

**MINUTES
BLUE RIBBON COMMITTEE ON
AFRICAN BURIAL GROUND
(CHESTNUT STREET)**

Wednesday, October 6, 2004
at 4:30 p.m.
held at the
Conference Room A, City Hall

1. **Call to order:**

Meeting commenced at 4:32 p.m.

Members in attendance were: Councilor John W. Hynes, Chair
Mary Bailey; Valerie Cunningham, Vernis Jackson, Councilor Laura Pantelakos;
James Splaine; John McGee, [Steve Parkinson, John Burke and Suzanne M.
Woodland (Ex-officio members)].

2. **Vote on September 15, 2004 Meeting Minutes:**

A motion was made to accept the minutes of the September 15, 2004 meeting by
Councilor Pantelakos, which was seconded and unanimously approved.

3. **Presentation by City Officials of Existing Conditions on Chestnut Street
(Utilities, Traffic Flow, Parking and Fire Safety):**

Steve Parkinson provided a summary of the municipal services on the street.
Both water and sewer services are located in the street. The waterline exists on
the easterly side of the street following the curb line. The sewer line, which was
installed in the early 1800s, runs along the westerly side of the Chestnut Street
curb line. The map handed out at the commencement of the meeting does not
reflect the sewer line extending up Chestnut Street from Court to State as the
GIS system has not been updated. The sewer line does continue up the street.

John Burke reported that Chestnut Street serves a limited functional purpose,
namely to provide access to the properties located on that street. Chestnut
Street is approximately 35 feet wide at the intersection with Court Street, and 40'
feet wide at the intersection with State Street. The width is sufficient such that
there is staggered parking on both sides. It is not a heavily utilized street for
through traffic. The parking meters are not fully utilized.

Fire Chief Chris LeClaire indicated that were Chestnut Street closed there were alternative routes and means to reach the private properties in that area. It was up to the residents and the owners of properties along that street to weigh any concern they may have with regard to response time if the street were changed.

Thereafter, the Chair opened up questions by committee members.

Ms. Cunningham asked a follow-up question to Mr. Parkinson with regard to the sewer line on Court Street. Mr. Parkinson reported that it was approximately 3' off the curb line and installed in 1800s and that he is not aware of any work that has been done on the Chestnut Street sewer line in approximately 25 years with the exception of the recent work which uncovered the burial site.

Jim Splaine queried whether there was any consensus on the location of the burial site and whether the Committee should be evaluating the boundaries of the burial site.

Councilor Hynes responded that we know where the remains were found. It is his hope that we can do justice to that site. The Committee's goal is to find a way to dedicate and honor this known site.

Councilor Pantelakos commented that the site needs to be big enough to have some sort of memorial.

Mr. McGee believes the area is a cemetery and it not appropriate to drive cars over the site. He made reference to historical documents describing the location of the site as well as to a public vote regarding a cemetery on Glebe land. He also commented that there was a report of wood being found during excavations on Chestnut Street closer to State Street. He also noted that there was precedence for closing down Chestnut Street in that the northern end of Chestnut Street was closed for economic development purposes.

Ms. Jackson asked a follow up question with regard to the burial site and the potential extent of the cemetery. Mr. McGee responded that he will bring in the historical documents, which he referenced. There was some additional discussion among committee members regarding the potential boundaries of the burial site.

Ms. Woodland posed a question to Mr. Parkinson with regard to whether there was any anticipated water or sewer work on Chestnut Street within the next six years. Mr. Parkinson responded in the negative.

Ms. Bailey emphasized that she would like to hear from the residents of Chestnut Street.

Ms. Cunningham suggested that it might be appropriate for the City to make a commitment that when the water and sewer lines need to be replaced in the hopefully distant future that replacement utility lines be diverted away from the burial location. She emphasized that she saw no point for removing or diverting the sewer or water lines at this juncture.

Jim Splaine emphasized his concern with regard to cars passing over the burial site and queried whether it would be possible to close off part of Chestnut Street. He also questioned whether the City was undertaking any addition excavation to find other burial sites. Councilor Hynes indicated that the Committee is charged with honoring the known site. Ms. Cunningham commented that it is not reasonable to expect further excavation at this point.

