

City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: JUNE 19, 2008

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: JAMES K. HARTMANN, CITY MANAGER

SUBJECT: STATUS REPORT ON THE PROPOSED PUBLIC ART HONORING CHARLES HOUSTON AND THE DESIGN PROCESS FOR THE PUBLIC ART

ISSUE: Status Report on the proposed public art honoring Charles Houston and the design process for the public art.

RECOMMENDATIONS: That City Council:

- (1) Authorize the City Manager to appoint a selection panel to oversee the design process as outlined in this report;
- (2) Authorize the Mayor to appoint a Charles Houston Art Project Stakeholder Advisory Group to work with City staff and the selection panel in selecting the finalist for the design competition; and
- (3) Request staff and the Commission for the Arts to proceed with the fundraising and design competition for the Charles Houston Art Project.

BACKGROUND: Charles Houston was an attorney of national reputation and a seminal figure in the civil rights movement. He used his expertise and influence to bring educational opportunity to the Alexandria-African American community. In appreciation for his contributions, the elementary school on Wythe Street was renamed in his honor. He later became Dean of Howard University Law School and authored a legal brief that was used by his protégé, Thurgood Marshall, to win the landmark U.S. Supreme Court case, *Brown vs. the Topeka Board of Education*, which helped end racial segregation in schools in the United States.

At City Council's meeting on October 25, 2005, Councilman Ludwig Gaines suggested that the Charles Houston Recreation Center renovation project incorporate a piece of public art honoring the memory of Charles Houston. Councilman Gaines also asked that the Alexandria Commission for the Arts take the lead in this effort. Council agreed with these suggestions and Mayor Euille asked that the proposal be docketed for Council consideration. On June 12, 2007, Council endorsed the concept of incorporating public art honoring Charles Houston into the Charles Houston Recreation Center and requested that the Commission for the Arts work with the Department of Recreation, Parks and

Cultural Activities to coordinate discussions with the Charles Houston Parent Advisory Board and staff at the Black History Museum. Council asked that staff schedule public meetings to obtain input and community support and to identify the type of public art that should be located at the Charles Houston Recreation Center. Council also requested that the Commission for the Arts work with the Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities to prepare a report on its findings from the public meetings and to provide Council with a scope of work, anticipated costs and fund-raising plans for the public art project.

From September 2007 through May 2008 Pat Miller, Chair of the Commission for the Arts, and staff have met with representatives of numerous organizations and stakeholder groups to discuss the Charles Houston art project. Ms. Miller and Matthew Harwood, Chair the Public Art Committee conducted a series of meetings with representatives of the Charles Houston Center Parent Advisory Board, the Departmental Progressive Club, the Parker-Gray Alumni Association and the Black History Museum. The Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities Department staff also conducted meetings (Attachment 1) April 24, 2008, at the Dr. Oswald Durant Memorial Center and on April 29, 2008, at the Black History Museum. On May 20, 2008, the Commission conducted a public hearing on the Charles Houston art project and collected additional public input (Attachment 2).

The Commission has established a fund-raising advisory group and has begun to meet and develop fund-raising strategies for the project. The fund-raising advisory group consists of Lavern Chatman, President and CEO, Northern Virginia Urban League; Vonda Stanford, President of the Charles Houston Parent Advisory Board; Mame Reiley, President, The Reiley Group; Matthew Harwood, Public Art Committee; and Pat Miller, Chair of the Commission for the Arts. The goal of the group is to raise the projected funds required for this project, (\$300,000). Initial plans from the group include soliciting individual donors, corporate and organizational donors along with a campaign to sell bricks for the plaza location. The budget includes the cost of design, fabrication, materials, insurance, delivery and installation, travel, and any other incidental costs. A portion of the budget will also be allocated toward maintenance of the project.

DISCUSSION: The Charles Houston Art Project design competition is anticipated to begin in summer of 2008. The competition will be advertised widely and will target local, national, and minority participation. The competition and process will be similar to the highly successful processes used for the Freedmen's Memorial Project and Rocky Versace Memorial Project at the Mt. Vernon Recreation Center.

A draft prospectus for the commissioning of public art for the Charles Houston Center has been developed based on the public comment received by members of the Commission for the Arts (Attachment 2). A Selection Panel made up of design and art experts appointed by the City Manager would conduct the search for qualified artists through a widely distributed Request for Qualifications. The Panel would include:

- One member of the Arts Forum
- One member of the Torpedo Factory Artist's Association
- One member of the Del Ray Artisans

- One experienced professional Sculptor
- One individual with a background in Design Competitions.

The Panel will evaluate applicants' qualifications, and three semi-finalists will be selected and will be vetted through the Stakeholder Advisory Group. Each finalist will receive a \$1,000 honorarium to develop a concept model for the public art.

