

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

Wednesday, January 19, 2005  
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, James Splaine, [Steve Parkinson, John Burke  
and Suzanne M. Woodland (Ex-officio members)].

John McGee arrived at 4:39 p.m.

Councilor Laura Pantelakos and Vernis Jackson were unable to attend. Ms.  
Geraldine Palmer attended on behalf of Ms. Jackson.

Also attending Dr. Richard Boisvert, State Archeologist.

2. Vote on December 1, 2004 Meeting Minutes:

By unanimous vote the draft minutes of the December 1, 2004 meeting were  
approved.

3. Report back regarding opportunities for involving High School students:

Assistant City Attorney Woodland summarized the opportunities for involving  
high school students in the activities of this Committee. Specifically Ms.  
Woodland has discussed with Mary Carey Foley the possibility of incorporating  
some component of the Committee's activities in Student Government Day.  
Student Government Day is tentatively scheduled for March 30, 2005. During  
Student Government Day, students role-play and these activities would lend  
themselves to consideration of the Committee's issues. Mary Carey Foley  
coordinates Student Government Day on behalf of Portsmouth High School. Ms.  
Woodland also reported that a Portsmouth High School student, who has been a  
Legal Department intern since the fall, is working on developing her own ideas to  
commemorate the site. She was unable to attend the meeting due to illness,  
however, she intends to attend a future meeting to share her ideas.

Jim Splaine indicated his interest in involving history classes. He thought involving students as part of the Student Government Day project was a good idea but inquired about that other avenue. Ms. Woodland advised him that she had made contact with the Social Studies Director at Portsmouth High School and there was some interest, however, finals/midterms were approaching and it would not have been feasible to set something up immediately.

Councilor Hynes indicated his desire to encourage all interested persons to submit their ideas to the Committee.

Eric Weinrieb of Altus Engineering, Inc. located at 133 Court Street voiced some frustration with the slow pace of decision-making. It was his opinion that decisions should be made sooner rather than later with regard to the site. Councilor Hynes indicated that he did not want to rush the process and that all persons should be involved.

Mike Brown, owner of 97 Chestnut Street, had questions with regard to the Committee's process. Councilor Hynes responded that the Committee would make recommendations to the City Council.

Valerie Cunningham wanted to hold off on making any decision with regard to student involvement until later in the meeting. There was some discussion as to whether a vote needed to be taken. Committee members Mr. McGee and Ms. Bailey concurred with Ms. Cunningham that we should hold off with further discussion with regard to student involvement until later in the meeting. Mr. Splaine indicated that we did not need to rush process. Mr. McGee made a motion, all concurring, to suspend further discussion of student involvement until the end of the meeting and all concurred.

4. Other Discussion:

Mr. McGee posed questions to Dr. Richard Boisvert, the State Archeologist, with regard to re-interment. Mr. Boisvert indicated that there are nine sets of remains and pieces of eight coffins (one coffin had two people in it). He explained that it is his decision as to where the remains are re-interred with the input of the community. He advised the Committee that at the public meeting held last year there was nearly unanimous consensus that re-interment should occur on Chestnut Street. He noted that at least five additional coffins are in the ground. Those were not recovered because they did not need to be disturbed for the Public Works project. Mr. Boisvert indicated that the re-interment could be in separate coffins/containers or one coffin/container. He questioned how much space would be allotted for the re-interment. The amount of space available will impact re-interment options. He reminded the Committee that there is still a cemetery under the street and sidewalk.

Ms. Cunningham indicated that it is her sense that most Committee members are interested in closing a small portion of Chestnut Street near the Court Street end. Committee members are not interested in closing half the street and thereby restricting access to driveways. Ms. Cunningham volunteered that at an African Burial Site discovered in New York City, the City re-intered remains in specially constructed/carved containers made of African wood. The containers were of smaller size and not typical coffin size.

Mr. Boisvert indicated again that he needed to know how much room will exist to re-inter. From his perspective, the more space the better. He reiterated that remains continue to exist under a portion of the paved street and sidewalk.

Mr. Splaine indicated that he liked Ms. Cunningham's idea with regard to re-interment. He was hopeful that Mr. Boisvert and Mr. Parkinson could meet to view the previously discussed plans for green space and street closure. City staff indicated they could follow up with Mr. Boisvert.

Mr. Boisvert wants the re-interment to happen in an appropriate place. He doesn't want parking spaces or driving over the re-interment site.

Ms. Cunningham moved to make a recommendation to the City Council to close a portion of Chestnut Street at the Court Street end.

Mr. McGee raised some concern with regard to the specificity of the motion. The motion does not make clear how much Chestnut Street should be closed. He recommends more time to prepare a detailed proposal to include street widths and other measurements.

Mr. Splaine also wanted time for Mr. Parkinson to prepare a proposed plan for the Committee to review.

Ms. Cunningham indicated that the Committee has never discussed denying access to driveways. She recollected that at the prior meetings the neighbors and Committee members were in support of a partial street closure.

Ms. Bailey referred to earlier hand drawn plans of a potential street closure prepared by Mr. Craig Musselman of CMA engineers.

Mr. McGee indicated that he initially wanted to close a portion of Chestnut Street. He then thought it would be preferable to make it one way with green space on one side of street. He has since heard from 5 people who want a partial closure of the street. He reiterated his interest in getting more specifics in the form of a detailed plan showing a partial closure.

Ms. Cunningham withdrew her motion on the expectation that the Committee could review a detailed street closure plan at the next meeting. Upon inquiry

from Councilor Hynes, Mr. McGee refused to disclose the names of the people who contacted him.

Mr. Weinrieb suggested that there should be a proposed schedule for the Committee's actions. He thought that the Committee should decide first what part of Chestnut Street should be closed and/or modified. The second question the Committee should tackle is what the closed area would look like in terms of landscaping or memorials. The third question is how to inter the remains. He believes that time is of the essence.

There was additional discussion with respect to re-interment and the space needed for re-interment.

Mr. Parkinson represented that the Public Works Department would put together a proposed plan for the next meeting showing a closure of Chestnut Street at the Court Street end. The plan would show the locations of the existing manhole and utilities. It would also show street widths. It would take into account the various comments made by the Committee members and Mr. Boisvert. He would also follow-up with the consulting archeologist to show the location of the known coffins that still remain on Chestnut Street.

Ms. Cunningham made a motion, seconded by Mr. McGee, to further explore the feasibility of closing the lower end of Chestnut Street by the development of a plan by Public Works. All concurred with the motion.

Mr. McGee again reiterated his interest in a partial closure similar to the design prepared by Mr. Musselman. He wants no parking on the street. He recognizes there may be an issue with turn widths.

Mr. Splaine also wanted to see a plan and to see how much green space would be available.

Paula Manning representing Banknorth indicated that Banknorth could support a closure of a portion of Chestnut Street near the intersection with Court Street. Closing all of Chestnut Street would not be feasible from the bank's perspective.

There was interest in trying to schedule another meeting within the next two or three weeks.

Meeting adjourned at 5:45 p.m.

Submitted by: Assistant City Attorney Suzanne Woodland