

Ebinger, Matthew J. - PDR

From: LENORA MCQUEEN <lenora.m@prodigy.net>
Sent: Sunday, October 4, 2020 9:30 PM
To: Robertson, Ellen F. - City Council; rodney@thewiltonco.com; David Johannas; lawmanchem@yahoo.com; egreenfield@rarealtors.com; murthyvg@gmail.com; max.hepp.buchanan@gmail.com; Reid, Lenora G. - DCAO Of Finance And Administration; Newbille, Cynthia I. - City Council; Gray, Kimberly B. - City Council; Lynch, Stephanie A. - City Council Office; Larson, Kristen N. - City Council; Jones, Michael J. - City Council; Addison, Andreas D. - City Council; Hilbert, Chris A. - City Council; Trammell, Reva M. - City Council
Cc: Ebinger, Matthew J. - PDR; Chen, Kimberly M. - DED; hwilliams@dickinsonwilliams.com; Cyane Crump; Elisabeth Price; Danielle Worthing Porter; Ellen Chapman
Subject: Support for ORD 2020-213 and acquisition of 1305 N. 5th Street

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Dear members of the City of Richmond Planning Commission, the Honorable Ellen Robertson and the Richmond City Council;

My 4th great-grandmother Kitty Cary would have been buried in the Shockoe Hill African Burying Ground; the now invisible Grave Yard for Free People of Colour and For Slaves at 5th and Hospital Street. She died a little over 160 years ago in the city of Richmond, where she lived in the home of her owner on the south-side of Franklin St., between 6th and 7th. That place today is a parking garage. Elizabeth Fisher, the daughter of her owner wrote a heartfelt letter to her sister Ann in Philadelphia the very same morning that Kitty died in 1857; lovingly, but very sadly informing her sister of the death of their beloved Kitty. The letter brought tears to my eyes as I read of her long illness, and painful death. I was touched by how much love was expressed for her in that letter by Elizabeth. Kitty's daughters who were present were devastated. Her other children and grandchildren unknowing of what had occurred - as they had been sold after the death of their owner a few years prior, splitting up the family. The deceased owner was Elizabeth's father. Elizabeth told of how she had Kitty's body neatly prepared for the grave, "it is what she would have done for me" she said. Kitty was dressed in the garment that she herself had requested for that purpose. Her last words were spoken to her children in an attempt to comfort them as she herself lay dying, seeing them weeping - "Don't cry children, don't cry for me, I am going home" - she breathed her last breath and died.

Elizabeth and her sister Jane who also lived in Richmond intended to follow Kitty's body to the grave the next day. She indicated that their intention was that no respect would be spared for Kitty. My intention also is that no respect should be spared for Kitty, other family members buried there at the burial ground, or for the more than twenty two thousand estimated to have been interred at the Shockoe Hill African Burying at 5th and Hospital Street. In my eyes Kitty holds a place of high honor. And all of those people buried there were probably loved by someone. They were someone's child, someone's mother, someone's father, brother, sister, aunt, uncle, grandparent, grandchild, cousin, husband, wife, friend..... They were someone's someone. They are still someone's someone. They deserve to be honored. They deserve to be remembered. They deserve to have their story told, and no longer hidden. And they deserve to be allowed to rest in peace.

I came to Richmond in October of 2017 to find Kitty (also others in the family). I had only known of the intention of her owner to keep her, the owner being the mother of Elizabeth. I had no idea of what had actually happened. So I came to Richmond, and I found Kitty. She was in the letter. The excitement I felt when I realized that I could go to the place that she would have been buried. I remember the confusion, and the disappointment upon reaching my destination. I didn't understand the place at all, and I kept thinking that I must be in the wrong place, it can't possibly be this place... And I had hoped that I was in the wrong place. And I left there not knowing until sometime later that it was actually the right place. How sad... That desolate hillside with an abandoned gas station on it and a billboard - It is so disrespectful; with streets, a viaduct, railroad tracks and a highway all run through its grounds. But with all that has happened there, it does

not make that place not important. With all that has happened it does not make the people interred there not important. It deserves something better. They deserve something better. Even those whose skeletal remains were obviously moved, and of those who were scattered, they deserve something better, as even today their essence remains.

