

ACCEPTED FEBRUARY 25, 2015

AFRICAN BURYING GROUND COMMITTEE
MEETING SUMMARY

DECEMBER 18, 2014 MACLEOD BOARD ROOM PORTSMOUTH PUBLIC LIBRARY 3:00 P.M.

Present: Vernis Jackson, Chair; Councilor Dwyer, Kelvin Edwards; Valerie Cunningham

Also Present: David Allen, Deputy City Manager; David Moore, Community Development Director

Absent: Mary Bailey (e)

Chair Jackson opened the meeting and moved to the first item, consideration of the meeting minutes from the December 1, 2014 and approved them.

Mr. Moore was recognized to give an update on project construction. He distributed a news release which described the work that had been completed. He advised that work was complete on the site for the winter as planned. He reviewed the works to be completed in the next year, which includes decorative railing installation (January) and additional work in April to include decorative pavement, plant material, artwork installation etc. He said the team continued to work well together and the abutters continued in their cooperation. In addition, he noted that six of the six abutters had completed their own offsite improvements to their abutting properties in coordination with the construction project. Some discussion on the construction project and the positive community feedback ensued. The Committee discussed usage of the site in the interim prior to completion and afterwards. They noted some concern related to smoking and skateboarding activities. The discussion ended with Mr. Moore agreeing to do some research on existing ordinances in place to prohibit these activities however, the Committee noted its long held preference to avoid signage at the site, especially “prohibitive” signage. In addition, the Committee discussed an idea to create a gate system at one end of the Memorial. It was decided that the Committee would recommend that the site be constructed as planned and to monitor usage to see if site changes of that sort were warranted. The Committee noted that the site is very porous and keeping members of the public out of the site during nighttime hours would be very difficult if not impossible an issue not dissimilar to many public places, including cemeteries and parks, throughout the City.

Mr. Moore then reviewed research into a resolution for the pedestrian connection challenge from the African Burying Ground across State Street and through to Porter Street. He indicated that he had found historical information about the abandonment of the former portion of Chestnut Street that connected State and Porter Streets, which he was pursuing in order to reestablish and improve a formal and inviting pedestrian connection that would link the African Burying Ground, Chestnut Street in front of the Music Hall, Vaughn Mall, and Portwalk Place, etc. He said the first step would be create a mid-block crossing from the African Burying Ground across State Street at the former street, which will go before of Parking Traffic and Safety in January. The Committee strongly supported the proposal to create a new cross walk and to make an inviting pedestrian connection

through the use of a bump out on the State Street side and a formal walkway long the former road to Porter Street.

The Committee chair then moved on to ceremony planning. The Committee had a brief discussion about the Committee's charge and makeup. It was agreed that the Committee should discuss the issue further and it was agreed that the Committee would do well to reach out to others about ceremony planning aspects including what traditions, customs, or other rites might be appropriate given the history of the site and those buried there. It was agreed to reach out to others to advise the Committee on the ceremony including having others attend the Committee meetings. The Committee discussed in general ceremony ideas and it was agreed that based on the discussion Mr. Moore would work the chair on an outline that could be used by the Committee in the future to guide future discussions.

The Committee discussed setting a date for a public ceremony to reinter the remains noting that planning was predicated on having a date. Mr. Moore repeated previous guidance from the construction team that project completion of all elements, including those that are sensitive to climate conditions, could be assured by mid-May and that the earliest a ceremony should be planned is the last two weeks in May. A discussion took place of possible Saturday dates including Memorial Day Weekend (May 23rd) and other dates into June, including weekend of Juneteenth (19th to 21st). Valerie Cunningham pointed out that Juneteenth (150th anniversary of establishment of the tradition) events planned for 2015 include a reunion of NH black families. Merits of the later June date were discussed and a majority of the Committee determined that completing the Memorial earlier in the season was appropriate and opted for the first weekend that the Memorial will be completed, May 23rd. The Committee agreed the date would not be shared widely until key venues could be confirmed to be available and in deference to a coordinated outreach campaign to be developed.

There was no time remaining to remaining items on the agenda and the Committee agreed to meet as soon as possible in January to continue to plan for the ABG ceremony.