

Winfree Cottage Relocation

400 E 15th Street, Richmond VA 24224

Nov 9, 2023



Project Purpose:

The City of Richmond is relocating and renovating The Winfree Cottage to the heart of the Historic Blackwell Neighborhood in Manchester. Originally located at the corner of Porter and Commerce, The Winfree Cottage was the home of enslaved and later freed black woman Emily Winfree, her children, and many of her immediate descendants. The Cottage was given to Emily by her former enslaver David Winfree in 1866 and offers a small glimpse into the neighborhood as it existed when she was alive. It is an architectural artifact that represents the resiliency of Emily herself and those who see themselves in her life's story. The Cottage is an important cultural asset of the City of

Richmond and a stop along the Richmond Slave Trail.

In 2002, the Cottage was moved to the parking lot adjacent to the Seaboard Building behind the Main Street Station, having been saved from demolition by The Alliance to Conserve Old Richmond Neighborhoods. The City now intends to move the Cottage to a city-owned parcel on the corner of Maury Street and East 15th Street, across from the JH Blackwell Elementary School, Preschool and Community Center, and adjacent to the Charlie Sydnor Park. Sydnor Park currently includes baseball, football, and soccer fields, as well tennis courts and small playground equipment. The park is currently the site of major improvement initiatives by the Department of Parks and Recreation. Across 15th street from the site are the Blackwell Senior Cottages, an RRHA development which consists of single story, multi-family units designed as accessible and affordable housing for seniors.

The objectives of the project are to relocate and renovate The Winfree Cottage and create a small residence and home studio space for a scholar/artist-in-residence whose work will add to the larger academic, scholarly, and artistic work of The Shockoe Project. Additionally, the project is to act as a living memorial to the life of Emily Winfree, with outdoor spaces for gathering that can be used in educational programming for students from the adjacent schools. The program for the Cottage was conceived based on a combination of the needs of the City, and the wants of the Historic Blackwell Community.

Funding for the project comes from monies allocated specifically for The Winfree Cottage in HB30 – Item 385 Budget Amendment #10H during the 2020 VA General Assembly. Additional funding is supported through budget allocations and fundraising efforts tied to The City of Richmond Shockoe Project. Construction for the project is estimated to begin in January 2024 and extend 12 months to December 2024.

The renovated Winfree Cottage is envisioned as VB construction type of Residential (R-2) classification, un-sprinklered.

Underlying Principles:

The underlying design principles for the project were cohesion with the existing neighborhood, repair of the existing Cottage with care and respect, and creating an educational node along The Richmond Slave Trail. Nestled off the road, the cottage sits elevated on brick piers with a simple front porch evoking the cottages historic aesthetic. Around the right side of the cottage, the new addition is defined by two volumes: one that matches the cladding and finish of the original cottage evoking the original footprint of the cottage, and a secondary volume with darker more modern cladding. Enclosed on 3 sides by a brick and composite wood ramp, the outdoor courtyard serves as a gather place for small groups and students. The courtyard and landscaping is meant to evoke the typical garden and yard spaces of post-reconstruction African-American homes.

Inside the renovated original cottage is a living/dining room space as well as an office/studio space. The original fireplace and mantle will be repaired and restored, but will not penetrate the roof surface, and will not be a usable chimney. The addition will contain a washer/dryer combo, a small kitchenette, an accessible bathroom, and bedroom with rear side porch.

The Cottage will serve as a small local cultural destination point for members of the Blackwell community, students from the local nearby schools, academics of all kinds, and many others. A walking path from the Charlie Sydnor Park connects the Cottage to the larger community improvement projects currently in development in Blackwell.

Landscape:

The project includes an intentional landscape and hardscape surrounding the relocated cottage, one that communicates the typical garden and yard spaces of post-reconstruction African-American homes. Improvements include walks connecting the cottage to the street and the adjacent Sydnor Park. Additionally, a courtyard next to the cottage will serve as a gathering space with interpretive elements that honor the life story of Emily Winfree.

Horticultural and material choices reflect the historical context of the cottage while also prioritizing ease of maintenance and durability. A concrete path leads to the cottage's front porch, flanked by a modest plant bed for colorful annual plantings. A second path leads to a gravel courtyard along the side of the cottage. The courtyard's fine, honey-dust gravel evokes a traditional swept yard, a common landscape practice in historical southern Black landscapes. In the courtyard, a solitary oak tree provides shade and conjures the image of the traditional kitchen yard where people once prepared food and carried out household chores away from the heat of the sun. Brick edging surrounds the courtyard, employing a traditional material to ensure the courtyard's durability over time. A mix of colorful perennials frames the courtyard, arranged in an improvisational patchwork style. The plants were selected for their common use in home gardens during Emily Winfree's lifetime.

Behind the cottage, a row of mixed shrubs and small trees are located within a swale. The swale directs stormwater, irrigating plants while slowing down the volume of stormwater entering the urban storm system. The deck at the rear of the cottage is enclosed by evergreen shrubs and trees to provide privacy and screen the modern mechanical equipment. A gravel path runs along the rear of the cottage, ultimately leading to the property's edge, where it will one day connect to the future walks at Charlie Sydnor Park.

Construction Program:

The building will stand 1 story tall at 18.5 ft. In this residential setting locating the building facing it's neighbors toward 15th street and placing the building back from the street will help to maintain the older residential character of the neighborhood. Programmatically, and in accordance with client requests, the cottage will serve as a residential unit owned and operated by the city.

Construction Timeline:

Construction is planned to be 12 months, set to begin in January of 2024 with a goal of completion by December 2024.