

## Fort Ward Park – Public Comments Received March 18 – March 27, 2009

Dear Laura,

This letter is in response to the City's request for comments on the future of Fort Ward Park.

We attended the meeting on March 18 and were encouraged by the comments of Mr. Mallamo and Mr. Kincannon. We are concerned, however, that their sentiments may never be put into action, particularly in light of Mr. Kincannon's imminent departure. We are also concerned that vehicles are still being driven and parked near, if not over, grave sites.

We hope that the City Council will call for the creation of a Fort Ward Park Citizens Advisory Committee, direct city staff to work with that committee to develop a master plan for the improvement and use of the park. We also ask that the Council set specific dates for the presentation of a proposed plan to the public in a public forum, for a public comment period, and for subsequent presentation of a revised plan to the Council.

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Dear Ms. Durham,

The Friends of Fort Ward have asked me to submit our thoughts in response to the City of Alexandria's initial plan of action for Fort Ward Park, outlined on March 18, 2009. In broad strokes, the Friends are heartened by the City's response to the concerns raised by various groups and individuals – ranging from neighbors, historic preservationists, descendants of those who lived in what is today the Park, and others – regarding Fort Ward Park. We are very pleased that the City acknowledges that regardless of what particular actions are taken, preservation and interpretation of the historic character of the Park – including both Civil War-era Fort Ward itself and archaeological or historic evidence from other eras, such as the graves of those who lived on the park site after the Civil War – must be paramount. We think that from this understanding that history must come first in any prioritization of civic values relating to the Fort Ward Park site, room can be found to reasonably accommodate the other worthy civic values implicated in any use of the Park.

The real demonstration of the City's conviction to address the issues surrounding Fort Ward Park will be its actions, however, and not its plans or words. Using public comment, the City has identified several immediate-term actions that it hopes to undertake within a short space of time. The Friends will look forward to such actions getting underway as soon as possible. Relocation of maintenance equipment away from the graves located in the Park maintenance yard is a positive start, and we await the progress on the other items outlined on March 18. We are aware that other short-term actions may be identified in the coming days as the City's plans are digested; as long as such actions are consistent with the broad strokes the City has put forward, those actions are also likely to enjoy the Friends' support.

The City also committed to a longer-term planning process for Fort Ward Park, using the feedback it obtained at two community meetings and through general public comment.



The Friends recognize the need for thoughtful and comprehensive planning to ensure that as many issues and concerns of stakeholders are addressed as possible. We look forward to the start of such a process, and we look forward to participating in it if we can. We do not expect the City to rely, however, on such a long-term planning process as a reason to defer short-term actions that can be taken at the Park in the meantime, assuming such short-term steps are fiscally reasonable.

In conclusion, the Friends are guardedly optimistic that meaningful improvements for Historic Fort Ward, Fort Ward Park, and the surrounding neighborhoods are possible as a result of the City's March 18, 2009 initial plan of action. We look forward to doing our part to assist the Department of Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Activities and the Office of Historic Alexandria in continuing to tell the story of Historic Fort Ward, as well as all of those stories that Fort Ward Park has yet to divulge.

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Dear Ms. Durham,

This is in response to the City's presentation made on March 18, 2009 at TC Williams High School, regarding the protection, management and future use of Fort Ward Park, which has been nationally recognized for its significance to the Civil War. I appreciate the opportunity to address this issue once again.

As I mentioned in my previous comments, I have worked for the federal government for 31 years and I am all too familiar with the federal agencies at times making final decisions in advance of the official public comment period. Fortunately that practice occurs less often because of strong Congressional oversight. While the presentation on March 18, 2009 by the Recreation, Parks and Cultural Department finally set aside their plan for large events, which included additional paving of the historic site. The groups and individuals involved in these discussions over the last 1 ½ years are concerned that the Recreation Department will merely set it aside their October 2008 plan only to bring it back at a later date. In fact, despite the promising words that evening, we suspect that funding for the 2008 plan's implementation is still contained in the City's current and proposed budget. We are aware that the city has already purchased at least one very large pavilion that is now in storage. This must have been done prior to the "public meetings".

I attended two of the three public meetings and I was impressed that more than 200 individuals participated in this opportunity for citizen input. After reviewing the meeting results it was clear that there was not one voice supporting the proposed plan that has been featured on the City's website for six months.

