

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

Wednesday, October 27, 2004 at 4:30 p.m.  
Site Visit at the Corner of Chestnut St. & Court St.  
Meeting convened thereafter at Portsmouth Fire Department  
located at 170 Court Street

1. **Call to order:**

Site Visit commenced at 4:30 p.m. at the corner of Chestnut St. & Court St.

Meeting commenced at 4:48 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 and John Burke (Ex-officio  
members)]. Ex-officio member Suzanne M. Woodland was unable to attend.

2. **Vote on October 6, 2004 Meeting Minutes:**

A motion was made to accept the minutes of the October 6, 2004 meeting by  
Councilor Hynes, which was seconded and unanimously approved.

3. **Site Visit Information:**

Steve Parkinson gave a brief overview of the burial site, where the remains were  
found and of the known sewer lines which run up Chestnut Street. He also gave  
a brief overview of an idea which included one-way traffic. He indicated that the  
remains were found on the left side located near the Hammer residence. He  
mentioned that there were more remains found to be on the left-hand side more  
so than on the right. However, he is uncertain of the perimeter of the burial site.  
He made conceptual drawings which would be discussed back at the Fire  
Station.

Valerie Cunningham had questioned the map that was from 1705 stating that it  
was not an original copy. She was wondering how redefined the map was at that  
point.

Steve Parkinson continued with an idea about moving traffic on one-side of the road (right side) leaving a 16' travel lane and the sidewalk would be left as is. If this were done, there would only be a lose of 3 parking spaces. This would result in the establishment of three green spaces in recognition of the African Burial site. A second scenario would be to have one green space on the corner of Chestnut and Court Street.

Mary Bailey had mentioned two volunteers, Terrence Parker of Terrafirma Landscape Architects and Craig Musselman of CMA Engineers, had gathered ideas in a sketch which will also be presented at the meeting at the Fire Station.

Valerie Cunningham had mentioned to Steve Parkinson that during the excavation 8 remains were found and removed. However there also exists 5 burials under the sidewalk which have not been removed because they were not in immediate threat as opposed to others.

James Splaine had said that whatever we do should be commemorative and do justice.

Councilor Hynes announced that he had received several calls from around the country in regards to what will happen and the final analysis of what will be done to the African Burial site.

James Splaine proposed that before heading over to the Fire Station that there should be a moment of silence in recognition of all the discoveries that were made.

4. **Review of various scenarios for partial closure of Chestnut Street as discussed at the October 6, 2004 meeting:**

The meeting convened back at the Fire Station.

Mary Bailey indicating that she took a visit to the site and thought that Craig Musselman of CMA Engineers might help formulate ideas of what could be done in recognition of the African Burial site. Mr. Musselman had then called landscape architect Terrence Parker of Terrafirma Landscape Architects to collaborate on some sketches.

Mr. Musselman passed out a draft of three different scaled maps. The handouts presented by him represents three different ideas. They were:

1. How to treat those being re-intered by avoiding more disturbance during re-interment as well.
2. Create a park like area so vehicles will not drive over the burial site so there will be no heavy compaction to disturb the site.
3. Avoid the disturbance of any more graves.

Mr. Musselman indicated that with more excavation we may run into more graves. The ideas established represent that it should not be a graveyard, but rather a memorial site due to the residential area. Perhaps something low key and not high maintenance such as shrubbery or a monument of modest size. His recommendation would be perhaps a small plaque legible to the pedestrians and/or some sort of public art or visual aspects. This could be accomplished by getting the public involved through submissions of their ideas, which would ultimately be decided on by the committee members. He took three scales and fit them on a larger map, however he does not have the final information on the exact location of the new sewer. He notes that the areas in which the bodies were found straddled both sides of the centerline.

Terrence Parker of Terrafirma Landscape Architects presented possible sketches used for a memorial area. However, some might not work due to interment areas and due to city specs in mind. He wanted to create options which people could talk about in terms of larger objectives.

Councilor Hynes addressed that most of the information will be posted on-line or at the library.

Mary Bailey took a moment to thank both Terrence Parker of Terrafirma Landscape Architects and Craig Musselman of CMA Architects for providing their services Pro Bono.

