

## **Attachment 6: Letter from Dissenting FWAG Members and City Response**

This document includes responses from staff from the Office of Historic Alexandria and Departments of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities and Transportation and Environmental Services to the letter outlining the outstanding concerns raised by the Oakland Baptist Church, Seminary Civic Association and Fort Ward and Seminary African American Descendants Society representatives. Responses are itemized following the identified concerns.

### **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.**

Response:

In March and May, 2014, the descendant community met with OHA staff and the history report author, Krystyn Moon, Professor of History and Program Director of American Studies at the University of Mary Washington, to discuss their comments on the history of the Fort community. Dr. Moon worked with the descendants, emailing throughout the spring, to address and/or incorporate any needed revisions or additions. In June, with the approval of the descendants, a revised draft of the report text was distributed to the Fort Ward Advisory Group and posted on the City's website for a public comment period. In July, a public presentation of the history research and report was made at an Advisory Group meeting. The group later voted to include the report with the management plan when it went forward to City Council.

Copies of the first draft of the Master Drainage Plan were hand delivered to members of Oakland Baptist Church on February 24, 2014, prior to the public meeting to discuss the plan on May 7, 2014. Comments were solicited and received until May 21, 2014. Members were informed that the revised draft was scheduled to be available near the end of June 2014. Following internal review it was made public on the RPCA website at the end of July 2014 along with the response to comments. Hard copies were distributed to members on August 8, 2014. It was noted to members that the comments received did not substantively change the Master Drainage Plan and the three recommended proposed projects were mostly unchanged. The public meeting to discuss the plans and vote for acceptance was on August 13, 2014.

- 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.**

Response:

The final draft of the history report text did not differ substantively from the revised draft approved by the descendants. It incorporated the correction of typographic errors, the addition of several citations, and a few paragraphs integrating additional research brought to light by the one individual who responded during the public comment period. These additions only further enhanced the document. This draft was circulated to the descendant community and the Fort Ward Advisory Group at the end of August. After this draft circulated, one minor adjustment to the title and role of one individual in the Acknowledgements was made. The final draft of the text was posted on the City's website in October and is the version that is now included as a reference document only (the History Report was not used in the management plan) with appendices of the management plan for review by Council. Graphics will be added to accompany and illustrate a final report in the near future.

- 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.**

Response:

The consultant for the history report was to complete a document-based study that considered a series of questions developed by the Fort Ward History Group about the Fort community, compiled the data already collected by the Fort Ward History Group and other volunteers working with city staff (including land records--a complete chain of title for all properties that now comprise Fort Ward Park, as well as previous oral history interviews), and incorporated additional documentary research on the history of the community and the acquisition of the land by the City for creation of Fort Ward Park. The report exceeds these goals.

OHA has recognized that there is a need for additional oral histories of descendant family members that could provide insight into grave locations and other activities of daily life of the community. In December, 2013, OHA offered to set up a separate contract with funds available in Fiscal Year 2014 for the descendant community to choose an oral historian to conduct interviews of family members so that the more personal story of the

community history could be documented and written. The descendant community declined to take advantage of this offer before the fiscal year ended, and this funding is no longer available. OHA has always considered that both the oral history and the documentary study perspectives have great value in interpreting The Fort community.

OHA is committed to continuing to pursue an understanding of the history of the community and the locations of additional burial areas within the park through oral history interviews of current and past employees who have knowledge of the past activities in the park. To date, two oral history interviews have been conducted within the ability of the department's annual work plan. Transcribing, a time-consuming task which is completed by volunteers, and editing, done in consultation with the interview subjects, are in process. When approved by the interviewees, the transcripts will be made available to the public on the City's website. Additionally, the directors of RPCA and OHA have questioned current City employees about their knowledge of graves in the park, but little information was obtained.

- 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.**

Response:

While OHA recognizes that there has been considerable objection on the part of the descendants to the manner in which the history report was prepared, OHA stands by its choice of Dr. Krystyn Moon as an extremely competent historian with impeccable academic credentials to complete this document-based study of The Fort community. Her teaching and research fields include race and ethnicity, and the document itself speaks to her abilities as a researcher. She is also a resident of the City of Alexandria with a desire to promote an understanding of the history of the community where she makes her home. At this point, except for photos and graphics, the report is complete, and the descendant community members have had ample opportunity to edit, revise and add to the document. Their representatives permitted the document to be presented to the public and included in the management plan. Dr. Moon's work has also been used by the descendants in order to demonstrate why the name of the development in the Woods Avenue area should be changed. In addition, as mentioned in the response to Comment 3, the descendants were given an opportunity to conduct oral history interviews and write the story from a different prospective.

