

Ad Hoc Fort Ward Park and Museum Area Stakeholder Advisory Group

C. Ziegler

In the fall of 2008, significant community concern became apparent in operation of Ft. Ward Park and its historical resources. Through a series of public meetings in the winter and early spring of 2009, the Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities Department developed a matrix of community and user issues. In order to respond to the longer-term future of the park, City Council created an *Ad Hoc Stakeholder Advisory Group* to study these issues.

The Advisory Group, established in June 2009, consisted of ten members appointed by the City Manager to a one year term, beginning in December, 2009 and ending in January, 2011. The goal set for the advisory group was to advise staff, recommending an appropriate balance between the different uses of the park, including active, passive/environmental and historic/archeological interests.

The report was completed in January 2011 and recommended the following specific actions for the City:

- **Prepare a Fort Ward Master Plan.**
- **Complete the archaeological investigation** at Fort Ward Park. With the discovery of marked and unmarked graves, the City must make it a priority to complete an inventory of sites, promote understanding, properly interpret, ensure protection and strive to honor the graves of the African Americans and others in Fort Ward Historical Park.
- **Address infrastructure issues and mitigate storm water runoff problems**
- **Focus attention on re-invigorating the Arboretum or consider eliminating this function at the Park; set up a regular schedule for tree care and pruning and create a tree replacement plan.**
- **Complete clean up of the Maintenance Yard including soil and gravel piles and work to create instead a landscape that properly honors the African American graves that lie in this area.**
- **Use best management practices (BMPs) in choosing mowing and turf management practices.**

- **Encourage city staff to continue to collaborate on management issues of Fort Ward and keep communication open and transparent across different city departments.** To this end a Memorandum of Understanding has been signed among the four City departments responsible for various aspects of Ft. Ward.
- **Establish a Citizens Advisory Committee to assist in Fort Ward management.**

In order to begin the implementation of these recommendations, on June 28, 2011 the City Council passed a resolution to re-establish an *Ad Hoc Fort Ward Park and Museum Area Stakeholder Advisory Group* for a period of two years. This period was extended for a further year, so the term will end this month.

Initially, we began our work in preparing what evolved into a Management Plan for Ft. Ward on our own, with guidance from City staff. A Management Plan expands from the concept of a Master Plan—a type of plan that prescribes improvements and their location within a set time period—focusing rather on cultural and natural resources, educational opportunities and operational issues at a given site. A Management Plan addresses specific topics that affect a park and its mission and operations, and lays out a long-range plan and management strategy that reflects a community's values and interests.

However, it soon became apparent that preparing a usable Management Plan required levels of expertise far in excess of that possessed by members of the Advisory Group. Thus, at our recommendation and after the appropriate procedures, the City engaged the firm of Lardner/Klein, landscape architects, to prepare the Management Plan, with the Advisory Group—and the public—commenting in detail on the draft. Lardner/Klein also drew heavily on the work already done by the Advisory Group.

In addition to the Management Plan itself, several other items are included in the overall package:

-A Master Drainage Plan, prepared by City staff and engineering consultants, that addresses the concerns of numerous stakeholders

-A report on archaeological investigations at Ft. Ward Park

-A report on the history of the site of Ft. Ward, primarily using documentary evidence, by Dr. Krystyn Moon, Associate Professor and Director of American Studies at the University of Mary Washington.

-The Memorandum of Understanding between the Office of Historic Alexandria; the Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities; the Department of Transportation and Environmental Services; and the Department of General Services, with an additional section concerning the best practices and optimum procedures for ground disturbance in areas where graves or other cultural resources are likely to be found.

All of these items, and *much* more, are available on the web page of the City of Alexandria's Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities under the heading of Ad Hoc Fort Ward

Park and Museum Area Stakeholder Advisory Group, and the web site of the Alexandria Archaeology Museum.

Will the Management Plan be implemented? Good question. A vigilant citizenry is the best way to ensure that it is. The 2011 report's recommendation in this regard states:

The Advisory Group believes that one of the great strengths of Alexandria is the role citizens play in decision making in the city. At Fort Ward Park, the Group believes that role should be on-going. The Group urges the city and City Council to consider forming a citizen's committee to oversee the implementation of these recommendations at Fort Ward but also to oversee the on-going management at Fort Ward. Such a group might include (but not be limited to) members of local citizen groups such as the Seminary Hill Association, The Seminary Hill Civic Association, the Friends of Fort Ward, as well as descendent and church groups with family buried at Fort Ward.

