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April 15, 2016

To: Members of the City of Richmond Planning Commission,
Members of the Public Art Commission
900 E. Broad St., Rooms 510, 511
Richmond, VA
23219

Re: Maggie Walker Memorial Plaza; Jackson Ward and Broad Street Local, State, and National Historic Districts

We write today as representatives of the Virginia Chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects to voice concerns regarding proposed plans to develop Maggie Walker Memorial Plaza at the intersection of Brook Road, N. Adams Street, and Broad Street within the City of Richmond. Richmond is a historic city that values its long-standing history and heritage resources. As currently conceived, the proposed plaza has the potential to irrevocably alter the historic fabric of the local, state, and national register historic districts of Jackson Ward and Broad Street, and to adversely affect local businesses and visitors to the area.

Such substantial alteration of historic resources within historic districts merits special consideration, evaluation, and assessment, which we feel has not been applied to this proposal. At the local level, the City of Richmond requires review of all changes to building exteriors and approval of proposed changes by the Commission of Architectural Review for a Certificate of Appropriateness. The current proposal has not been subject to such a review or approval. Likewise, the closing of a road and its impact on the urban streetscape should trigger careful review for appropriateness. At the state and federal level, when work on such a proposal is executed in a National Register of Historic Places-listed historic district, such as Jackson Ward and Broad Street, using government funds, the plans must be reviewed by the State Historic Preservation Office for Section 106 compliance. At the very least, plans for the plaza in question should be prepared under the guidance of appropriate professionals and meet the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties. We recommend that any decision regarding plans for the plaza be deferred until appropriate evaluation, assessment, review be completed.

In addition to our concerns regarding the impact of the current design on historic resources, we question whether the current plan will suitably honor the memory and accomplishments of Maggie Walker. The current proposed location for the sculpture may be limited in its ability to allow residents and visitors to enjoy, appreciate, and understand Maggie Walker, due to the volume and speed of traffic along Broad Street, the closing of Brook Road, and a lack of amenities, such as shade available to the public once the existing live oak tree is removed. The size of the statue may also overwhelm the space.

Deferring a decision regarding the plan affords the City ample opportunity to evaluate other alternatives that do not threaten to alter historic resources and are more amenable to providing a welcoming site for the proposed memorial. There are several locations a short distance away within the Jackson Ward neighborhood that might be considered due to their connection with Maggie Walker's life or because they better accommodate the character, context, and scale of the sculpture, as designed. Consider, for example, locations associated with Abner Clay Park, the Black History Museum and Cultural Center of Virginia, or a site in closer proximity to the Maggie Walker House, or the bank that Walker chartered. Recognition of Walker might still occur within the existing plaza in a different form, and direct visitors to the memorial elsewhere.

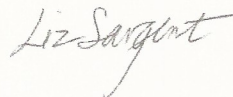
We therefore recommend that current plans for the Maggie Walker Plaza undergo further review and consideration before moving forward to the next stage of approval. These efforts, whether they take the form of modifications to the existing site plan to better respect historic resources, or lead to the selection of an alternative site for the memorial, should be reviewed by professionals with experience and qualifications working with historic resources, and evaluated for conformance with local ordinances and guidelines. With careful consideration, the City can successfully and honorably commemorate the significant contributions of Maggie Walker without adversely impacting important historic urban fabric.

The Virginia Chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects further supports this endeavor by offering to provide guidance and expertise in support of these recommendations and the successful completion of this testament to Maggie Walker.

Respectively submitted,



Missy Benson
Virginia Chapter, ASLA President



Liz Sargent
Virginia Chapter, ASLA HALS Representative