



Legislation Text

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City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: DECEMBER 2, 2020

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

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

DOCKET TITLE:

Consideration of a Grant Application to Virginia Humanities to support the preliminary research on the potential ownership and use of enslaved labor by the City of Alexandria Government.

ISSUE: Consideration of a grant application to Virginia Humanities for a \$5,000 grant to fund research staff, travel, and research facility fees to create a preliminary report on the historic ownership and use of enslaved labor by the City of Alexandria government.

RECOMMENDATION: That City Council authorize the City Manager to:

- (1) Approve the application to Virginia Humanities for a \$5,000 grant;
- (2) Approve the acceptance of funds from Virginia Humanities for \$5,000, if the grant is awarded; and
- (3) Authorize the City Manager to execute the necessary documents that may be required.

BACKGROUND: There is a growing movement for institutions, including local governments, to grapple with their sometimes-troubled legacies. The degree to which these institutions engaged in, supported, and profited from the legal enslavement of human beings is varied, but an honest accounting of this involvement is a necessary component of any program based in social justice. To this end, the Office of Historic Alexandria seeks to identify the City of Alexandria's government (including its predecessor entities) historic involvement in the institution of slavery.

This initial research program should address, at a minimum, the following questions:

- Did the City of Alexandria government own enslaved people? If so, what can we learn about these people?

- In what ways did the City of Alexandria government support this system of race-based slavery?
- In what ways did the City of Alexandria government profit from this system of race-based slavery?
- What evidence exists to document how enslaved people built public infrastructure within the City of Alexandria?

To date, no evidence has been identified to suggest that the City of Alexandria (or its predecessor entities) as a legal entity held enslaved individuals. Many of the City's trustees, mayors and councilmembers, however, were slave holders. The City's legal code also upheld and enforced the institution of slavery. An initial research project seeking to understand and account for the ways in which the modern City of Alexandria has been shaped by and profited from enslavement is an important first step.

FISCAL IMPACT: This grant, if awarded, will provide \$5,000 for a preliminary research report. Funds will be used for research staff, travel, and research facility fees. If it is determined that additional research is needed, OHA will apply for additional grant funds.

STAFF:

Emily A. Baker, Deputy City Manager

Gretchen Bulova, Director, Office of Historic Alexandria