Ft. Ward Park is an extraordinarily complex entity, with multiple layers of history intersecting with the ongoing interests of current stakeholders. Adding to that are the challenges of multiple City agencies having responsibility for various aspects of the Park's operation and maintenance. You therefore have all the reasons you need for continued citizen involvement in Ft. Ward Park. The recent challenge of the possible intrusion of food trucks into Ft. Ward Park indicates that the possibility of future threats to the Park's well being cannot be excluded. We should also note that the reason for the establishment of the two successive citizens groups addressing issues at Ft. Ward Park was precisely because citizens felt that their concerns were not being sufficiently addressed. Thus, the most elementary prudence would endorse the recommendation of the establishment of an ongoing **Citizens Advisory Committee** to oversee the management of Fort Ward Park.

DRAFT

C. Ziegler

2014-09-03

Outstanding Concerns with the Final Draft Management Plan for Fort Ward Park and Museum

Oakland Baptist Church

Seminary Civic Association

Fort Ward and Seminary African American Descendants Society, Inc.

September 9, 2014

On August 13, 2014 the Fort Ward Park and Museum Advisory Group appointed by the City Manager met to discuss the Draft Management Plan for the area, including summary work done by Lardner/ Klein Landscape Architects, the History Report done by Dr. Moon, and the Drainage Plan done by the URS Corporation. At the meetings end the Council Chair made a motion to approve the documents and send them forward for further commission and public review and eventual review and approval by the City Council. A vote was taken and the motion carried 6 to 3 in favor of the action.

Voting against the motion was the Oakland Baptist Church, Seminary Civic Association and the Fort Ward and Seminary African American Descendants Society, Inc. The following report has been prepared at the urging of the Advisory Group and the Directors of the City of Alexandria Office of Historic Alexandria and the Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities. It outlines the concerns of the three organizations that voted against the motion and is intended to be included in the packet to be presented at the September 10, 2014 public meeting on the Draft Management Plan.

It is important to note that the concerns that are described in the following sections are ones that we raised initially at the March 18, 2009 public meeting on Fort Ward Park and throughout the advisory group process. As you may recall the most important concerns that we identified at that meeting were:

- * Find the graves and burial areas within the historic park and treat these sacred places with respect;
- * Stop the water running off parkland from entering the Oakland Baptist Church Cemetery and damaging graves and gravestones;
- * Involve the community, early and throughout the entire process, in the history and interpretation of the story of African American families who lived at the Fort before the creation of the park.

These concerns have been shared with the advisory group members, city department heads and local elected officials throughout the five years we have been working with the city. Frankly our concerns have not changed since day-one and we have voiced them throughout the process.

The major reasons we voted against approving the Draft Management Plan for Fort Ward Park and Museum are:

1. The Draft Plan was to include the Drainage Plan and History Report. These documents were not provided to our advisory group members with adequate time to review them before the vote. We were unwilling to approve documents we did not review.
2. The History Report that was acted on at the August meeting was not the final draft document that was prepared by the consultant for the Office of Historic Alexandria. Further, the final draft document was not provided to descendant family members of Fort Ward or our advisory group members with adequate time to review them before the vote.
3. The History Report did not include any of the oral history interview information about the location of graves and the removal of grave stones from descendant family members of Fort Ward and past and current employees of the City of Alexandria. These interviews, which were promised to be done by the Director of the Office of Historic Alexandria, have, or are likely to have, important information on the location of family graves within the park.

Current and former employees of the city, as well as descendant family members, have first-hand knowledge that can be used to more accurately complete the final draft management plan. This information, if included, would provide important facts that have been omitted by city researchers.

4. The History Report was done contrary to the promises made by the Director of the Office of Historic Alexandria with regard to the involvement of the descendant family members. We were told by city managers that this was our story to tell. The draft report was prepared by a consultant with questionable expertise in African American history and without public notice and early and frequent input from family members.

5. The Draft Drainage Report does not address the illegal actions taken by the City of Alexandria, to modify the use and condition of the park's maintenance yard uphill and next to the Oakland Baptist Church Cemetery, that have created runoff problems. The proposed solution to water running off of parkland into the cemetery is to add soil and rock on top of, and adjacent to, known and likely graves despite the concerns of descendant family members, the Seminary community, and leaders of the Oakland Baptist Church. The solution does not address water flowing through the gravel, placed without permits or public notice, in the maintenance yard and into the cemetery.

The report's solution for managing water flowing through the ravine between the Short's property and the cemetery does not recognize or respect the graves that have been reported in this area. Unfortunately the report seems to embrace the idea that city leaders consider that it is acceptable to further bury family graves with soil and rock as a way to protect and honor them.

