of the park.

*Located within the City of Alexandria horticulture maintenance yard.

Fort Ward Gravesites – 2009

Office of Historic Alexandria
and the
Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities

RPCA and OHA are collaborating to determine all the historic issues, including the identification of possible Africa American graves at Fort Ward Park. Known gravesites include the Clara Adams gravesite, currently located in the fenced horticulture maintenance area and fenced off for protection. Two additional areas of graves have also been identified -- one west of the fort and one on the west side of the park. Both areas are not circumscribed at this time and do not have specific boundaries. The area on the west side of the park includes virtually the entire maintenance yard and some of the area outside the yard. The area west of the fort is situated adjacent to the restored Northwest bastion of the fort. It is cited on several early planning maps for Fort Ward Park (dated 1962 and 1965) as a demarcated area that is labeled "cemetery" and "grave area." Some memories, obtained through oral history, also say that graves were scattered throughout the Fort Ward Park area.

RPCA does not currently have an alternative site for the horticulture maintenance facility, however. The Department is looking to improve operations and is considering options for future relocation of the facility. Staff will also be looking at how to reduce and minimize horticultural maintenance yard usage in the near term. As part of that action, the park's maintenance vehicles have already been moved from the Fort Ward horticultural maintenance area to the adjacent parking lot.



DEPARTMENT OF RECREATION, PARKS
AND CULTURAL ACTIVITIES

Kirk Kincannon
Director

1108 Jefferson Street
Alexandria, Virginia 22314-3999

Phone (703) 838-4343
Fax (703) 838-6344

Park and Recreation Commission

April 14, 2009

The Honorable William Eulle
Vice Mayor Redella Pepper
Councilman Ludwig Gaines
Councilman K. Rob Krupicka
Councilman Timothy Lovain
Councilman Paul Smedberg
Councilman Justin Wilson

Re: Short and Long Term Improvements at Ft. Ward Park

Dear Mayor and Council Members:

The Park and Recreation Commission has followed the issues raised about Ft. Ward Park over the last year or more as various aspects of the assets and management of the park have been explored and discussed. As our Commission and the Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities focused on some of the issues last fall it became apparent that this was a place where many different interests come together and that circumstances had reached a point where increasing demand from the various sets of user-interests had become too great. Alexandria has loved this park a little too much.

The Commission has had a number of discussions with Director Kincannon about how to proceed, especially given the fiscal restraints under which the City is now operating. Our first recommendation was for the Department to hold a series of community listening sessions on all topics and uses related to the park. Those were concluded recently. As an outcome of those sessions, the Commission is recommending a series of stepwise actions which you will consider shortly and which we want to address here briefly.

The Park and Recreation Commission sees the process of addressing the concerns and opportunities at Ft Ward Park in two distinct steps – the first to occur in the short term over the next five years and the second occurring five to six years from now. Starting last year it was apparent that some changes needed to occur almost immediately and we want to recognize that some steps were taken during the last season which helped to address the issues of over-use and noise levels. It was clear those steps needed to be taken almost immediately.

The staff report that you now have on Ft. Ward Park outlines some further recommendations for changes this year to reservations, management and some consolidation of picnic shelter locations, along with better enforcement. This list of short term actions were presented at the community listening sessions and there was general agreement in the community that these were appropriate steps to take at this time.

We wish to point out that implementing this short-term plan will result in substantially decreased picnic area use, particularly the large group use that has been traditionally accommodated at Ft. Ward. Decreasing the amount of this use in the park is inevitable and desirable, but there is no other location in the City that can currently absorb this demand. What we also know is that, like a balloon that squeezed in the middle only to have it expand in another place, we cannot significantly decrease the large party use in this park without planning to introduce or increase it in some other location in the City. This applies to other large events that occur at the park as well, like the jazz festival. The truth of that matter is that the City's population continues to grow and that population is seeking more outdoor recreational opportunity – which we should embrace and accommodate. We are not growing our parks in proportion to the needs of today and certainly not to meet the needs that are coming in the near future. Most neighborhoods that are near larger parks do not want increased use and we have certainly heard about the consequences of unplanned increases from the community around Ft. Ward Park.