The public continues to be mindful that the Parks Department was prepared to ram the project through regardless of the legitimate concerns expressed by many groups and individuals including neighboring communities, Oakland Baptist Church members, Seminary Hill Association board members, the Alexandria Historic Society, the Alexandria Archeological Commission, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, and others whose families lay buried on the site. For a relatively small town in the shadow



of our Nation's Capitol, this does not speak well of the City's elected officials or its employees.

This historic park is not only about the African American graves but it is where slaves freed after the war lived, attended school, and worshiped. This situation reminds me of a written request to our subcommittee by Jesse Jackson Jr. He asked for report language that instructed the U.S. National Park Service to include the entire story of the Civil War before, during and after in their visitor centers' and interpretive displays throughout the country, as they needed to be replaced or upgraded. This is what is needed at Fort Ward Park – recognition that African Americans, freed by President Lincoln, lived, raised families and died free men and women within this historic area.

Despite Roger Blakely's repeated threats and arrogant public statements about not being able to take action on our proposals or continue basic services at Fort Ward because of reductions to the City budget, we understand that the City current and proposed budget include significant plans to fund additional paved parking areas, paved trails, new restrooms, and additional picnic pavilions. I have spent the last 17 years working on federal budgets, and I am aware that there are times when difficult decisions have to be made. However, it is clear to all of us that the City has proposed to spend large sums of money on the 2008 plan that has been on the City's web site for six months. It would seem appropriate and justified to reallocate those funds to support the actions listed below.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

**1. Immediately remove all evidence of the Maintenance Yard including stones, fencing, and other materials.**

(we acknowledge the City removed many of the vehicles immediately after the public meeting on the 18<sup>th</sup>)

**2. Immediately remove the area used by the arborist.** Many area residents remember what was envisioned at this site and the early days where beautiful gardens flourished. However, users of the park have watched the dramatic deterioration the last 15 years. It is a maintenance area with trash and broken pots strewn everywhere, maintenance vehicles, broken machinery, tools and large compost piles and landscape debris. The relatives of Clara Adams, and the others that are buried here have had their grave markers destroyed, and the environment is disrespectful to those buried there. Even as a working area, it always unclean and unkept. This area should be immediately moved to another location. This simple work can be done anywhere.

3. After everything is removed, seed and, or, sod the area completely. The City should insure that adequate funds are made available for appropriate archeology /historical survey's and studies as well as interpretive markers for the grave sites, the overall park area and the Museum. However, removing all materials in the



maintenance area and the potting/compost area should be removed and returned to a more natural state this year.

Finally, all of the interested parties would like a public acknowledgement and commitment from the Mayor and City Council that the above mentioned actions will be funded from this year on until the Park appropriately acknowledges and respects the story of the people who lived on this land after the war and the plan promoted by the Recreation and Park Department will never be raised again. In an ideal situation, the park should be moved from the Recreation and Parks Department and made the responsibility of the Office of Historic Alexandria. City elected officials and employees should understand that our groups do not trust the Recreation and Parks Department. They have proudly demonstrated that they do not respect the public's input and were determined to move forward on this huge new change without the public's consent. The mowing and landscape maintenance could easily be contracted. The City has always contracted a significant part of the City's workload including planning and landscaping.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the action plan for Fort Ward Park. I look forward to hearing more about the City's plan for protecting and managing this special area.

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Good meeting last night at TC. It was conducted well and very informative. Thank you all for your efforts.

Suggestion. One of the slides showed a map of Fort Ward with boundaries that extended across Braddock Road on to Episcopal High School's property. This would be an excellent location for a large sign with arrow that indicates Fort Ward is across the street. Why not ask Episcopal to donate that piece of land to the city? They should readily do that with all that the city does for them, i.e. fire and EMS protection, free schooling for the faculty kids (they don't pay property taxes).

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Subject: Review of the City's Findings and Possible Immediate Actions for Fort Ward Park

Dear Laura,

This letter is in response to the City's request for comments on the presentation made on Wednesday March 18, 2009 by Kirk Kincannon, Director of the Recreation, Parks & Cultural Activities Department, and Lance Mallamo, Director of the Office of Historic Alexandria. I appreciate the effort the City is making to work with the residents on the future of Fort Ward Park. I encourage you to continue to work with us to reach agreement on how best to protect, manage, use and interpret the park and in doing so give the community back its history.