I have been deeply involved in research uncovering the history of the place where my ancestor Kitty was laid to rest by those who loved her. It has been a horribly sad and disturbing journey seeing the degradation, the disrespect, and the destruction associated with this burial ground. I have no idea if she rests there in peace, or if she fell victim to one of the many atrocities that befell that graveyard. Any number of things may have happened to her, from having her body stolen and used as a medical cadaver, to ending up as street fill. Though even if she herself were untouched, how could she rest in peace? The history of the burial ground is tragic. It's story is yet incomplete, though it is continually unfolding.

The very day after I read that letter for the first time telling of Kitty's death, and while attending a symposium, the President's Commission on Slavery at the University of Virginia, in which I also participated - I learned the first tragic piece of history directly connected to the graveyard. It was a main topic at the symposium - grave robbing for the medical colleges; and this graveyard was one of the main targets. I was absolutely horrified. I later learned of the well at VCU where human remains were thrown away as if they were trash. The medical waste well at VCU that was accidentally uncovered specifically dates to the time of this graveyard. It also dates to the time of Kitty's demise. Grave robbing was only the first of several horrifying pieces of news regarding the history of the burial ground that I learned of. Equally as terrifying as the burial ground's destructive past is its future, as even today high-speed rail and the widening of I-64 threaten to harm it, unless steps are taken to recognize it, acknowledge its full historical boundaries, and protect it. This burial ground is supposed to be a place of eternal rest - a place of honor and memorial, just like at the two burial grounds next to it. The disparity between them is shocking, and quite beyond words.

On any given day a descendant of those buried inside the walls of the Shockoe Hill Cemetery or the Hebrew Cemetery can go and visit the grave of their ancestor which is still to this day lovingly cared for and attended to. That is not true of the African American community who had enslaved ancestors and some who were free people of color and who died between 1816 and 1879 in the city of Richmond. Those ancestors were also buried in the Shockoe Hill Cemetery, but they were interred in the segregated part of that burying ground, which was located outside of the walls. They have been made to appear as if they had simply disappeared, or as if they had never existed at all. I have often wondered when will they who were interred outside of the walls be recognized and honored. When will they be given the peace that they may rest, and that we may rest knowing we have corrected the wrong and are now doing the right thing.

It now appears that a new day may be dawning as this new ordinance(s) is being considered for the acquisition of 1305 N. 5th St., and its inclusion on the Slave Trail. 1305 N. 5th St. is a small portion of the Shockoe Hill African Burying Ground but it lies at its very heart. Originally two acres in size, the city approved its expansion to nearly 15 acres in 1850. Later maps suggest an even greater expansion in time. Research and estimates indicate that more than 22,000 Black Richmonders were buried at this site. The 1305 N. 5th St. property contains all that is left to claim, protect, memorialize and learn from this extraordinary history.

I ask that your vote be in favor of ordinance 2020-213 and the acquisition of 1305 N. 5th Street. Thank you for your consideration.

Yours truly,

Lenora McQueen
Member of the descendant community of the Shockoe Hill African Burying Ground

Ebinger, Matthew J. - PDR

From: Ellen Chapman <ellen.chapman@gmail.com>
Sent: Sunday, October 4, 2020 1:54 PM
To: rodney@thewiltonco.com; David Johannas; Robertson, Ellen F. - City Council; lawmanchem@yahoo.com; Elizabeth Hancock Greenfield; murthyvg@gmail.com; max.hepp.buchanan@gmail.com; Reid, Lenora G. - DCAO Of Finance And Administration
Cc: Ebinger, Matthew J. - PDR; Chen, Kimberly M. - DED
Subject: Support for ORD 2020-213 and acquisition of 1305 N. 5th Street

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Dear Members of the City of Richmond Planning Commission,

I am writing to support ordinance 2020-213 (Item #11 on Monday's Planning Commission Agenda) and its focus on acquiring 1305 N 5th Street. I am a member of the Shockoe Alliance, a resident of the 6th district half a mile from the burial ground, one of the authors of the Shockoe Hill Burying Ground PIF, and a scholar who studies Richmond's archaeology and its community importance. I deeply appreciate the commitment to the site shown by the City of Richmond in proposing this ordinance, and I ask you to vote in support of it.

