



Legislation Text

File #: 19-2066, Version: 1

City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: MAY 8, 2019

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

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

DOCKET TITLE:

Consideration of a Grant Application to the Virginia Department of Historic Resources Certified Local Government Grant Program to Support the Non-Invasive Survey of Two Cemeteries in Alexandria, Virginia.

ISSUE: Consideration of a grant application to the Virginia Department of Historic Resources Certified Local Government Grant Program for a \$10,500 grant for a non-invasive, geophysical study of two historic cemeteries in Alexandria associated with African American residents.

RECOMMENDATION: That City Council authorize the City Manager to:

- 1) Approve the application to the Virginia Department of Historic Resources Certified Local Government Grant Program for a \$10,500 grant;
- 2) Approve the acceptance of funds from the Virginia Department of Historic Resources Certified Local Government Grant Program for \$10,500, if the grant is approved; and
- 3) Authorize the City Manager to execute the necessary documents that may be required.

BACKGROUND: Alexandria Archaeology, a division of the Office of Historic Alexandria (OHA), seeks \$10,500 from the Virginia Department of Historic Resources Certified Local Government Grant Program to support a non-invasive, geophysical survey of Penny Hill and Douglass Cemeteries in the City of Alexandria. Certified Local Government Grants fund efforts to preserve historic, archaeological and cultural resources, including Cultural Resource Surveys and Public Education/Information eligibility areas.

The goals of the overall project are to:

- 1) Conduct a non-invasive geophysical survey of Penny Hill and Douglass Cemeteries (including the use of ground penetrating radar) and produce a report on the results;
- 2) Update the Virginia Department of Historic Resources archaeological site inventory forms to reflect the results of this survey and current historical research;
- 3) Update the number of burials reported to the Department of Historic Resources to amend House Bill 2739, Historical African American Cemeteries, which allocates funding for historic African American cemetery maintenance based on the number of documented burials; and
- 4) Design, fabricate and install interpretive signage to inform residents and visitors of the significance of these sacred places.

Funding from the Virginia Department of Historic Resources Certified Local Government Grant Program will directly support the City's interpretation, preservation and management of historic African American cemeteries.

DISCUSSION: Survey and identification of burials are important efforts in the preservation and management of historic cemeteries. The City of Alexandria established Penny Hill in 1795 for residents, and later paupers and indigents. The number of burials is unknown and very few grave markers survive. Douglass Cemetery was established in 1895 as an African American cemetery and is now maintained by the City. Douglass is named for Frederick Douglass, whose year of death coincides with the founding of the cemetery. Internment records suggest over a thousand people are buried in the cemetery, yet many fewer markers remain visible today. Both cemeteries are located in the Wilkes Street Cemetery Complex. Penny Hill Cemetery is located on the 700 block of S. Payne Street between Franklin and Jefferson Streets and Douglass Cemetery is at 1421 Wilkes Street. City archaeologists originally recorded these sites with the Virginia Department of Historic Resources in 1990 and recommended formal archaeological studies if funding sources could be identified. Since then, archaeologists have successfully applied non-invasive techniques for surveying historic cemeteries elsewhere in the City, including at the Contrabands and Freedmen Cemetery and at Fort Ward. Geophysical survey is the most effective method for identifying the potential locations of burials (and other subsurface anomalies) without disturbing the ground and serves as a first step in delimiting the size and scale of historic cemeteries. Maps produced through non-invasive techniques like ground penetrating radar can aid archaeologists and the City in planning for, managing, and preserving these sites. The survey, documentation and interpretation will take place during the grant cycle from July 2019 through July 2020, if approved.

FISCAL IMPACT: This grant, if awarded, will provide \$10,500 toward the \$18,345 of preservation and interpretation costs associated with surveying and documenting Penny Hill and Douglass Cemeteries. Applications to the Certified Local Government Grant Program may also be sought to continue the preservation project in future years. Necessary matching funds will be provided in kind (\$6,045) and in cash, included in OHA's FY 2020 operation budget (\$1,800). No further City funding is necessary.

STAFF:

Emily A. Baker, Deputy City Manager

Gretchen Bulova, Director, Office of Historic Alexandria

Eleanor Breen, City Archaeologist, Office of Historic Alexandria