- 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.**

Response:

The Master Drainage Plan does not attempt to address past City actions that may or may not have altered conditions that may or may not be contributing to existing conditions found in the field. The intent of the Master Drainage Plan was to begin the analysis with the existing conditions as they were observed at the beginning of the project. All solutions were formulated to mitigate existing problems as they were observed or implicated by the consulting team using accepted standard engineering practices and principals. One of the conclusions made by the consulting team is that prevailing drainage patterns and runoff quantities and flow rates *are not mitigated nor reduced by the removal of imported fill material found in the old maintenance yard.*

The archaeological investigations do not indicate that the gravel fill on the maintenance yard is as deep as suggested by the descendant community. The gravel appears to be only about ½ to 1 ½ feet in depth.

The Fort Ward Advisory Group and descendant community have been told on numerous occasions that the berm to improve storm water runoff into the Oakland Baptist Cemetery is to contain clean fill soil, not rocks. It has also been pointed out that clean fill has been placed on top of the graves at Freedmen's Cemetery. In fact, one stipulation by the Virginia Department of Historic Resources was the placement of at least two feet of fill on top of graves at Freedmen's to help ensure their future protection.

Nevertheless, OHA acted when the descendant community protested the placement of a berm on top of burials. To further discussion on this issue and to determine whether graves are actually present in the proposed berm area, OHA is currently conducting an archaeological investigation of the locations, as provided for in a 2012 allocation by Council that set aside funds to conduct archaeological excavations to ensure grave protection prior to drainage improvements. At the time of the staff report preparation, approximately 50% of the proposed berm area has been investigated, and no grave locations have been identified. Given the weather conditions, the remaining portions may not be investigated until spring. OHA/RPCA/T&ES have all indicated that the proposed berm locations can be changed to avoid impact to graves and other cultural resources.

Prior to any modification in the ravine, which is part of the concepts for the large-scale, future stormwater management project, archeological work will be completed to look for evidence of graves. As in all cases of proposed ground disturbance and stormwater improvements, plans will be altered to ensure that burials and other sensitive areas are protected in place.

- 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.**

Response:

A great deal of archaeological work has been conducted to identify the locations of sacred ground and potentially significant buried resources. Approximately 1,400 shovel test pits were excavated to look for concentrations of artifacts associated with The Fort community, Native Americans and other occupants of the park. Metal detection was conducted to identify clusters of Civil War activity outside of the fortifications. More than 100 areas were scraped by a backhoe or hand-excavated to look for evidence of graves and other large features such as foundations or wells and privies.

The investigation identified 20 areas with potential to yield significant information about daily life in the African American community as well as 4 verified sacred burial areas with 43 grave locations discovered plus an additional 7 possible cemetery areas. As indicated in the summary of the archaeological investigations included as Appendix II of the plan, the investigations have led to the delineation of levels of protection for areas across the park, and the management plan incorporates these levels into the determination of proposed and allowable actions. The process to ensure preservation of resources is specified in both the management plan and the addendum to the MOU, which is included as Appendix IV of the plan.

OHA understands the critical nature of identifying burial locations within the park. The draft management plan and both Appendices II and IV clearly specify that known and potential grave areas are in maximum protection zones and that all areas with graves are to be treated as sacred places. Any changes planned in these sacred areas are to be consistent with this designation. Placing interpretive elements or markers and addressing potential safety or environmental concerns are the only types of development that should occur. If any ground disturbance is to be done in these locations (e.g, for placement of

fences or interpretive signs, planting of trees, etc.), archaeologists will investigate the areas to ensure that no graves will be disturbed. If graves are discovered, locations will be altered to ensure that all burials are protected in place.