This conclusion brings us to the second and more important step that we feel must be undertaken to address the longer term issues and planning at Ft. Ward Park and in other parks. It is our Commission's strong recommendation that the City must commit to undertaking a single, large park master plan starting approximately five years from now which will address the increase in demand for park uses. We see this plan addressing the accommodation of increased use primarily at the larger City's larger parks, while leaving the small and more neighborhood-oriented parks to serve passive uses. Last year the Commission sent a list to the City Manager of items under the heading of *Unfunded CIP Requests for 2009*. We wanted to underscore, even as the City moved into uncertain economic times, that the capital budget items in the current and out-years of the budget were only the tip of the iceberg, and that much more need was waiting in the wings. The first item listed was "*Park Master Plans – Key Sites*". As we have thought more about it, it has become apparent that there should be one master plan done for the "Key Sites" and that each one of these large parks should comprise a chapter in the master plan. As a preface to developing that master plan, we recommend that the Recreational Needs Assessment, adopted in 2003, be updated with new demographic and use-demand information. The Department had previously requested resources to accomplish this update in FY 2010 but the request was denied. Five years from now the current Assessment will be more than ten years old, with the underlying data even older. The update must be accomplished in order to serve as framework to develop a large park master plan. Without taking these two steps we will not be able to meet increasing needs.

By way of example, many of these key, large parks were never subjected to a formal planning process, and certainly not one that related overall City recreational demands and uses to each other. Chinquapin is a prime example of a park that was unplanned and must be used much more efficiently in the future. The ring road (formerly the neighborhood drive) that existed when the property was purchased using federal Land and Water Conservation Funding remained and the park uses were developed in an adjunct manner over time off the road. Now we must determine what uses fit in this park, how much it can accommodate and whether the roadway, or parts of it, should be removed. We should even re-examine parks like Ben Brenman which was planned, but more than a dozen years ago. Times have changed.

The updating of the recreational needs assessment and the undertaking of a large parks master plan both must be efforts that are contracted to outside professional organizations which specialize in these kinds of products. While there is a cost associated with doing so, it is very clear that there is real value to the taxpayers in our community for making that kind of investment. Together these studies will form a roadmap for defining and meeting the recreational needs of our community for the next several decades. Departmental staff is not equipped to produce these kinds of work products for a number of reasons.

Meanwhile, the recent focus on Ft. Ward has started our community on a journey of discovery to bring to light the full history of the park. Layers of time and history are our City's greatest asset and biggest challenge. While we need to honor the past in our public parks, we also need to keep these parks functioning and meeting today's needs. Over the next few years representatives of the various interests at Ft. Ward should coordinate and work together to set a course for uncovering and documenting the full history of this place to serve as a foundation for the full park plan that will be undertaken in the future.

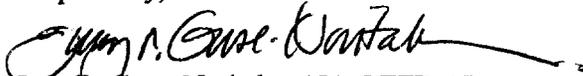
We will give a caution at this point however, that all these multiple concerns and uses need to be viewed and solved together, not in isolation. Any comprehensive park that is developed needs to address the history of the African American community that was located there, the Civil War history of the site, the recreational needs and must do so while honoring the final resting places of many of Alexandria's citizens. It is a tall order and one that we must all work together to solve, but in the end there will still be a park here that will the City can enjoy. We should not rush to solve this piecemeal, but that the time to do a thorough job as financial resources once again become available.

In closing we want to mention one final item at Ft. Ward that is an issue in other places in the City and which needs a city-wide solution. For some time Ft. Ward has served as the horticultural center for City operations. This is not a park that is well suited for that city-wide function. In the past we have discussed with the Director that the 3 acre silver of public land between the Metro and CSX lines that the City received as a part of the Potomac Yard planning should become the horticultural center for the Department's operations. It would be a very good use for that parcel of land. But the truth of the matter is that there is no more "back of house" in the City at any of our parks where park maintenance facilities and yards can be located without interfering with park activities or the nearby neighborhoods and yet this is a critical function. As the waterfront plan is developed and the public areas and access along the waterfront is managed as a single park unit we will need to address a need for a place to stage maintenance in that area as well.

