

***City Charter Section 9.06 Case #2019-0004***  
***1315 Duke Street and 225A S. Payne Street***

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<b>Application</b>	<b>General Data</b>	
<b>Request:</b> Review whether the proposed purchase of Freedom House by the City of Alexandria is consistent with the City of Alexandria Master Plan pursuant to Section 9.06 of the City Charter.	<b>Planning Commission Hearing:</b>	February 4, 2020
	<b>City Council Hearing:</b>	(For Information Only) February 11, 2020 February 22, 2020
	<b>Zone:</b>	CL / Commercial Low RM / Residential
<b>Address:</b> 1315 Duke Street and 225A S. Payne Street	<b>Small Area Plan(s):</b>	Old Town

**Staff Reviewers:** Karl Moritz, Director, Planning & Zoning, [karl.moritz@alexandriava.gov](mailto:karl.moritz@alexandriava.gov); Catherine Miliaras, Principal Planner, Planning & Zoning, [catherine.miliaras@alexandriava.gov](mailto:catherine.miliaras@alexandriava.gov)

**Staff Recommendation:** Staff recommends that the Planning Commission **approve** this request, finding that the proposal is consistent with Section 9.06 of the City Charter of Alexandria, Virginia, and with the City's Master Plan.

**PLANNING COMMISSION ACTION, FEBRUARY 4, 2020:**

On a motion by Commissioner Lyle, seconded by Commissioner Brown, the Planning Commission voted to confirm that the City's purchase of 1315 Duke Street and 225A South Payne Street was consistent with the Alexandria Master Plan for City Charter Section 9.06 Case #2019-0004. The motion carried on a vote of 6-0.

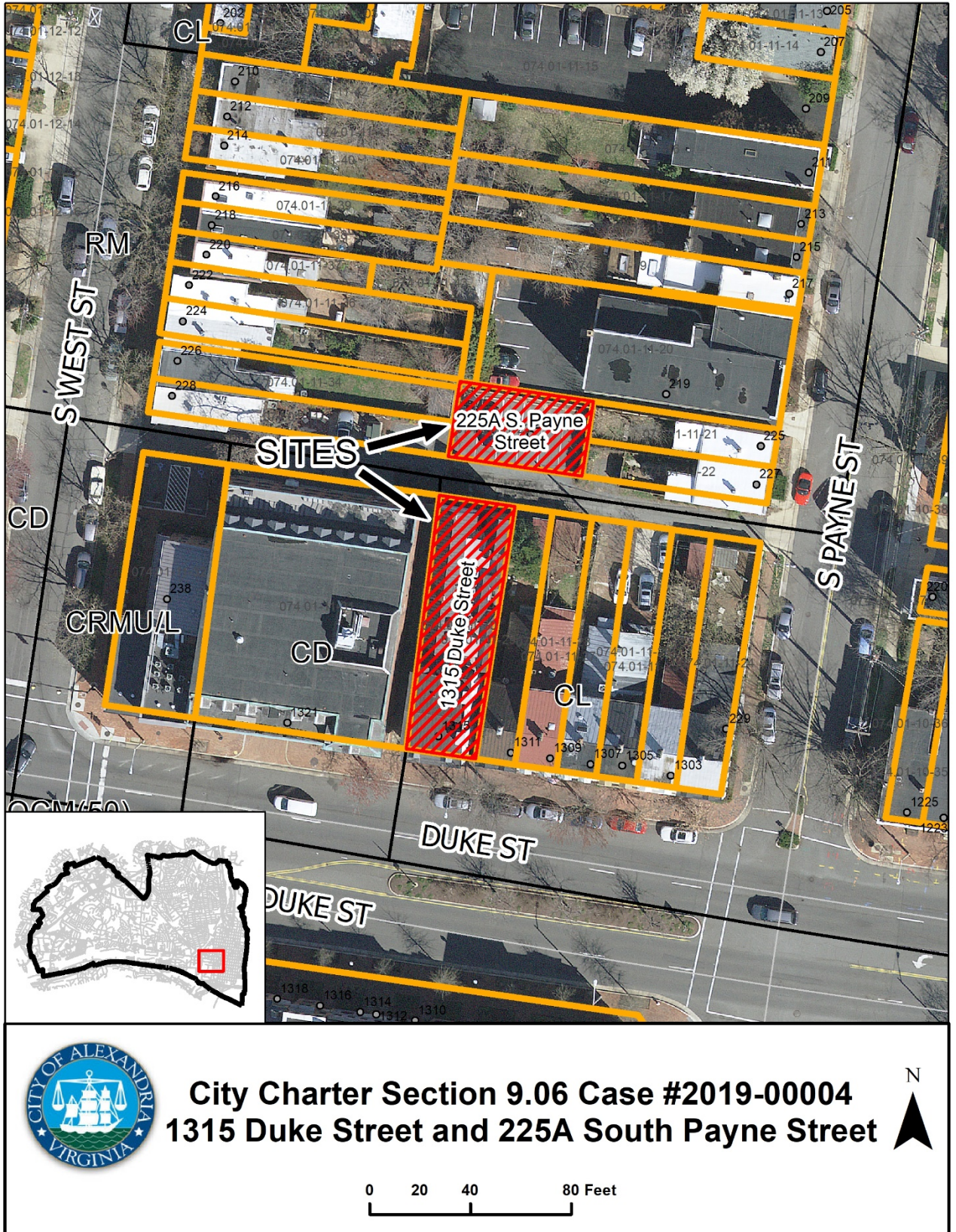
Reason: The Planning Commission agreed with the staff analysis.

