



1 November 2024

Mr. Rodney Poole, Esquire
Chair, Planning Commission
City of Richmond
900 E. Broad Street, Room 511
Richmond, VA 23219

Dear Chairman Poole and Members of the Planning Commission:

On behalf of Preservation Virginia's Trustees, statewide staff and members, I write in support of Ordinance No. 2024-283 to formally designate the City owned property at 1305 North 5th Street as a cemetery. Taking this action builds on the multiple efforts to reclaim a portion of this sacred ground that has been scarred and disrespected by infrastructure development.

Shockoe Hill African Burying Ground was named to our list of *Virginia's Most Endangered Historic Places* in 2021 to raise awareness of the threats to what remains of the once 31-acre resting place of 22,000 free and enslaved individuals and the solutions that will honor their memory. Since that time, strides have been made including the City's acquisition of the property, historic designation of the property, archaeological surveys, installation of a historical marker and other achievements. Much work remains.

Approving Ordinance No. 2024-283 is one more step. Formal establishment of the site as a cemetery perpetually protects the site from future ground disturbance and offers a path forward in acknowledging the profound and solemn significance of this place. Preservation Virginia encourages the members of the Planning Commission to approve this ordinance.

Thank you so much for considering our perspective.

Sincerely,

Will Glasco
CEO

From: [Ellen Chapman](#)
To: [PDR Land Use Admin](#); [Chen, Kimberly M. - PDR](#)
Cc: [LENORA MCQUEEN](#); [Dan Mouer](#); [ourrosewood](#); [Ryan K Smith](#)
Subject: Support for Ordinance No. 2024-2
Date: Monday, November 4, 2024 11:45:20 AM

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Dear Planning Commission,

I am an archaeologist working in cultural heritage law in Richmond and I live within a half-mile of the cemetery. I have been working on this project with Lenora and others since 2018. I strongly support passage of this ordinance and ask you to strongly support this ordinance in your review today.

Historical and archaeological evidence is ample that the city established a cemetery at 1305 North 5th Street and that the vast majority of the city's African-descended population were buried there over the course of its existence (roughly 1816-1879). The city was then a primary actor in disappearing the cemetery, both through conducting and allowing destructive projects and through allowing the cemetery to fall into neglect and failing to keep records of its existence.

This ordinance will acknowledge what the city staff and advocates and researchers now know to be true - that this place is a sacred place of rest that must no longer be desecrated, and that there is overwhelming evidence of intact and disturbed human remains across the 1305 North 5th Street parcel.

I deeply thank the city for taking this action and restoring this cemetery zoning, as one important part of undoing the city's past and ongoing erasure of this cemetery. I greatly appreciate the work of city staff on this issue over the last several years. I additionally ask the city to ensure that the sections of 5th Street and 7th Street within the cemetery's National Register of Historic Places boundary also be zoned as a cemetery. There is substantial evidence that bodies were graded under these streets (including by then City Engineer Cutshaw), and any future work to maintain these roads must be undertaken with the utmost care to ensure that ancestral human remains are treated in compliance with state laws regarding cemeteries and human remains.

Thank you for your consideration of this important ordinance. I do not have any economic or professional relationships that would be affected by the adoption of this legislation.

Best wishes,
Dr. Ellen Chapman
1701 4th Ave
Richmond, VA

Lenora McQueen
lenora.m@prodigy.net

November 4, 2024

To the Honorable Andres Addison, and the city of Richmond Planning Commission

Re: Still endangered, seeking your support for ordinance 2024-283 and help for the Shockoe Hill African Burying Ground

Dear Councilman Addison, Mr. Poole, Ms. Greenfield and the City of Richmond Planning Commission:

I wish to express to you my support for ordinance 2024-283. This ordinance will re-establish the 1.2 acre parcel at 1305 N 5th St. (which is a part of the much larger *Shockoe Hill African Burying Ground*) as an official cemetery. This parcel contains a portion of both the original 1816 "Burying Ground for Free People of Colour" and the "Burying Ground for Negroes", which was established and operated by the city of Richmond as a municipal burying ground. It was a segregated part of the city's *Shockoe Hill Burying Ground* (a.k.a. Shockoe Hill Cemetery) and designated specifically for people of African descent, both enslaved and free. It is also the burial place of my ancestors. It is on their behalf and also on the behalf of the thousands of others buried there that I write to you today. The passage of this ordinance will do an incredible thing for this burial ground, and provide it much needed recognition and protection in that specific location. I am asking that you too will support ordinance 2024-283.