In our view there is a crying need for the City to find perhaps three locations across the city to centralize this kind of maintenance facility. A small proto-type park building can be developed that is attractive and fits with the character of our community. Adjoining maintenance yards could be planned so that they are not unsightly. This should be done in conjunction with TE&S so the facilities serve some of their functions as well. Additionally these locations could also serve as outreach centers for citizens to get mulch, recycle, purchase rain barrels, or buy native plants and trees. In short, these could become the defacto environmental outreach centers for the City. Done right, there will be no need to hide them. If they are well designed and integrated they should make good neighbors. As with any good idea in the City, this one requires land and money. It is an issue that we need to address head on. Not doing so in the past lead to a situation at Ft. Ward that will need to be corrected over the next few years.

Thank you for your consideration of these matters. Please feel free to contact me with any questions or to discuss these ideas further.

Respectfully,



Judy R. Guse- Noritake, AIA, LEED AP
Chair, Park and Recreation Commission

Attachment: *Unfunded CIP Requests for 2009*

Cc: Jim Hartmann, City Manager
Mark Jinks, Deputy City Manager
Kirk Kincannon, Director
Rich Baier, Acting Director
Ellen Stanton, Chair, Historic Alexandria Resources Commission
Lance Mallamo, Director Office of historic Alexandria
Park and Recreation Commission

Department of Recreation, Parks & Cultural Activities
Unfunded CIP Requests - 2009

PRIORITY I (Short Term – following behind current budget “out years)

1. Park Master Plans (key sites)
2. School Grounds Master Plans (key sites)
3. Miracle Field
4. Chinquapin Park Sports Complex
5. James Polk Recreation Center
6. Bike Trails (key trails)
7. Four Mile Run Stream Restoration/Four Mile Run Park Improvements
8. Competition Track (perhaps Hammond or GW)
9. School Irrigation Systems on School Property (key sites)
10. Brenman Park (sports lighting, field additions & synthetic surf)

PRIORITY II (Medium Term)

1. Park Master Plans (balance of sites)
2. School Grounds Master Plans (balance of sites)
3. Lee Center Outdoor Sports Complex
4. Bike Trails (additional trails)
5. Charles Barrett Recreation Center (expansion)
6. Minnie Howard II (completion of 2nd planned field)
7. Skate Park 2 (location to be determined)
8. In-line Hockey Facility
9. School Irrigation Systems on School Property
10. Arboretum (facility, plantings, signage & marketing)
11. Brenman Park (sports lighting, field additions & synthetic turf)
12. Spray Parks at two Mini-Pools

PRIORITY III (Long Term)

1. Tennis Courts
2. West End Recreation Center
3. Bike Trails (balance of trails)
4. West Side Field Sports Areas (around Van Dom Eisenhower)
5. Fort Ward Park Improvements (budgeted as joint project w/OHA)
6. School Irrigation Systems on School Property (balance of sites)
7. Horticulture Center
8. Marina (upgrades and expansion)
9. Spray Parks at two Mini-Pools