The "Shockoe Hill African Burying Ground," originally named the Burying Ground for Free People of Colors and Slaves, was established in 1816 as the second municipal burial ground open to people of African descent in Richmond. Parts of the burial ground were damaged during the Civil War by the explosion of a powder magazine, and after the war the site became a potters field for burial of impoverished persons buried at the expense of the city. The city closed the cemetery in 1879, dug an extension of 5th Street through it in 1883, damaged it through construction of the 5th Street Viaduct in 1891, and in 1960 sold what remained of it as a vacant lot into private ownership, where it became a body shop and later a billboard site. This burial ground is larger than the parcel at 1305 N. 5th Street, but securing this parcel is essential to saving the burial ground.

The rehabilitation of this site, whose damage and desecration was substantially caused by a past white supremacist Richmond city government, is an essential element of Richmond's current reckoning with its past racist policies. In addition, it is a choice that enjoys widespread support. Over sixty individuals and organizations (including all the current candidates for Richmond mayor) endorsed the Preliminary Information Form submitted to the Department of Historic Resources. Member of the Planning Commission Councilwoman Ellen Robertson, in whose district the burial ground is located, has also endorsed the PIF and has been very responsive to concerns about the site starting when it went up for tax sale. As a result of the PIF, the site was recently found to be eligible for the National Register of Historic Places by the Department of Historic Resources (https://www.dhr.virginia.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/127-7231_Shockoe_Hill_Burying_Ground_HD_2020_PIF.pdf). Preservation groups and organizations across the city, such as Historic Richmond Foundation, the Sacred Ground Historical Reclamation Project, and James River Hikers also support action.

Saving this sacred ground and moving towards sensitive commemoration at the site is essential for Richmond's progress towards being a place where the lives of its citizens are valued, celebrated, and mourned in an equitable fashion. Not only is this essential for the over 22,000 people buried at the burying ground, it is

essential to their descendants, and it is deeply important for Richmond's children to grow up in a place where historical Black burial grounds are recognized and reclaimed. Nowhere is the continued importance of sacred spaces more visible than in the tireless work of descendant Lenora McQueen, whose extensive research is the basis of the PIF and the current growth of awareness about the site.

I urge you to vote yes on this ordinance, and on the second ordinance needed to reacquire this parcel. I also ask that for any future projects conducted in this area (including the DC2RVA high speed rail project, and changes to 5th Street, Hospital Street, the north bank of the almshouse, Jewish cemetery, and Talley property, I-64, and the railroad easement to the north and east of this property) that the Planning Commission require an archaeological assessment before proceeding. Too often, burial grounds especially in urban areas are presumed destroyed without an adequate examination of the site conditions. A Daily Dispatch article from September 11, 1883 clearly illustrates that bodies and bones were graded under 5th Street during its extension towards Shockoe Valley (see column 4 here: <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84024738/1883-09-11/ed-1/seq-1/>). We do not yet have a clear understanding of where in the burial ground burials may be intact or where human bone might be found, so any project in this area should proceed with caution and with community and researcher engagement.

I appreciate the work that this ordinance must have required from city staff, especially Kim Chen in the Planning Department, and elected officials such as Councilwoman Robertson and Mayor Stoney. I also thank Lenora for her tremendous research and advocacy, Ana Edwards for her long advocacy on behalf of Black burial grounds in Richmond, and Drs. Dan Mouer, Ryan Smith, and Steve Thompson for their work writing and research.

Sincerely,
Ellen Chapman, PhD

Ebinger, Matthew J. - PDR

From: Cyane Crump <ccrump@HistoricRichmond.com>
Sent: Sunday, October 4, 2020 12:10 PM
To: rodney@thewiltonco.com; David Johannas; Robertson, Ellen F. - City Council; lawmanchem@yahoo.com; Elizabeth Hancock Greenfield; murthyvg@gmail.com; max.hepp.buchanan@gmail.com; Reid, Lenora G. - DCAO Of Finance And Administration
Cc: Ebinger, Matthew J. - PDR; Chen, Kimberly M. - DED; LENORA MCQUEEN; Danielle Worthing Porter; Elisabeth Price; Harold Williams
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Members of the City of Richmond Planning Commission –

Historic Richmond is writing to support the Ordinance 2020-213 (Item #11 on Monday's Planning Commission Agenda) and its focus on acquiring 1305 N 5th Street.

