


City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: JUNE 7, 2007

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: JAMES K. HARTMANN, CITY MANAGER 

SUBJECT: CONSIDERATION OF THE DESIGN PROCESS FOR FREEDMEN'S CEMETERY MEMORIAL PARK

ISSUE: Consideration of a design competition for the design of the Freedmen's Cemetery Memorial Park and the creation of a City Manager appointed steering committee.

RECOMMENDATION: That City Council:

- (1) Approve a design competition process for the design of the Freedmen's Cemetery Memorial Park, and
- (2) Authorize the City Manager to appoint a steering committee with a membership as outlined on page three of this report to oversee the design selection process.

BACKGROUND: On August 27, 2002, the City of Alexandria executed a Letter Modification to the 2000 Settlement Agreement between the City and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) relating to the replacement of the Woodrow Wilson Bridge and the decision to change substantially the design of the previously planned urban deck. This Letter provided new alternative mitigation measures in the City, including the acquisition and enhancement of the Freedmen's Cemetery site at South Washington and Church Streets as well as funding for the purchase of land to construct ballfields on Witter Drive adjacent to Telegraph Road. In 2004, the City of Alexandria entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with the Federal Highway Administration and the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) regarding Freedmen's Cemetery which stipulated the measures necessary to ensure the protection of the graves.

Freedmen's Cemetery is located in the 1000 block of South Washington Street and the 700 block of Church Street. From 1864 until 1869, the cemetery was the burial ground for as many as 1,800 freedmen-black men, women and children who escaped slavery and sought refuge in Alexandria during the Civil War. More than 100 African American soldiers were also buried in this cemetery, but were moved in 1865 to Alexandria National Cemetery. The Freedmen's Cemetery Memorial Park project plans to honor the heroic efforts of these African Americans and commemorates their sacrifice as they found freedom. Limited archaeological investigations in just a few areas of the site, which were conducted as part of the Woodrow Wilson Bridge

Improvement Project and by the City archaeologists from 1999 through 2004, resulted in the identification of 123 graves. This work also determined that the graves are very fragile and, in some cases, situated close to the ground surface and near building foundations. Undoubtedly, many graves have been lost due to previous re-grading, building construction, as well as excavation to install and replace fuel and oil tanks.

There are three properties that will ultimately comprise Alexandria Freedmen's Cemetery Memorial Park. The City acquired 714 Church Street on January 31, 2007, for \$3.5 million. The City acquired 1001 South Washington Street on April 19, 2007, for \$2.3 million. The existing structures on these parcels have been demolished. The building foundations were left intact to avoid any damage to the graves.

Two other properties of the original Freedmen's Cemetery are currently owned by VDOT and consist of the land adjacent to the I-95/Capital Beltway and in the vicinity of the Church Street ramp. The City and VDOT are negotiating an agreement for long term use and maintenance by the City of these VDOT-owned adjacent areas so that they can be incorporated into the memorial park planning and can be maintained consistent with the maintenance of the cemetery.

The City held a Re-dedication ceremony on May 12, 2007, to re-dedicate the land as a burial ground after 138 years of other non-related uses.

Archaeological investigations have begun and follow the treatment plan approved by VDOT and the Virginia Department of Historic Resources. The City archaeologists and temporary crew are carefully excavating soil on the site in order to determine areas where graves no longer are preserved and where ones still remain. Care is being taken so no grave shaft or burial is disturbed. A consultant historian is conducting research and writing a history of Alexandria Freedmen's Cemetery. A map documenting locations of graves in the cemetery will be produced from the archaeological work and guidelines prepared to make sure that the graves are protected during construction of the memorial park. The archaeological work should be completed by the end of 2007.

A design competition is proposed to be held to select the design concept for the Freedmen's Cemetery Memorial Park. This process will begin after the archaeological investigation has been completed at the end of 2007. The competition will be widely advertised and will target national, as well as local, and minority participation. The National Organization of Minority Architects will be consulted on the proposed design competition process, as well as to encourage participation. Design competitions have been successfully used in local projects such as the Vietnam Memorial and the planned Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial projects in Washington, D.C. In order to create interest in this project and to encourage many quality entries, the top three designs will be awarded a cash prize in the range of \$10,000, \$5,000 and \$2,500, respectively.

As currently contemplated, City staff, and a City-retained architectural/engineering/landscape design team, will be responsible for executing, in collaboration with the winning designer, the design of the winning concept. However, it has been recommended by the Chair of the Park and

Recreation Commission that if the winner of the competition is professionally qualified to undertake the architectural engineering/landscape design, that that firm be permitted to assume that role. City staff agrees with this recommendation and will implement it as long as federal (FHWA) and State (VDOT) procurement regulations permit such a process. This memorial park design will go through the City's Development Special Use Permit process, including an extensive public participation process.

A Project Design Steering Committee is proposed to be appointed by the City Manager to assist with implementing the design competition and recommending the top three designs. The charge of the Steering Committee will be as follows:

- Review the draft solicitation for the design competition, along with required oversight by VDOT/FHWA;
- Review the entries of the competition and make a recommendation to the City Manager on the selection of the three winning entries;
- Review the implementation of the design of the park for conformance with the selected design concept; and
- Sponsor outreach meetings with the community and interested boards and commissions relating to this project.

The Steering Committee will be composed of appointees made by the City Manager who are members of the following organizations:

- Two members from the Friends of Freedmen's Cemetery
- One member from the Historical Alexandria Resources Commission
- One member from the Alexandria Archaeological Commission
- One member from the Planning Commission
- One member from the Parks & Recreation Commission
- One member from the Alexandria Historical Society
- One member from the Arts Commission
- One member from the Society for the Preservation of Black Heritage
- One member from the Old Town Hunting Creek Civic Association
- One member from the Old Town Civic Association
- One member from the VDOT/FHWA project team
- One member from the Woodrow Wilson Bridge Neighborhood Task Force

The City Manager will designate the chair (or co-chairs) of the Steering Committee. These organizations have been consulted in the development of this design process and their input has been incorporated in to this report.

Staff anticipates that the preliminary plan for the Memorial Park will be before the City Council for approval in mid-2009. Construction is expected to begin in 2010.

FISCAL IMPACT: Funding in the amount of \$6.5 million is being provided by the Federal Highway Administration as part of the Woodrow Wilson Bridge Settlement Agreement for the improvements at Freedmen's Cemetery. Given the \$5.8 purchase cost of the land, it is likely that additional funds will be needed to complete the Memorial Park. Additional federal funds will be sought.

The City will provide the funding for the design competition awards and advertising for the design competition. This is estimated to be \$30,000.

Funding in the amount of \$25,000 has been provided by a Save America's Treasures grant from the National Park Service to include publication of the history of Freedmen's Cemetery and preparation of web materials.

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