


City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: APRIL 15, 2010

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: JAMES K. HARTMANN, CITY MANAGER 

SUBJECT: CONSIDERATION OF UPDATE ON FT. WARD PARK AND MUSEUM AREA ACTIVITIES AND PLANNING

ISSUE: Ft. Ward Park and Museum Area Activities and Planning.

RECOMMENDATION: That City Council receive the report.

DISCUSSION: Based on a request of Council Member Krupicka, the Director of the Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities Jim Spengler, Director of the Office of Historic Alexandria Lance Mallamo, and Chair of the Fort Ward Park and Museum Area Ad Hoc Stakeholder Advisory Group Tom Fulton have jointly prepared the following information for Council. At the April 27 Council Legislative meeting, an oral presentation will be made to Council.

Through a series of public meetings in the winter and early spring of 2009, a matrix of community and user issues was developed that reflected a need for both an immediate and a long term plan to address Fort Ward Park issues. The Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities and the Office of Historic Alexandria worked with the City Manager's Office to address some immediate issues and to develop an interim management plan for the park in the Spring/Summer 2009 season. In order to respond to the longer term future of the park, staff recommended the establishment of an Ad Hoc Fort Ward Park and Museum Area Stakeholder Advisory Group. On June 19, 2009, the City Council approved the creation of this group with the charge to advise staff with a goal of recommending an appropriate balance between the different uses of the park, including active, passive/environmental and historic/archeological interests. The Ad Hoc Group held its first meeting December 8, 2009.

A public meeting is planned in May as part of the regular meeting of the Ad Hoc Group to provide the community an update on actions and to receive public comment.

Actions since June 2009

Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities (RPCA):

- * Established Manager on Duty program to provide supervisor coverage on weekends in the park from April through October.
- * Revised reservation policy and increased rental fees.
- * Established ticket booth check-in station for picnic reservations on weekends.
- * The number of group picnic reservation sites was reduced.
- * Rules were changed for picnic reservations to limit total attendance to 350 people in the rental areas in any 4 hour time block.
- * Speed bumps were added to the roadway along with additional signage for walkers.
- * Information kiosks were added to post regulations.
- * The horticultural/nursery functions were moved off site.
- * The maintenance facilities were relocated away from Marlboro Estates.
- * Established no mow areas of the park to decrease erosion, storm water run off, protect historical resources and improve habitat.

From the summer of 2009, after the changes were implemented, to the present time only one recorded complaint regarding conduct at the park was received by RPCA.

Office of Historic Alexandria (OHA):

During the past year, the Office of Historic Alexandria embarked on several new initiatives to better understand the historical significance of Fort Ward Park, including the following:

- * Prepared a *Draft Inventory of Cultural and Historic Resources of Fort Ward Park* to begin the preservation planning process for the park.
- * Worked with RPCA to coordinate and review any necessary ground penetration at Fort Ward, and assigned an on-site archaeologist during the period of disturbance to ensure no cultural resources are impacted.
- * Assembled an intradepartmental team comprised of staff from Fort Ward Museum and Historic Site, Alexandria Archaeology Museum, Alexandria Black History Museum and OHA Administration to work with RCPA and the community on new research, interpretive and outreach programs for Fort Ward Park.
- * Established a public Fort Ward History Work Group, to assist OHA and RPCA with the documentation, research and interpretation of cultural and historic resources of Fort Ward Park, including its association with Native Americans, the Defenses of Washington Civil War fortifications, and the post Civil War African American community that existed until 1961.
- * Performed an experimental Ground Penetrating Radar Survey within select areas of Fort Ward Park that has tentatively identified 38 potential burial sites and other archaeological features.

- * Temporarily roped off known and potential burial areas within the park (with specially built bollards that do not penetrate the ground) until such areas can be archaeologically “ground-truthed” later this year.
- * Prepared and issued an RFP for archaeological services to begin the first phase of archaeology investigation at Fort Ward later this year.
- * Through the efforts of Congressman James Moran, requested and obtained a matching “Save Americans Treasures” grant of \$75,000 to support historical interpretation and accessibility at Fort Ward.
- * Requested and obtained a non-matching “Partners in Scholarship” grant of \$15,000, from the National Trust for Historic Preservation, for African American interpretation at Fort Ward, including research and signage.
- * Focused on the significance and role of Fort Ward Park as part of the upcoming Civil War Sesquicentennial commemoration planned for 2011-15.

