

Adopted 9-17-08

**AFRICAN BURYING GROUND COMMITTEE**

**AUGUST 14, 2008 CHESTNUT STREET AND PORTSMOUTH PUBLIC LIBRARY 5:00 P.M.**

Present: Vernis Jackson, Chair; Mary Bailey, Vice Chair; Valerie Cunningham; Councilor Christine Dwyer; Councilor Pantelakos; Steve Parkinson (Ex-officio)

Absent: Jack McGee, Suzanne M. Woodland (Ex-Officio)

Also Present: Cindy Hayden, Deputy City Manager; David Moore, Assistant Community Development Director; Jerome Meadows, Meadowlark Studio; Robbi Woodburn of Woodburn and Company (Consultant)

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Chairperson Jackson opened the meeting on site at Chestnut Street and welcomed Mr. Meadows and Ms. Woodburn. She then recognized Mr. Meadows and Ms. Woodburn to walk the Committee members through the Chestnut Street site. Earlier in the afternoon, the design team marked-out the locations of key portions of the memorial design, including the travel way, memorial space, sculptural elements, the raised portion at the end of Chestnut Street, and the landscaped planters.

On site, the Committee and design team discussed the height of the sculptural elements and the slope of the site and how these factors would impact the site design as visitors moved through the site. Committee members discussed how the site visit helped them visualize the planned components of the burying ground design.

After the on-site session, the meeting moved to the MacCleod Room at the library. Chairperson Jackson recognized Mr. Meadows to review design developments the team had worked on since the previous meeting.

Mr. Meadows indicated that he and Ms. Woodburn had worked collaboratively on the raised section at the Court Street end of the site. He indicated that the wall, which would be facing Chestnut Street would be high enough to require a railing. He indicated that the railing could potentially compete with the sculptural elements in the “quiet” portion of the memorial and proposed some design solutions. He circulated images of kinte cloths and other African cloth patterns to Committee members explaining that he believed the patterns could be used to develop ceramic tiles which could be set into a rail on the top of the wall. He added that he thought these tiles could be developed with students and might also include Adrinka symbols. Committee members liked the proposed use of African patterns, symbols and ceramic tiles, which would not include color. Ms. Cunningham and other members of the committee discussed using patterns which had a connection to the City’s Sister City in Accra, Ghana. Mr. Meadows indicated he would provide a sketch of a proposed railing design at the next meeting which would include the use of Adrinka symbols and ceramic tiles.

Next Mr. Meadows discussed the design solution he proposed for the line that flows through the site. At the last meeting, the Committee discussed choosing phrases from the Petition of 1779 which would be included on the line itself as it moved through the site. Mr. Meadows presented a vertical element which would be located on the line about half-way through the site. Committee members liked the form of the vertical element. This was proposed to be an element which would discuss the Petition itself. After some discussion by the Committee, it was determined that the vertical element was an opportunity to provide some context for the site itself and should include information about: the historical context of the site (such as when it was in use); re-discovery in 2003; that bodies are likely located in spaces outside of the memorial itself; and tie into the Petition of 1779. The committee also discussed utilizing a map which is credited with notifying future generations about the site of the “Negro Burying Ground”. Committee members were supportive of using phrases from the Petition itself on the line. Mr. Meadows and Ms. Woodburn discussed several possibilities of carrying that out. The design team would work on the font, text size, construction method, and material choice for the Petition phrases and get back to the committee at the next meeting.

After discussions about the wall railing, the “Petition” vertical element and the “Petition” line, Mr. Moore addressed issues related to reburial of the exhumed remains. He said that the Committee needed to consider how the design would fit in with a reburial plan. He identified three issues that impact reburial method and location. First, he indicated that the State Archaeologist, Dr. Richard Boisvert, had advised earlier in the process that the human remains should not be reburied near the underground utilities, in order to prevent their disturbance during any future utility work. Second, he indicated that the Committee would want to carefully consider whether it was appropriate to rebury remains underneath newly planned site elements such as the wall at the Court Street end or sidewalks. Third, he indicated that the method of reburial would affect the timing of reinterment related to construction.

Mr. Moore indicated that the design team and City staff had discussed these issues and determined that a reburial vault may be a good solution to the various challenges related to reburial. He indicated that the vault could be located away from existing utilities, it would prevent the remains from being directly under planned site elements, and it would allow the community to hold a reburial ceremony after the construction was complete so the bodies would not need to be reinterred during construction.

The Committee discussed issues related to reburial and Mr. Moore pointed out the area on the memorial design plans where the eight bodies were exhumed and where five additional caskets were identified. The Committee agreed that reburying the remains in a vault would be an effective approach to reburial given the site constraints and the desire to treat the remains respectfully. Ms. Cunningham pointed out that it was important to not overemphasize the eight exhumed remains at the expense of the other five bodies which were identified, and the others that are likely to exist on Chestnut Street and points west. After discussions, the Committee determined that respect for all of the remains associated with the site could be achieved by reburying the eight exhumed remains in the vault, but not emphasizing the vault too much. It was discussed, how the vertical element

on the "Petition" line would be an opportunity to inform visitors that the remains of the eight individuals exhumed were not the only remains at the site.

The Committee members thanked Mr. Meadows and Ms. Woodburn for their work to date and thanked them for their efforts during, and in preparation for, the on-site portion of the meeting. The Committee then moved to other business which was consideration of the minutes from July 24, 2008. Councilor Pantelakos moved to approve the minutes and the motion was seconded by Councilor Dwyer. All voted in favor.

The Committee then discussed the next steps in the process. Councilor Dwyer reminded the Committee that when the Committee completes its design process, the Committee would recommend the design to the City Manager and the City Council. Prior to that, she discussed the need of the Committee to meet with project abutters. The Committee members discussed the support the project has already received from project abutters and that meeting with project abutters and the public would be needed next steps. Five property owners and tenants who are abutters to the project on Chestnut came out to the site during the meeting expressed their support for the project moving forward.

A public meeting is also planned as part of the design process. Committee members discussed how the Committee has sought public input during the design forums in 2007. Councilor Dwyer indicated that the public meeting process should solicit input from the community on how to go about fundraising for the project.

In addition to these planned future meetings, Councilor Dwyer said she felt the entire City Council needed to be updated on the work of the Committee prior to communicating with abutters and the wider public. Chairperson Jackson asked how many times staff thought the committee would meet prior to the end of the year. Mr. Moore estimated that the Committee would meet a total of four times.

Chairperson Jackson adjourned the meeting at 8:00 p.m.