The semi-finalists will be expected to present their proposals to the Selection Panel and to the Stakeholders Advisory Group. The Stakeholder Advisory Group, appointed by the Mayor, would be made up of the following:

- One member of the Charles Houston Recreation Center Parent Advisory Group
- One alumnus of Parker-Gray High School,
- One citizen-at-large,
- One T.C. Williams High School student,
- One relative of Charles Houston,
- One member of the Alexandria Chapter of the NAACP,
- One member of the Departmental Progressive Club,
- One member of the Northern Virginia Urban League,
- One member of the Alexandria Commission for the Arts, Public Art Committee,
- One member of the Alexandria Society for the Preservation of Black History,
- One member of the Historic Alexandria Resources Commission,
- One member of the Park and Recreation Commission.

The City Manager would designate the chair (or co-chairs) of the Selection Panel and Stakeholders Advisory Group. In addition, City staff designated by the Directors of the following departments, will serve in a support role for the Stakeholder Advisory Group and the Selection Panel: Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities, Office of Historic Alexandria, Planning and Zoning, General Services, and a representative from the Black History Museum.

The semi-finalist proposals/models will be exhibited for a two-week public review period. Based on public comment and Panel review and Stakeholder input, the Panel will select one of the proposals to recommend to the Stakeholder Advisory Group. Upon agreement from the Stakeholder Advisory Group, the finalist will be recommended to the Commission for the Arts. The Alexandria Commission for the Arts will review the concept and display the concept during a two-week public review period. The proposal then will be forwarded by the Commission to City Council.

Staff anticipates that the semi-finalists will be selected by late fall. The Charles Houston Recreation Center will be completed in Spring 2009. A location will be reserved for the public art which would be installed after the art work is complete. We expect the final concept to be recommended to City Council during the Winter of 2009.

When fundraising is completed the design development and installation of the artwork will proceed through the regular City processes.

FISCAL IMPACT: The City budget for this project is estimated to be \$8,000 for the design competition and solicitation. The \$300,000 budget will include the design, fabrication, materials, insurance, delivery and installation, travel, and any other incidental costs. A portion of the funding will be allocated toward maintenance of the project. There is no money budgeted for this public art project currently in the RPCA budget other than the \$8,000 for the design competition and solicitation. All other projects costs associated with this art project will be funded by private donations and grants.

ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment 1. Charles Houston Public Art Project, RPCA Public Meeting notes April 24, April 29

Attachment 2. Charles Houston Public Art Project, Commission for the Arts public hearing notes May 20, 2008

STAFF:

Kirk Kincannon, Director - Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities

Aimee Vosper, Division Chief, Park Planning - Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities

Cheryl Anne Colton, Cultural Arts Administrator - Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities

CHARLES HOUSTON MEMORIAL PUBLIC ART PROJECT

**ALEXANDRIA DEPARTMENT OF RECREATION, PARKS
AND CULTURAL ACTIVITIES PUBLIC MEETINGS**

APRIL 24 AND 29, 2008

Suggestions/ideas gathered a community meetings held on Thursday, April 24 at the Dr. Oswald Durant Memorial Center, 1605 Cameron Street; and, Tuesday, April 29 at the Alexandria Black History Museum, 902 Wythe Street.

1. Plaque with/for Parker Gray School
2. Concern – not to take the creativity away from Artist
3. With proximity of site – with Black History next door developing stronger ties with/Recreation now; interpreting more opportunities within building that the site should be interpreted; tie Charles Houston with Parker Gray Alumni – help and provided resources for Black History in Plaza – interpretation along plaza; tie both together
4. Street and relationship to Black History Museum – and Reading Room/education
5. Library first started by Samuel Tucker and Charles Houston interconnection between Library/Charles Houston
6. Walking timeline across the front of the Plaza
7. Since this is a historical landmark, has this gone through National Register?
8. Construction Question on Jobs. What was allowed? What was done? Community did not get to see Architects work.
9. Have the “History Story”
10. Before Charles Houston there was Parker Gray – Relocated to Madison Street. Old Parker Gray was changed to Charles Houston, now no place is named Parker Gray – promoting Charles Houston in place of Parker Gray. direction should be toward both histories – Parker Gray – 2 principals – separate girls/boys schools combined both principals’ names. 2 schools for Black Children ; Parker Gray important to this City.
11. Something should represent both – want something there to honor Parker Gray as well as Charles Houston; Councilman Ludwig Gaines told of both important elements; equal pay and desegregation. Feel that Parker Gray is very important, Charles Houston great in his

work – want these combined; Parker Gray central to community. .

12. Parker Gray Alumni Association President; Charles Houston Rec. Center – that is where it needs to be; reference to teachers and principals. Something large enough to see (don't need bifocals); exhibit and reflect.
13. Equal emphasis on both Charles Houston and Parker Gray stories.
14. Two stories should be incorporated
15. Issue – not able to place Parker Gray – Vocational ethnically – now have MLK, Jr. memorial; want *3 dimensional; Parker Gray shows evolution of Charles Houston full story. Should continue Parker Gray name.
16. Still have small sign on Wythe St. – but need more. MLK, Jr. Mem – may take few more years
17. Resident now knows about Charles Houston; advocate something like Roosevelt Memorial Plaque shows his life –something educational. Now knows about Parker Gray – Advocate for more education in the Art Space – to take about local History and Parker Gray Educational
18. A lot of Educational opportunities with both stories of Charles Houston and Park Gray School. Education!
19. Proposed future Memorial MLK – component of some presence – interactive to be placed here at Black History Museum
20. Emphasize theme of equality of all races and all people – like the one sculpture 3 figures leaning (Bali figures) interactivity and interdependence on one another– traditional with same interdependence.
21. Contemporary vs traditional
22. Related search for achieving equality
23. Howard University students to be involved with proposing ideas for the memorial; mindful that children are interacting with center
24. Very thoughtful that it has to be near children
25. Afro centric images, different – that no one else has thought of.
26. Permanent sculpture is very expensive, extensive. Commemorate what is alive, not