It should also be stressed that the management plan is not a static document. Outside of the sacred ground, there is a procedure in place for archaeological investigations to occur prior to ground disturbance in the High Protection Areas, the areas around the homes of The Fort community, where descendants think that additional family graves may be present. In other areas, monitoring by City archaeologists will occur. A few areas have been identified on the basis of the archaeological and historical research where ground disturbance may occur without archaeological investigation. However, in all cases, both City staff and all consultants working in the park are required to call Alexandria Archaeology if buried features or concentrations of artifacts are discovered when an archaeologist is not present. Any additional grave locations identified will be considered sacred ground and subject to maximum protection, as are all the currently identified known and potential grave areas. These procedures are all specified in the management plan and associated appendices.

- 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.**

Response:

The MOU between city departments is and was included as an attachment to the Management Plan. The additional attachment to the MOU, a protocol and process for ground disturbance activities, was discussed and agreed to at the August Advisory Group meeting where the representatives of the Seminary Civic Association, Oakland Baptist Church and the Fort Ward and Seminary African Descendants Society representatives voted against moving the plan forward. The document could not be considered or included in the draft prior to that meeting because the discussion had not yet occurred.

- 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.**

Response:

The 2011 Final Report and Recommendations of the initial advisory group had five priority recommendations (Executive Summary Attachment). 1) Prepare a Fort Ward Master Plan; 2) Complete the archeology investigation at Fort Ward; 3) Address

infrastructure issues such as stormwater run-off, topsoil conditions and relocate the playground to the western side of the park; 4) Focus on tree care and create a tree planting plan in coordination with OHA's archeological findings and clean-up/restore the old maintenance yard; and 5) Use best management practices in choosing mowing and turf management practice. In response to the first recommendation, staff suggested, and City Council approved moving forward with a management plan for the park. The management plan addresses the remaining four recommendations, along with the majority of the more specific items under each of those recommendations. In addition, in consultation with the subsequent Advisory Group, some of the initial recommendations were initiated during the planning process, including improved turf care to reduce run-off and erosion, additional archeology work, identification of tree planting locations, and transfer of responsibility for the care of all archeological sites to the Office of Historic Alexandria (including the burial sites in the old maintenance yard). Finally, the initial group recommended that a follow-up group be created, and that new group was in place from September 2012 to September 2014 to advise staff on the development of the management plan. Many of the recommended actions in the management plan came directly from the 2011 Recommendations and reports/recommendations written by the subsequent Advisory Group in 2012 and 2013.

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.**

Response:

The management plan calls for the demarcation of the grave areas to identify them as sacred places and protect them from recreational use (Action item on I-27). The plan also recommends that maintenance of those areas is also transferred to OHA, with a trained



contractor , through an updated MOU. Some archaeological excavations have already been conducted with this goal in mind.

The stone quarry consultant working with the Freedmen's Cemetery developer donated 50 additional stones valued at \$5,000 (identical to those used to mark graves at Freedmen's Cemetery) to the City for use as grave markers in other cemeteries, and OHA accepted this offer and suggested that these be placed at Fort Ward. OHA believes that marking the individual burial locations within The Fort, along with a delineation of the burial areas, offers increased protection from future disturbances and helps to ensure that the use of the areas as burial grounds will not be forgotten. The donated markers have not been put in place because of objections of some members of the descendant community regarding aesthetics related to the type of stone that is available. As a result, OHA recommends that this issue be deferred until the Interpretive Plan for the park is fully developed.

Deed research has indicated that Oakland Baptist Church never owned the Old Grave Yard area. According to the deeds, the land switch mentioned in the comment above refers to property to the north of the original Oakland Baptist Church Cemetery parcel, not to the Old Grave Yard area, which is to the south. Of course, this does not mean that the Old Grave Yard was not an integral part of The Fort community as it developed over time, and this has been recognized by OHA on numerous occasions. RPCA and OHA are open to considering an agreement with Oakland Baptist Church for the church to assume enhanced maintenance responsibilities for the Old Grave Yard area.

**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.**

Response:

The management plan includes discussion of recent history and actions on pages II- 1.2 and II-1.3, II-2.7 -2.13. The management plan was contracted and designed to look to the future to take into account the various uses of the park and make recommendations about changes in use, interpretation, and management practices. The recommendations strive to ensure that staff of the various City departments work together to manage the park while protecting culture resources.

An important chapter addresses future interpretation of The Fort community in the park and includes a recommendation to set up an Interpretive Planning Committee to provide guidance on inclusion of interpretive elements to accomplish this goal. RPCA and OHA requested funding to prepare an Interpretive Plan for the park in the FY2016 budget.

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,