6. The draft final plan's proposal for additional archaeology relies on the Office of Historic Alexandria, or their consultants, to determine in advance of development decisions whether or not there are graves or historical, cultural or archaeological resources present. This is the same

approach that was used in the past and has resulted in the destruction, degradation and disrespect of African American graves and artifacts from the Fort community. Unfortunately over the last seven years that this effort has been underway leaders of the Office of Historic Alexandria have not repaired or built up trust with the descendant families, Seminary community and church leaders to be able to return to a status-quo approach. In fact recent comments about the treatment

of graves within the park have further eroded trust that was severely damaged by the past approval of illegal activities within the park's maintenance yard.

7. The Memorandum of Understanding, between those city departments that have responsibility for management, use and development of Fort Ward Park and Museum, was to be included in the Final Draft Management Plan with a section describing the process for research, review, public input and approval of ground-disturbing activities within areas of the park that are known to have, or likely to have, graves. The Memorandum, as described at the meeting, was not included in the final draft.

8. The overall report offers few if any of the recommendations made by the initial advisory group. Rather it relies on a menu of ideas to choose from. Many of the ideas suggested call for additional city-funded consultant studies to further review and determine actions for the management, use and development of Fort Ward.

9. The report does not provide the families of those buried in the park with the opportunity to determine the way family graves will be protected from visitor use, maintained, and identified. It appears that these burial areas are to be managed as recreation areas rather than a cemetery or historic area. Discussions with the leaders of the Office of Historic Alexandria indicate that the city has acquired and would like to use headstones that are not consistent with the wishes of family members.

In addition, many descendant family members and leaders of the Oakland Baptist Church believe that known family graves, within the park, are not being protected or managed by the city. The Jackson family burial area and the Old Grave Yard are poorly maintained, not protected from recreation use, need to be fenced and have signs posted urging respect for these places. It is strongly contended by the descendant families, community and leaders of the Oakland Baptist Church that The Old Grave Yard was originally part of the Oakland Baptist Church Cemetery before the city revised the cemetery boundary as part of a trade of lands. This sacred area, which contains many graves, should be incorporated back into the cemetery so that it will receive protection.

10. The draft report makes no mention of the events, problems and concerns that led City Council to take action to improve the city's management, protection and use of Fort Ward Park. The report does not acknowledge any of the past and more recent actions that city departments have taken that show a disregard to past and current African Americans with family ties to the park and cemetery.

In summary, the desire of the advisory group leader to move the incomplete draft final management plan forward the action to vote on the approval of the plan was premature. Despite

the public and private money, time and effort that have gone into preparing these documents they still need revision before a management plan is ready to present to the City Council.

We request that we be given the opportunity to briefly present our concerns at the public meeting on September 10, 2014. Should you have questions please contact Frances Colbert Terrell at (703)379-9511.

Sincerely,

Lena Rainey, Oakland Baptist Church

Frances Colbert Terrell, Seminary Civic Association

Adrienne Terrell Washington, Ft. Ward and Seminary African American Descendants Society,

Dave Cavanaugh

General Comments:

- The Ad Hoc Fort Ward Park and Museum Area Stakeholder Advisory Group is to be complemented for completing a lengthy, difficult and contentious assignment.
- I generally agree with priorities to restore the health and attractiveness of Fort Ward Park. This is important in generating public support for maintaining parks and recreational resources.
- Support completing an archaeology survey of the area within the former maintenance yard and removing the fence. Since no surface disturbing activities are planned for the area, further delay and expense associated with a detailed archaeological study may be avoided.
- Improving accessibility along the circle road should be a high priority.
- The amphitheater is underutilized and consideration of alternatives for better utilization and integration of the facility into the park and museum should be a higher priority.
- The Sections I and II are confusing. Section II is detailed and overly prescriptive and strays from providing a framework. To alleviate potential confusion, the Summary Report should clarify that Section I: Summary Report is a guide and policy document for use by park staff, other partnering agencies, elected officials and interested members of the public. Section II provides background material and discussion considered by the Advisory Group in support of the key recommendations.

Goal 1—Management and Funding

- Continue the collaborative management process between City agencies as established in the Memorandum of Understanding.

Comment: Seemingly this approach has not worked satisfactorily in the past. Suggest the MOU be re-evaluated, streamlined and a managing department be identified for managing the park. The lead agency should report directly to the City Manager's office and work closely with other stakeholders in the community to ensure progress is made implementing various recommendations in the report.

Comment:

Fort Ward is a historically significant regional park. Regional partnering and funding is critical to the successful revitalization of Fort Ward Park and Museum. This is important management function and should be included in the Management and Funding Section.