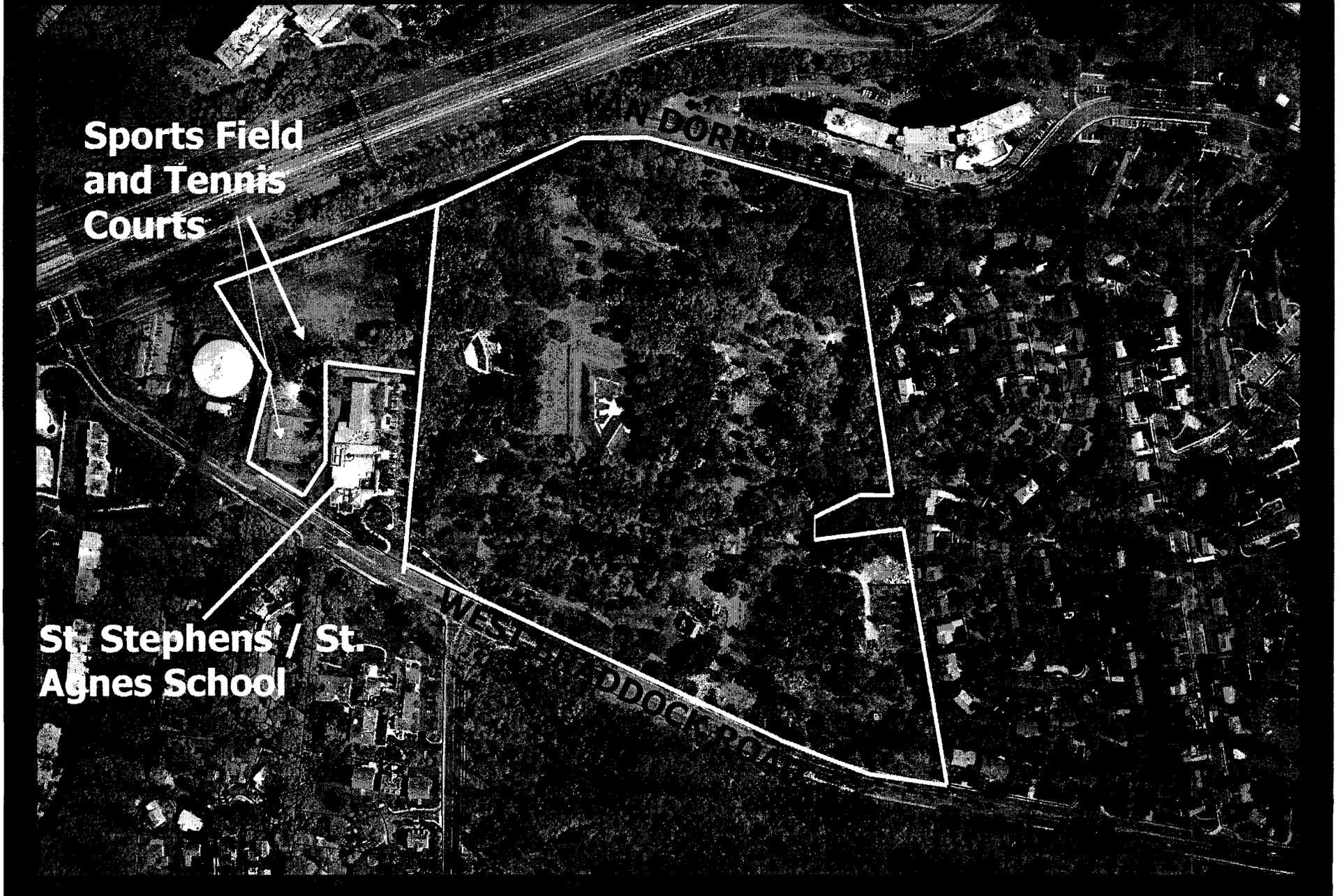
Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities

The Office of Historic Alexandria

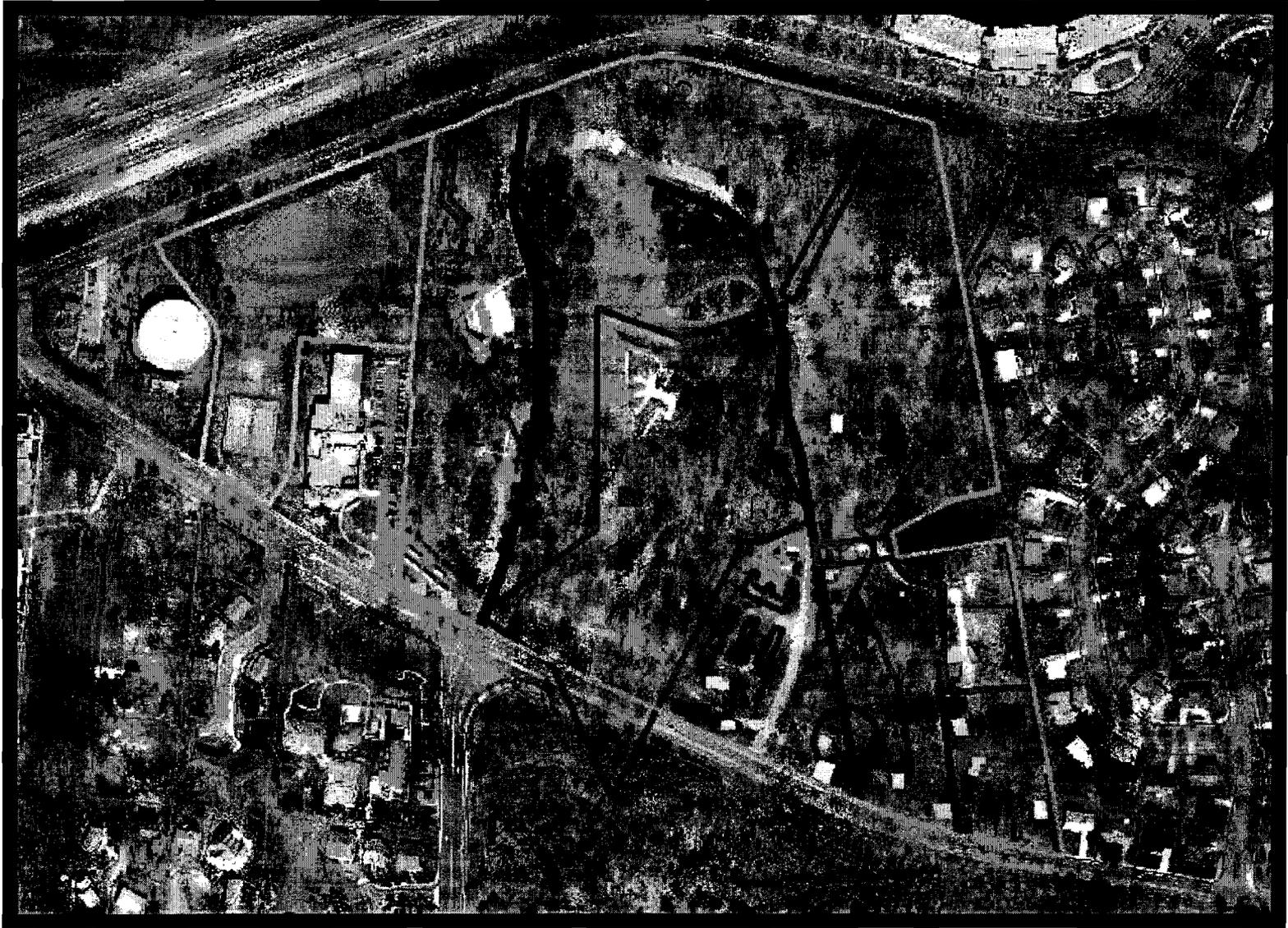
Fort Ward Park
Planning and Cultural Resources