Chair Macek noted that this building was one of the most fitting buildings to add to the City's portfolio of museums and that it was important to commemorate what occurred on this site. He appreciated that the City was able to provide the resources to acquire it.

There were no speakers. Gretchen Bulova, Director of Office of Historic Alexandria, Audrey Davis, Director of the Alexandria Black History Museum, Eleanor Breen, City Archaeologist, and Al Coleman, Deputy Director of General Services, were in attendance and available for questions.



City Charter Section 9.06 Case #2019-00004  
1315 Duke Street and 225A S. Payne Street



PROJECT LOCATION MAP



## **I. DISCUSSION**

The City proposes to purchase two properties located at 1315 Duke Street and 225A S. Payne Street in Old Town. The properties are now both owned by the Northern Virginia Urban League (Urban League) and are located across an alley from one another as shown in the map on page 2. The Duke Street property is a 9,810 square foot building and the Payne Street property is a small surface parking lot. Section 9.06 of the City's Charter requires that the Planning Commission review any proposed acquisition or sale of public land. The Planning Commission is charged with ensuring that any such acquisition, sale or change is consistent with the City's Master Plan.

## **II. BACKGROUND**

1315 Duke Street includes the Freedom House, an 1812 brick building that served as the headquarters and slave pen of the largest slave trading firm in the United States in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The building possesses both local and national significance related to the buying and selling of enslaved persons. The building was once part of the headquarters for the largest domestic slave trading firm in the United States. From 1828 to 1861, five successive firms forced as many as 50,000 enslaved adults and children from the Chesapeake Bay area to the slave markets in Natchez, Miss., and New Orleans by foot or ship. The property was designated as a National Historic Landmark in 1978, a designation reserved for resources that represent an important aspect of American history and culture. The property was purchased by the Northern Virginia Urban League in 1997 and has functioned as a small museum with office and program space for the organization since then. The lot fronts onto Duke Street and has rear access via a public alley. City Real Estate records state that the 1315 Duke Street lot has 2,937 square feet.



**Figure 1. 1315 Duke Street, front elevation.**

225A S. Payne Street is a vacant lot on the north side of the alley adjacent to the rear of 1315 Duke Street and is zoned RM / Residential. The lot currently provides six parking spaces for the use of 1315 Duke Street. City Real Estate records state that the 225A S. Payne Street lot has 1,648 square feet.

In 2018, in order to generate interest in the museum/building, the Office of Historic Alexandria (OHA) in collaboration with the Northern Virginia Urban League, implemented expanded access to the site by the public including Friday and Saturday hours supported by City staffing. The City also commissioned a facility condition assessment report in 2018 which indicated 1315 Duke Street would need \$3.3 million in capital investments and repairs over a 10-year period with nearly half of those funds needed in the first three years.

Due to financial considerations, the Urban League listed 1315 Duke Street and the adjacent six (6) parking spaces at 225A S. Payne Street for sale but did not market the property for sale. City staff began working with the League in June 2019 to negotiate terms of a possible sale to the City. On December 31, 2019, the Urban League and City announced an agreement that the City would purchase 1315 Duke Street and 225A S. Payne Street in order to preserve this National Historic Landmark for future generations. The City's proposed use will be an expanded museum and office space at 1315 Duke Street, and to continue the parking use at 225A S. Payne Street. The Urban League will continue to rent office space within the building for a five-year period. It is the City's intent to expand the museum space within the building to tell the story of the domestic slave trade and those who were enslaved. The City will be funding the acquisition of the building and plans to utilize \$2.44 million in State funding contained in the Governor's proposed budget, along with private fundraising, for the purposes of building restoration and museum development.

### **III. CONSISTENCY WITH THE MASTER PLAN**

#### Old Town Small Area Plan (1992)

The Old Town Small Area Plan advocates for planning policies that retain the balance of residential and commercial uses and contextual development. The acquisition is compatible with the goals and objectives of the Old Town Small Area Plan as it will:

- “Protect buildings and areas of historic and architectural value;”
- “Encourage the tourist potential of the historic and architectural aspects of Old Town.”

The acquisition of a nationally significant historic building that includes a museum component will allow for public access to the site as well as further educational opportunities and scholarly study of this important historic resource.

Historic Preservation Master Plan (1992)

The City's Master Plan includes several City-wide chapters that focus on key elements that are of interest across the City, including one on Historic Preservation. Master Plan goals for Historic Preservation include the following:

- "To identify historic resources throughout Alexandria."
- "To protect and preserve historic resources through sensitive management that prevents their destruction, damage and neglect."
- "To promote public awareness and appreciation of historic resources and Alexandria's heritage."

The purchase of the two properties will successfully allow this unique resource that speaks to local and national history and the experiences of innumerable enslaved persons to be publicly accessible and, also, will provide a place for study, research and contemplation.

#### **IV. STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

Staff recommends that the Planning Commission find that the proposed acquisition of 1315 Duke Street and 225A S. Payne Street is consistent with Section 9.06 of the City Charter of Alexandria, Virginia and with the City's Master Plan, including specifically the Old Town Small Area Plan and the Historic Preservation Master Plan.

STAFF: Karl Moritz, Director, Planning & Zoning  
Catherine Miliaras, Principal Planner, Planning & Zoning