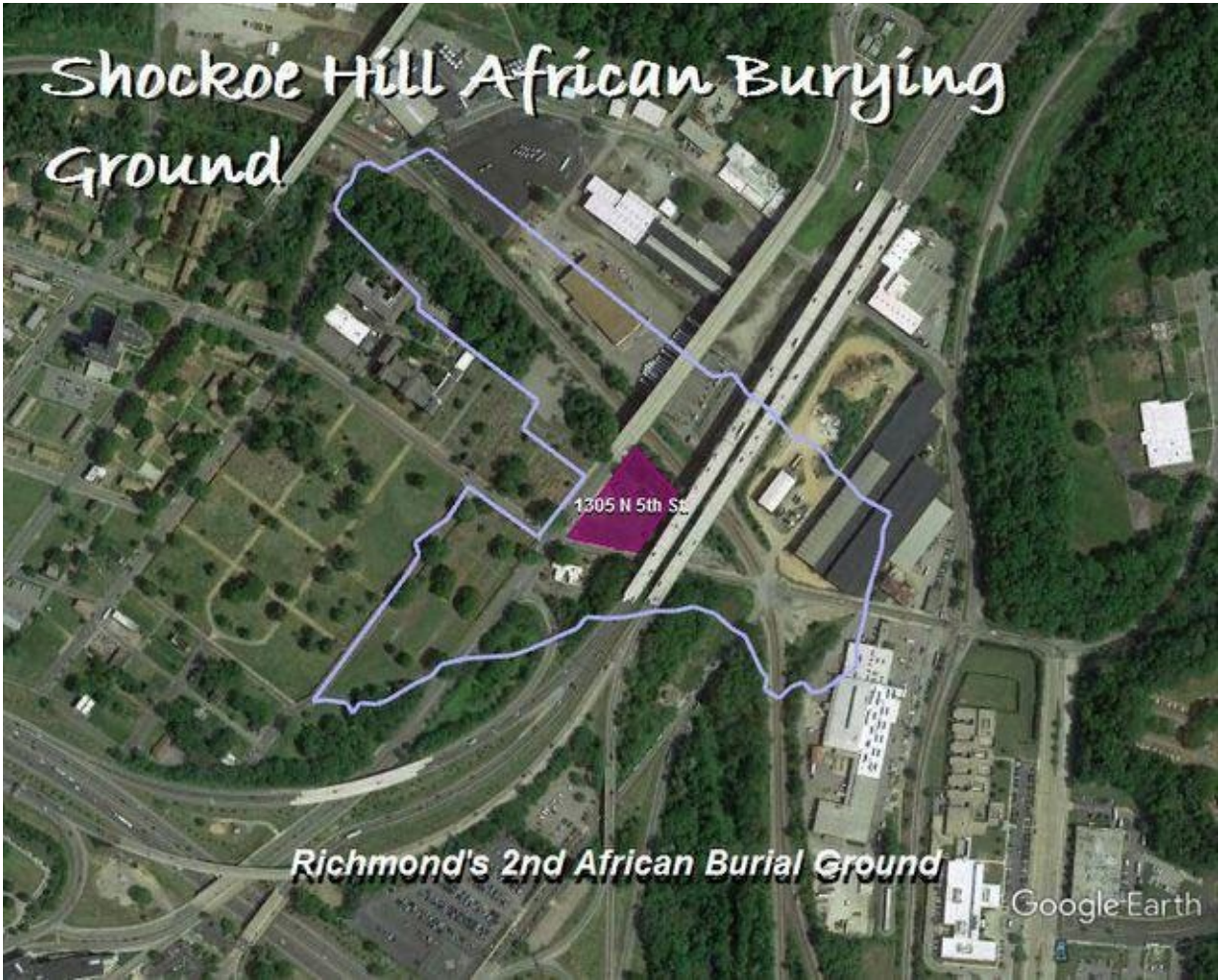
I would however like you to be aware that this burial ground is so much more than just this small parcel which represents a little less than 4% of the larger burial ground. During its active period (1816-1879) it was expanded from its original 2 acres, to a little over 31 acres, and received over 22,000 interments. It is not just one of the largest African Burial Grounds in the United States. It is the largest African Burial Ground in the United States (larger than the African Burial Ground in New York City). And though the passing of this ordinance will bring much needed protection to 1305 N 5th St., the rest of the burial ground remains one of Virginia's most endangered historic places. Unfortunately one of the current threats against the burial ground is the city of Richmond itself. The intersection and railroad crossing at N 7th St., and Hospital St. was constructed directly in and through this burial ground. The extension of 7th St. in 1890 harmed part of the burial ground. Human bones were unearthed and left scattered across the new 7th St. extension. This terrible episode in the history of the burial ground should prove that this intersection is part of the burial ground. And it is my ask, hope, and prayer that the city will do a new thing and work to correct the dangerous traffic issues there at that intersection without causing further harm to the burial ground. Unfortunately, the currently proposed city plans will harm it. I have personally proposed non-invasive alternatives that I hope will be given real serious consideration by the city and adopted and implemented. This entire burial ground is a sacred place, not just what has been reclaimed at 1305 N 5th St. I ask and pray that all of it will be given the respectful treatment, honor and protection that this sacred place deserves, and that no more harm will be done there, or anywhere within the burial ground.

Thank you for your consideration.

Yours truly,

Lenora McQueen
Descendant, researcher and advocate for the Shockoe Hill African Burying Ground

Enclosures: 3 maps of the Shockoe Hill African Burying Ground to include one highlighting city owned area of the burial ground in fuschia and lavender, and 1890 City Council records regarding 7th St extension in the burial ground.



From City Council meeting held on 6 October 1890:

"Burial of bones: They have considered the resolution referred September 1st 1890, as to burial of human bones which were exposed & c on 7th near Hospital. No further action is necessary the bones alluded to having been buried."

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Citation: Richmond City Council, Common Council Journal, April 1887 - November 1890 (Richmond, VA: Library of Virginia, 1890), 753. Accession number: BC7S96774

From City Council meeting held on 1 September 1890:

"Human Bones: Be it resolved that the Street Committee be required to provide for the collection and suitable burial of the human bones which are now exposed and scattered along the extension of 7th St. near Hospital St."

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Citation: Richmond City Council, Common Council Journal, April 1887 - November 1890 (Richmond, VA: Library of Virginia, 1890), 743. Accession number: BC7S96774



The green areas above represent over a dozen various owners of parts of the Shockoe Hill African Burying Ground. The 3 fuschia areas are city of Richmond owned parcels to include 1305 N 5th St. The lavender areas that include N 2nd St., N 4th St., N 5th St., N 7th St., and Hospital St. are also owned by the city. These streets were constructed in the existing burial ground.