City Council
April 14, 2009

FORT WARD PARK TODAY



Preliminary Cultural Resource Locations Layers of History



Preliminary Cultural Resource Locations African American Neighborhood



Preliminary Cultural Resource Locations

Cemeteries



Preliminary Cultural Resource Locations Civil War Overlay

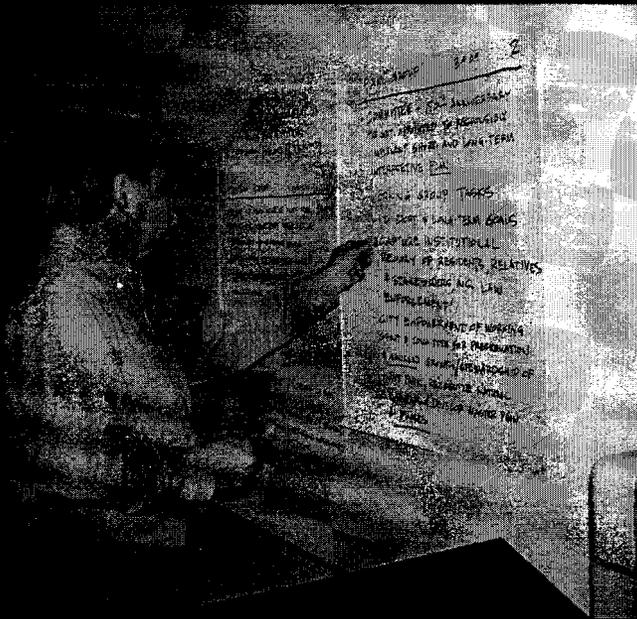


Preliminary Cultural Resource Locations American Indian Site



Community Meetings

- ▶ Group Discussions
- ▶ Priority Exercise



Identified Areas of Interest

- ▶ Historic and Cultural Resources
- ▶ Park Operations and Maintenance
- ▶ Active Use of Park
- ▶ Passive and Casual Use
- ▶ Environmental and Natural Resources

Proposed Immediate Actions

- ▶ Phased plan for relocation of maintenance and horticultural facilities
- ▶ Reduction in reservations and enforcement of “no alcohol” and “no amplified noise” without permit policies
- ▶ Establish Staff/Community working group
- ▶ Controlled access available for grave sites
- ▶ Early April walking tours w/working group and public

