



Legislation Text

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City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: MARCH 8, 2017

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: MARK B. JINKS, CITY MANAGER /s/

DOCKET TITLE:

Consideration of the Acquisition of the Property Located at 517 Prince Street and the Associated Lifetime Lease for the Current Owner, and Conservation Easements for Open Space and Historic Preservation.

ISSUE: Acquisition of 517 Prince Street for historic preservation and public open space purposes.

RECOMMENDATION: That City Council authorize the City Manager to:

- (1) Acquire the real property located at 517 Prince Street;
- (2) Sign the lease agreement with the current property owner to allow him to reside at the subject property for the rest of his natural life or an earlier time of his choosing which the seller is reserving unto himself as part of the sale of the property;
- (3) Sign the Conservation Easement Agreements with the Virginia Department of Natural Resources and the Virginia Outdoors Foundation for an open space easement on the property, and the Virginia Department of Historic Resources for a historic architectural preservation easement on the house; and
- (4) Execute all documents that may be required.

BACKGROUND: The Murray-Dick-Fawcett House, located at 517 Prince Street, has long been recognized as one of the oldest, and most authentic pre-Revolutionary homes remaining in the City of Alexandria. The house was built about 1772 and documented by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) in the 1930's, with the architectural drawings prepared at that time now held within the collections of the Library of Congress. In the 1960's the house was included within the Alexandria National Historic Landmark District, receiving the highest designation for historic recognition and protection afforded by the Federal government. Since its original construction, the historic house has had few modifications, and architectural features, woodwork, wall

finishes and gas lighting fixtures are still intact within the interior. The adjacent land contains a large garden area and terrace that will provide an urban vest-pocket park one block from both King and South Washington Streets.

DISCUSSION: The City is in contract to purchase the historic property at 517 Prince Street for the sum of \$1,250,000. A Virginia Land Conservation Fund (VLCF) grant of \$900,000 was awarded in September 2016, and a Virginia Outdoors Foundation grant of \$350,000 was awarded in February 2017 for the acquisition of the property for open space and historic architectural preservation purposes. The required match for the VLCF grant is provided by the “bargain sale” donation of home equity by the current homeowner C. Joseph Reeder and the Virginia Outdoors Foundation grant.

As part of the sale, Mr. Reeder, currently 90 years old, will lease the property back and will remain as a tenant in the house for the remainder of his natural life or until he chooses to vacate. This arrangement will give the Office of Historic Alexandria time to plan for the use of the property as a historic site/educational center and vest-pocket park. During this time, the City will have use of the exterior property at all times and use of the house at least 12 times per year. A public tour and garden reception is being planned during May in honor of Historic Preservation Month. Under the terms of the grant awards, preservation easements for open space and architectural preservation are required to protect the site in perpetuity.

The creation and publication of a full Historic Structure Report for the 18th century homestead is now being completed by architectural historian Richard Bierce, at no cost to the City, which will guide planning and future maintenance for the structure. The Office of Historic Alexandria plans to establish a permanent endowment for maintenance and programming at the site, and solicit private gifts to support this effort. The Historic Alexandria Foundation has already pledged a major financial commitment to the endowment effort.

FISCAL IMPACT: The purchase price of this property is \$1,250,000. The purchase price will be paid for through the grant from the Virginia Land Conservation Fund of \$900,000 that will be available at the closing and the City will be reimbursed for the remaining \$350,000 from the Virginia Outdoors Foundation grant.

ATTACHMENT: Fawcett- Reeder House at 517 Prince Street Presentation

STAFF:

Emily A. Baker, Deputy City Manager

Joanna Anderson, Deputy City Attorney

Lance Mallamo, Director, Office of Historic Alexandria