This section should include a recommendation to City officials and management regarding the importance of working with regional partners in preparing an interpretive plan that will potentially generate financial support from other public institutions and private organizations. Developing an interpretive plan with regional appeal will increase tourist visits and hopefully have a spill over benefit for local hotels and restaurants.

Although there is continued interest in the importance of the circle forts, there is a growing interest in the African American experience before, during and after the Civil War. Coordination and collaboration with Fairfax and Arlington Counties as well as the National Park Service, the National Museum of African American Culture and History, and the African American Civil War Memorial may help generate public support, grants and financial support to fund research and programs.

Goal 2—Objectives and Strategies

Ground Disturbing Activities

Comment

- To add flexibility, I suggest the area with no ground disturbing activities allowed without further review by OHA include a provision for OHA monitoring. “No Ground Disturbing Activities Allowed without further review or one site monitoring by OHA.

Goal 3- Objectives and Strategies

Comment:

- It is unclear from the report what the impact is by adopting the APPA Standards related to “Operational Guidelines for Educational facilities, Grounds, Second Edition.
- The APPA standards are a management tool which explains the five APPA Appearance Levels and provides management information on benchmarking, job descriptions, outsourcing, and much more. It is a tool more directly applicable to campus and institutional setting. It is questionable if it is an appropriate tool for historical parks.

Goal 4-Educate and Engage Visitors-Share the Stories of Fort Ward Park

- Develop a detailed Interpretive Plan for Fort Ward Park

Comment:

The recommendation for an Interpretive Plan for the park is too general. The overly broad notion of “Civil War to Civil Rights” will complicate preparing an interpretive plan appropriate for a historically significant Civil War Park and Museum. More importantly, it will diminish the important role of the Fort and the role and contribution of African Americans before, during and immediately after the Civil War.

The Defenses of Washington theme has been the dominant theme for the last 50 years. This remains an important theme and the site of the best reconstructed fort protecting the Washington, D.C. during the Civil War. What is missing is a theme that focuses on slavery, refugees fleeing to Union controlled areas and forts, and how ending slavery transformed America. The nearby forts and hospitals were places where African America found work, built huts and after the war settled into small individual communities. As important is the contribution of African Americans in shortening and ending the war, and their struggle after the war for voting rights, education and equal treatment.

I suggest the management plan be linked to the historical significance of the fort and to the untold contribution and role of African Americans before, during and after the Civil War in their quest for freedom.

Comment:

I disagree the museum and park is an appropriate place for “one connected story from the Civil War to Civil Rights”. The current signs in the park are sufficient to cover African American heritage linked to the park, cemetery and families living at the former fort and the immediate area.

The park is historic because of its connection to the Civil War and the changes it brought about. It would be a real challenge developing an interpretive plan covering 100 years including the beginning and end of reconstruction, Jim Crow, segregation and the Civil Rights movement. It would be a mistake to introduce Civil War to Civil Rights—A Century of Change at Fort Ward.

The park could be a venue for lectures, storytelling, completing oral histories of what was like to be an African American living in Alexandria after World War II and during the Civil Rights period.

The area near the Fort had recently been annexed by the City and acquisition of the land by the City was prompted by groups interested in preserving the Fort for the upcoming 100th anniversary of the Civil War and to provide a park space for the fast growing area. At that time the role of African Americans during the Civil War was overlooked.

The City acquired several properties from African American families. At the time the area was transitioning to commercial and residential development. Although the properties were acquired ostensibly under the threat of condemnation, there is no evidence that property owners were unfairly treated or condemnation used other than to clear title. In almost all cases the City was able to negotiate reasonable settlements. There is evidence the City was able to reach agreement with the Oakland Baptist Church on the boundaries of the cemetery.

Although the treatment of African Americans in Alexandria during the 50s and 60s is an important story and a backdrop to the Civil Rights period, Fort Ward and members of that community were not directly related to the Civil Rights protests. However for many African Americans the displacement was an example of a persistent pattern of white discrimination. To incorporate the civil rights movement into the interpretive plan would take away from the compelling and dramatic story of African Americans fleeing to Union lines, enlisting and serving in the U.S. Colored Troops, forming nearby communities, educating their children, organizing churches, becoming politically active and registering to vote in 1867.

References to the Civil Rights movement should be deleted.

Comment:

The Action Item for Goal 4 is to have OHA formally invite key stakeholders to participate in a new advisory committee to develop the interpretive plan. Descendant and interested groups have an important role in helping develop an interpretive plan that does not overwhelm the park. Suggest under Goal 4 Objectives and Strategies adding that for the new advisory group is to be successful it must be led by individuals with a history and cultural background, trained and experienced in working with diverse groups in preparing meaningful and informative interpretive plans.