Councilor Pantelakos posed a question to the Fire Chief regarding whether any closure or partial closure might result in an increase of fire insurance for properties located along the street. The Fire Chief responded that he was not aware whether there would be an increase or not.

Ms. Bailey queried whether the Committee should make a recommendation on how to handle remains, if additional remains are found in the future.

Mr. McGee summarized his opinion with regard to further excavation on public and private property. He concluded by stating that we have identified this one site and we should focus on this one site. Councilor Hynes emphasized that we know of this one site and we should do justice to all those slaves buried in the City; location known and unknown. Ms. Cunningham pointed out that we do not know if the individuals buried on Chestnut Street were slaves or free and that therefore it would be more accurate to refer to them as African Americans.

There was discussion about re-interment with Ms. Cunningham explaining that the State asked for community direction as to re-interment and there was a consensus that re-interment should be at the site.

The Chair then invited questions and comments from members of the public.

Dirdre Hammer of 115 Court Street had a question with regard to the remains under the sidewalk. Ms. Cunningham commented that the remains under the sidewalk are relatively stable.

Attorney Chuck Meade, with a law office located at 96 Chestnut Street, indicated general support for a memorial in the area. He queried whether the street could be made one way with diagonal parking. He was in favor of retaining at least some parking spaces for the need of businesses in the area.

Eric Weinrieb, with a business at 133 Court Street, raised questions with regard to the make up to the Committee and the opportunity for Chestnut Street area

residents to participate. Councilor Hynes advised Mr. Weinrieb that the Committee is very much interested in input from Chestnut Street residents. The Committee is looking for consensus and he should continue to attend the meetings. His voice and those of the other property owners shall be heard. Councilor Pantelakos asked Mr. Weinrieb if he was in favor of some type of memorial. He responded that he would be interested in evaluating some partial closure of Chestnut Street particularly if that would create some green space. He was concerned about access, the flow of traffic and parking recognizing that multiple interests needed to be balanced.

Mr. Michael Brown of Heads Up Realty, located at 97 Chestnut Street, reported that there are two business located at 97 Chestnut Street; a haircutting salon and a manicuring salon. He is supportive of a memorial of some type, but commented that parking would be an issue for the business.

Ms. Hammer had a follow-up question with respect to the sidewalk. Her house abuts the sidewalk and emphasized her concern about people walking on the sidewalk if there are still remains underneath the sidewalk.

There was an exchange between Mr. McGee and Mr. Parkinson with regard to various scenarios for closing off a portion of Chestnut Street and changing the parking layout. It was agreed that for the next meeting City staff would attempt to reduce to paper some simple sketches reflecting various options.

Mr. Splaine suggested that abutters should get copies of all meeting notices and a copy of minutes. He is looking for a consensus within the neighborhood. He suggested that the next meeting should be on-site followed up with an opportunity for discussion. He wondered whether anyone would be willing to host the Committee and members of the public after the site visit, so that the Committee would not have to return to City Hall to continue the meeting.

Councilor Pantelakos raised a question with regard to the number of trucks using Chestnut Street. Response from residents indicated that there were few trucks on the Street; with the exception of UPS deliveries.

There was a question from the press with regard to the Committee's timing to make a recommendation. Councilor Hynes indicated that there was no fixed time to make a report back to the Council.

Mr. McGee agreed to provide the historical document previously referenced. Ms. Woodland agreed to contact the local office of BankNorth formerly Portsmouth Savings Bank to try to make contact with the local manager. Ms. Woodland agreed to work with Ms. Hammer, who offered to host the Committee after its site review. The Committee tentatively agreed to meet on Wednesday, October 27, 2004, at 4:30 p.m. on Chestnut Street. Such meeting to be confirmed at a later date and with due public notice.

4. **Adjourned:**

Councilor Pantelakos made a motion which was seconded to adjourn with unanimous consent. The meeting was adjourned at 5:35 p.m.

Submitted by: Suzanne Woodland

Minutes were approved at meeting on October 27, 2004.