

ACCEPTED SEPTEMBER 29, 2014

AFRICAN BURYING GROUND COMMITTEE
MEETING SUMMARY

AUGUST 7, 2014 PLANNING CONFERENCE ROOM, PORTSMOUTH CITY HALL 3:30 P.M.

Present: Vernis Jackson, Chair; Mary Bailey, Vice Chair Councilor Dwyer (via telephone), Kelvin Edwards; Valerie Cunningham

Also Present: David Moore, Community Development Director; Dave Allen, Deputy City Manager; JerriAnne Boggis, Portsmouth Black Heritage Trail; Kathy Wheeler; Ellen Marllat; David Watters

Absent:

Chairman Jackson opened the meeting and welcomed members of the public in attendance. She then recognized David Moore to provide various updates regarding construction and project next steps.

Mr. Moore advised the Committee that preparations were being made on many fronts to move forward with a project construction start date of August 18th. He noted that this date was recently selected after confirming the delivery date of various critical custom architectural materials for the project, including the granite. He advised the Committee that recent meetings were held or scheduled with project abutters, the construction team, and that coordination with the State Archaeologist and the City's consulting archaeologist was ongoing. Mr. Moore indicated he was coordinating press and communication with the City Council and the Committee volunteers to ensure people were kept up today with project developments. He provided a brief update on project fundraising and noted that it continued in coordination with dedicated fundraising volunteers.

He noted that staff and construction team were proceeding on a tight timeframe to complete the project during this construction season. He advises that many pieces need to be coordinated including the preparation of the remains for reburial as well as the reburial ceremony for burying the remains.

He reported back to the committee on preparations for the reburial of the remains exhumed in 2003 and 2008. Previously, the Committee discussed proposals to create coffins for the project and decided to work with a local artisan (Jeffrey Cooper) on the burial boxes to ensure control over the sensitive nature of this project including ensuring the size of the remains and the need to ensure boxes can be assembled and sized correctly to fit in the burial vault. In addition, ensuring the boxes could be completed for the planned completion in November was also critical. He reported that Mr. Cooper is interested in concept and made some specific proposals, which included the use of pine boxes and that the boxes, when assembled could be carved on their tops to create a design (Sankofa?) that would "tie" all of the boxes together.

In addition, the Committee previously had discussed its preference to reinter the remains exhumed in 2008 as part of additional site investigations for the Memorial construction. David Moore had discussed this previously with Dr. Boisvert and recently renewed his own understanding of his

guidance on the issue with him. Dr. Boisvert indicated that he would follow the desires of the descendant community/Committee. It was decided, the Committee would recommend the City reinter the remains in the burial vault along with the 2003 remains, and further that the 2008 remains be buried together in one burial box, but within that box, they be separated. David said he would follow-up with the guidance from the Committee with Dr. Boisvert and Independent Archaeological Consultants and follow-up accordingly.

Mr. Moore invited discussion by the Committee of a public ground breaking to take place at the site in recognition of the construction start. He noted that the start date would be relatively quick and that the Committee might consider a date later in August that would be held in proximity to the construction start date but after the actual start of construction and suggested dates.

Chair Jackson then recognized invited discussion by members of the Committee and recognized members of the public to speak as well. Ms. Cunningham expressed concern that the tight time frame for project completion and fabrication of burial coffins would preclude additional public involvement in this key project element and encouraged the Committee to consider another approach. Mr. Watters, Ms. Boggis, Ms. Wheeler and Ms. Marlatt expressed similar concerns related to both the approach of the reburial ceremony as well as the tight timeframe in which the public would be able to engage with the reburial such as through the preparation of the coffins, etc. Discussion took place surrounding these topics.

The discussion then moved towards the “groundbreaking” event for the project. Ms. Cunningham and other members of the public advocated for a solemn ceremony to take place on site prior to construction moving forward. She noted that the construction start essentially meant the site would be reviolated. As the discussion moved forward, the concept of a consecration ceremony to take place on Sunday August 17th, the day before construction would start the next date at 7:00 a.m. The Committee agreed this was the best way to move forward and Valerie Cunningham was selected to organize program and report back to the Committee to obtain feedback. Mr. Moore said the City had no preference for the timing of a groundbreaking and was happy to work with the Committee on any decision it made in follow-up to the day’s discussion.

The Committee revisited the previous discussion related to the timing of a reburial ceremony. Committee members agreed unanimously that planning on a reburial in spring 2015 would allow for sufficient pre-planning and involvement by the community.

The meeting was adjourned