Eric Weinrieb posed a question of how much area will be required to return each individual to its burial site and how much room will actually be needed.

Councilor Hynes responded that he was not sure how much area will be needed because when dealing with something new there hasn't been any regulations laid out with it.

Valerie Cunningham had mentioned that they are not talking about complete coffins and remains, but rather we are talking about remains which have been badly deteriorated. Therefore, we are not sure of the size in which the remains will be re-interred.

Councilor Hynes reminded everyone that we are not here to recreate what happened, but rather what we are trying to do is to memorialize the events of what happened.

Tom Hammer raised a question whether the idea was to determine where to put the remains back due to excavations and the amount of room.

Steve Parkinson replied that the east-side of the street has enough room to put graves back but the excavated areas go beyond the center line. The graves

would go back easily if the option was chosen to close off the end of the street. The remains were found in poor condition due to the depth that they were found. The re-interment will not be as deep as the original depth of approximately 8' feet deep. He indicated preliminary sketches offer a green space of approximately 20' x 50' long but they would lose parking spaces on the street. However, traffic would still have access to the bank parking and driveways. Another idea presented would be dead ending the street (at the end of Chestnut and Court Street) but there still would be access to bank parking and driveways. However, traffic from that standpoint is not a great idea because it creates a problem of cut through traffic.

Paula Manning with Bank of New Hampshire, supports the idea of a memorial ground however is not in favor of closing off Court Street.

Councilor Hynes opened the discussion to the public for comments.

Mr. Hammer asked about state laws upon re-interment and who had made the decision to remove the bodies from the ground.

Councilor Hynes said he is not sure there is not any specific law in regarding to discoveries they make.

Valerie Cunningham replies that it is the chief archeologist for the State of New Hampshire to make the final decision upon re-interment.

Steve Parkinson remarks that while the bodies were removed it was because state law required that once exposed the bodies must be removed.

John Maher is in favor of some sort of a memorial site. He would like people visiting the area to know just what was there. In terms of space he would suggest the site be large enough to contain numerous remains.

Eric Weinrieb raised an issue in regards to the interment area. He was wondering if it may be possible to have multiple interments to help reduce space constraints. He also mentioned that Chestnut Street has been discontinued and that there is another portion of Chestnut Street by the Music Hall. With regards to that, for emergency 911 purposes, he suggested that now would be an appropriate time to rename the street.

Paula Manning of the Bank of New Hampshire said that closing off State Street (but it is my belief she meant to refer to Chestnut Street) would have a negative impact upon traffic flow and would pose a problem for the bank.

Councilor Hynes indicated that he would appreciate a letter from the Bank of New Hampshire stating its concerns to have on file.

John McGee was wondering if it was feasible to have a crossbar at the exit from Bank of NH parking lot onto Court Street which would be electrically activated so it would prevent people from going in that way controlling traffic, however, it would not impede people leaving.

Paula Manning of the Bank of New Hampshire expressed that she is not happy about gating off the community. However they will look at possible cost effective options.

Valerie Cunningham posed a question to the Bank of New Hampshire about the time when the road was closed off during the City excavation, whether or not the Bank experienced any problems in terms of traffic flow.

Charlotte Hubbard, Bank of New Hampshire Manager, replied that there were no problems with traffic or parking during the time of the excavation.

Steve Parkinson indicated that the road was closed off after the Bank's driveway.

Valerie Cunningham took a moment to go back to Eric Weinrieb's idea of possible multiple interments stating that the remains were already found like that when they were discovered.

John Maher believes that renaming the street is an excellent idea. Perhaps the name of an African American. He also is in favor of creating more green space for the memorial site and feels it would be most appropriate.

Tom Hammer is in favor of a one-way street eliminating parking all together. He feels it would only cause more of a traffic problem if parking were allowed to stay there.

Councilor Hynes announced that should anyone have further questions to please give him a call or e-mail him.

5. **Adjourned:**

Councilor Hynes made a motion which was seconded to adjourn with unanimous consent. The meeting was adjourned at 5:45 p.m.

Submitted by: Hannah Orestis

Approved with the addition of a document entitled "Suggested Objectives" prepared by Vernice Jackson and Mary Bailey by vote of Committee on December 1, 2004.