Ft. Ward Park and Museum Area Stakeholder Advisory Group

ORGANIZATION: On January 14, 2010, in a noticed and scheduled public meeting, the Advisory Group organized and elected member Tom Fulton as Chair, Chuck Ziegler as Vice-Chair, and Bill Schreiner as Secretary by a quorum of members present and voting. The Group decided to hold a regularly scheduled series of meetings noticed and open to the public on the second Thursday and fourth Tuesday of each month, and such other times as might be needed, for the approximately one calendar year (2010) the City recommended and the Group determined it needed to accomplish its mandate from the City. The Advisory Group also determined that it would formulate a Mission Statement to guide its work.

MISSION STATEMENT: That the Advisory Group’s work should...”Ensure the preservation and protection of Fort Ward Park for the citizens of Alexandria into perpetuity. Commemorate and interpret Fort Ward history related to the Civil War, the African American community living in and around the Park and all other cultures. Develop a framework of recommendations for the overall usage of Fort Ward by balancing and merging the richness of culture and history with recreational, environmental, and operational management demands.”

For its **SCOPE OF WORK**, the Advisory Group decided that it would use the issues raised by citizens at the three public hearings held in 2009, as well as any and all written submissions to the Parks and Recreation Department on the issue of Fort Ward Park, as well as any that are raised at its own public meetings as a starting point in its considerations.

THE WORK THUS FAR: The Group also determined it should hear from a variety of City Department heads regarding the challenges they face in managing Fort Ward Park. The Advisory Group extended invitations to Mr. James Spengler, Director of the Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Affairs, Mr. Lance Mallamo, Director of the Office of Historic Alexandria, Mr. Rich Baier, Director of the Department of Transportation and Environmental Affairs, Mr. John Noelle, City Arborist (Fort Ward is Alexandria’s designated Arboretum), Dr. Pamela Cressey, City Archaeologist, Ms. Susan Cumbey, Fort Ward Museum Director, and Mr. Wally Owen, Fort Ward Museum Assistant Director.

In scheduled meetings, noticed to the public, the Advisory Group heard from Mr. Spengler, Mr. Mallamo, and Mr. Noelle on March 20, 2010 (at their scheduling request), and from Ms. Cumbey and Mr. Owen on March 23, 2010. The Group is scheduled to hear from Dr. Pamela Cressey on April 8, 2010, and has not yet scheduled a time to hear from Mr. Rich Baier.

The Advisory Group also decided to hear from stakeholder groups regarding issues associated with Fort Ward Park. As a result, invitations to submit information were sent to: The Parks and Recreation Commission, the Historic Alexandria Resources Commission, the Alexandria Archaeology Commission, the Seminary Hill Association, the Seminary Civic Association, the Friends of Fort Ward, and the Oakland Baptist Church. To date, the Advisory Group has received replies from the Seminary Civic Association and the Historic Alexandria Resources Commission.

Additionally the Advisory Group decided to divide into smaller work groups to better manage the range of issues it is dealing with. The Group decided on the following five subgroups with two Advisory Group members taking the lead on each:

Historical and Cultural Issues/solutions:

Civil War history, African American culture, Native American culture, protection of historic sites and areas, summarize existing and proposed interpretation; led by Frances Terrell and Chuck Ziegler

Environmental and Natural Resource Issues/solutions:

Erosion concerns, summary of trees (including arboretum), plants, wildlife, soils and the overall health and sustainability of these resources; led by Linda Ries and Richard Brune

Recreational Use Issues/solutions:

Walking, running, picnicking, use of dog park, sledding, playground, amphitheater, special events, including impact on Park neighbors; led by Ripley Forbes and Bob Moir

Park Operations and Management Issues/solutions:

Maintenance of turf, trees, plants, signage, trash, fencing, pavilions, parking, access, staffing, hours of operation, safety, crowd control; led by Bill Schreiner and Phil Voorhees

Development and Promotion Issues/solutions:

Options for interpretive products, educational opportunities, access for larger groups for special occasions; led by Adrienne Washington and Tom Fulton

YET TO DO: The Advisory Group plans to compile chapter recommendations into a first draft, hold a public meeting to solicit comments, post for public and City comment, revise as needed and complete a second draft by the end of 2010, which would be submitted to appropriate City officials in early January 2011.

STAFF:

Mark Jinks, Deputy City Manager

James Spengler, Director, Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities

Lance Mallamo, Director, Office of Historic Alexandria