This site has been known by many names over the years and now is best known as the "Shockoe Hill African Burying Ground." This burial ground, which is actually larger than the parcel at 1305 N. 5th Street, was established in 1816 as a municipal burial ground by the City of Richmond at about the same time as nearby Shockoe Hill Cemetery and Hebrew Cemetery. Additional detailed information on the history and historic significance of this site can be found in the Preliminary Information Form recently reviewed by the Virginia Department of Historic Resources (DHR) accessible here - <https://www.dhr.virginia.gov/pifs/shockoe-hill-burying-ground-historic-district-richmond-dhr-127-7231/> - and in the scholarly article by Dr. Ryan K. Smith in Buildings & Landscapes: Journal of the Vernacular Architecture Forum accessible here - <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5749/buildland.27.1.0017?seq=1&cid=pdf-reference>

We first learned about the Shockoe Hill African Burying Ground site after Lenora McQueen's research was shared with us several years ago. She is the leading advocate for this site. Notably, she has several ancestors and family members who were buried here. Most poignantly, one of her family members, who was then the sexton at Monumental Church, lost twin toddlers in July 1867 who were buried here.

After studying Lenora McQueen's research, it was immediately apparent to us that this was an important site worthy of saving. In 2018, we began advocating for this site in connection with the DC2RVA project. While we support the DC2RVA project, we were very concerned about how this site had been treated over the years and wanted to make sure that there were no further adverse effects from this rail project. In connection with the DC2RVA project and its further investigation into this site, by letter dated March 20, 2019, we asked the City of Richmond to acquire the parcel at 1305 N 5th Street with a goal to further the physical examination, educational research and interpretation of the site.

In connection with DC2RVA, we fought for the site to be treated as eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. This advocacy continued through this year as we supported an

application for listing on the National Register as part of a larger district with the nearby Shockoe Hill and Hebrew cemeteries and the Almshouse, among other related historic sites. The Preliminary Information Form for this proposed district advanced through the DHR State Review Board in September 2020.

We also have been advocating for this site as part of the Richmond 300 process. In that regard, we are pleased to see its Future Land Use designated as Public Open Space rather than Industrial in the September 29, 2020 version of the Richmond 300 master plan.

Few people know of this site's history because it has been so damaged. Lenora McQueen has diligently researched the site and worked with a number of academics, and their collective research has shown that the burial ground received approximately 20,000 souls over seven decades. Starting in the 1870s, road, railroad and highway projects damaged the site, desecrating an unknown number of graves. It is likely there are many graves remaining on this parcel, under Hospital Street and on other land nearby.

In addition to the City administration, we are grateful for City Preservation Planner Kim Chen's concern for the site, for the many talented academics and preservationists who have taken up its cause, and for DHR's recent advancement of the historic district. And, above all, we are grateful for Lenora McQueen's tireless advocacy for this site.

This site is not only sacred space, but its past treatment also tells the story of how historic sites, particularly those connected to underrepresented communities, have been mistreated over the years in the name of progress. Almost 150 years of development has tried to erase this site from the landscape. It is time for this place to be once again visible on the landscape of our city, remembered appropriately, and studied.

We understand that Ordinance 2020-213 is one of two ordinances needed to advance the actual acquisition of the parcel at 1305 N. 5th Street. We hope that second ordinance will follow in the near future.

I ask you to vote in support of this ordinance and the re-acquisition by the City of this parcel. I ask you also to consider how sites like this have been damaged by prior planning decisions and development as you consider your work on all matters coming before this commission in the future. We can't let our work today treat our community's sacred and historic places in the same manner as our predecessors.

Please let me know if you have any questions about these comments. Thank you for your consideration of these comments.

Cyane



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Executive Director

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