memorize what is dead

27. Children should be the audience, teach and educate – to focus on the next generation
28. Memorial should represent black peoples struggle for education
29. Instructional part – will there be space on the interior?
30. Vestibule – Charles Houston’s life; Black History Museum with Charles Houston
31. Multiple connections between Charles Houston to bring Samuel Tucker into the picture – the R. Robinson library; with Charles Houston right next door – to help people understand Black History Museum; educational; Walk across street to be able to talk and teach about Charles Houston and Parker Gray also. Charles Houston Recreation Center/Black History Museum; Interpreting library next door; Education and Reading significant struggle; Resources – larger way to interpret Black History Museum; Physical and intellectual – interpretation.
32. Need to know the first names for those individuals – Parker and Gray
33. Another significant event in Alexandria and Virginia; 1967 decision; While man can marry a black woman – Memorial plaque at lawyers, 110 North Royal Street. Charles Houston’s life – opportunity to do something in addition. PC process in dealing with James Bland. Public Park could communicate this event.
34. Fundraising effort – need to remember strong Art oriented with educational component; students need to participate; interactive; tie past into creativity of the future; History seeing History memorialized. Historical tie in to the future for the Children; Artsy/Educational “Ah Ha” moment. “High Art” not Artsy.
35. Annual reoccurring event – Adapt this educational component; caulk for peace – designed for children; free draw – annually and globally.
36. Consider temporary public art installations such as luminaries, or consider annual festivals.

Comments from index card:

Bricks that were removed from Charles Houston – salvage

Install bricks again w/medallions “Donor Willie” as fundraiser naming people on bricks, “in memoriam. (Vonda Stanford)

CHARLES HOUSTON MEMORIAL PUBLIC ART PROJECT
ALEXANDRIA COMMISSION FOR THE PUBLIC MEETING

MAY 20, 2008

Public Comment:

1) Speaking

Charles Houston represented in a way that brings Past to Future and empowerment

Parker Gray & Charles Houston enter twined possibly through timelines/bricks/donations fundraising opportunities

Something that appeals to children and community surrounding the center
– bring diversity together

2) Started out Civil Rights lawyer: Charles Houston and his legacy.

Highest significant and represented in Art connected with Parker Gray School

Photo of Parker Gray entry way photo – could be hung under entrance to Charles Houston. Photo – may have had name on it

Significance – Charles Houston a lawyer/Dean of Law School – inspired advocates of Civil Rights – argued for termination of segregation of school.

Community understood – equal education even though schools change.
Art should put two things together (Photos Library of Congress) could they find something not as stern don't like emerging from stone image.

3) Public Art Committee Report

Fascinating figure to memorize.

What is his Alexandria story – connect/resonate with community.

1st thing found – Parker Gray connection

High School name changed – significant of Parker Gray story was in the past someone new in community didn't know signing.

Parker Gray Story –

Idea of the teachers – very important.

Alumina Association wanted to celebrate teachers – Names on list but then thought that a name might be left off.

Leave it to something more with break sales of facility – Personal approach

Importance of being education Opportunity – struggle for education and people fought that fight.

4) Black History Museum

Input to what is having across street. Critical involvement with Charles Houston interpretation or statue

As a Museum – Louis Hicks interest in Interpretation of site as a school and Charles Houston.

Interpretation Plaza – beyond just statuary.

What school was about, not just statue. Integrate unto Black History Museum. Black History events at Charles Houston Recreation Center – Performances etc...comply opportunity to interpret Charles Houston legacy.

5) Same feeling with Parker Gray story goes back quote a while –

No local facility that bears the name parker Gray
Charles Houston a national story
Parker Gray a local story should be told

6) Just don't forget Parker Gray = and its story Parker Gray Alumni Association

7) City resident, Recreation Center does have Charles Houston name but we should tie in Parker Gray story –

Idea: opening for center diag. from Black History carve out Blacktop – connected walkway between Black History Museum and Charles Houston

Don't minimalism the affect that Charles Houston had on a local and national level – Charles Houston moved Thurgood Marshall in the landmark Case – test case in South Carolina – did though South Carolina. If there was a way – Charles Houston was involved in that.
National affect – much larger community – more than what is said in larger US.

8) Agree with – prior

Relevance to Charles Houston and connection to Parker Gray
Census – Fred Day interest in the souls who have done so much over the
years and in the past.

City needs to be generous – don't neglect those that have sacrificed before
this.

Hope that Arts Commission takes these comments seriously.

Pivotal area – this is the place. Significant event

Check with Planning & Zoning, Federal Register, Parker Gray