Although the remarks by Mr. Mallamo and Mr. Kincannon on the 18th were positive and promising the written recommendations do not reflect the array of public comments shared with and submitted to the City. The “Possible Immediate Actions” that are presented and are included on the City’s website offer very few solutions to the problems that the public has identified. Frankly the groups and individuals I have been communicating with fear that the problems we have brought to you over the last two years will continue and the City’s idea to promote the park for non-historic special events will resurface.

We hope that City of Alexandria government and elected officials will further review the many letters and comments from the public comment and develop more substantive possible actions for Fort Ward Park. We also hope that the City will complete the task of removing vehicles, equipment and debris from the maintenance and nursery area. We were glad to see the vehicles and equipment being removed last week. However, earlier today I noticed that automobiles were once again parked next to the graves of Clara Adams and her husband and that maintenance trucks from the City and contract services were again using the yard.

The City’s ongoing concerns about funding and staff time are obviously real problems that limit your ability to do what is needed to protect and manage Fort Ward Park effectively. Perhaps this economic climate is the right time to look at the park as more like a network of interlocked public-private partnerships. More than ever now is the time for the City, in cooperation with partners, to establish a vision, prepare an action plan and then seek help from the broader community to make it a reality. We believe that within the broader community are people with a whole set of talents that can make things happen. Such a partner-centric approach may represent a radical departure from the way that Fort ward park has been managed but it offers the best hope for the future.

The following are my comments on possible immediate actions that should be included in the City’s proposal for Fort Ward Park.

1. The Mayor and City Council should publicly announce that the City’s October 16, 2008 Fort Ward Park Facility Study and Recommendations be dropped from consideration and the City will continue to work with the public to develop an action plan for Fort Ward Park.

2. To help complete the action plan, and assist with implementation of the plan, the City in cooperation with the Friends of Ft. Ward Park should Create a Fort Ward Park Citizens Advisory Committee.

The Advisory Committee should be directed to continue to work with the City and engage the public over the next 60-90 days in a collaborative process to develop the action plan for Fort Ward Park. Extra time will provide for discussions and consensus agreement to be reached on park issues including noise, alcohol, park uses, management of crowds, and master planning. Once the action plan is prepared in draft it should be presented to the public for final review and comments. After a public review period and



final revisions the action plan can be submitted to the Mayor and City Council for consideration and approval.

3. The City should move the maintenance and nursery yard operations, and their buildings, materials, compost piles, and vehicles, to another City-owned property. All city and contract vehicles should be restricted from this area.

In addition, the City should place signs near the existing grave sites and likely burial areas to recognize those who are buried within the park. Arrangements should be made for the City to allow the families of those buried within the park to be able to display wreaths on or near grave sites.

4. The Mayor and City Council, working with the City Manager should add \$150,000 in City funds in the 2010 budget for cleaning the maintenance and nursery yard, and beginning archeological and historical research and surveys in 2010 to locate African American graves and structures.

The ground within this area should be seeded or covered with sod, and regularly maintained, until the City's Office of Archeology can their surveys and studies and develop a stewardship plan for their conservation, protection and interpretation.

5. Using the funds noted in item #3. the City should immediately provide temporary protection for the Jackson Family grave area, which is identified in the City's General Layout [Plan] for Fort Ward Park dated March 1965. This temporary protection should continue until the City's Office of Archeology can study and survey the grave sites and develop a stewardship plan for their conservation, protection and interpretation.

6. The City should provide funding within 2011 budget and beyond to the City's Archeological Office for archeological and historical studies and surveys for the Maintenance Yard and Nursery area; the Jackson Family grave site; and other areas where African American descendants have lived, worshiped, were educated and been buried.

7. The Mayor and City Council, with the City Manager, should add funds to the 2010 budget for the Fort Ward Park Museum to develop interpretive displays, including walking tours, on the people and activities of the pre-and post Civil War periods, within the Museum and outside within the park. These displays should be completed in time for the start of the sesquicentennial celebration of the Civil War in 2011.

8. The City should evaluate the option of consolidating the primary management of the Fort Ward Historical Park under the leadership of the Office of Historic Alexandria, with maintenance and visitor services provided by Recreation, Parks & Cultural Activities, and, or, a private contractor. The historic resources of the park, as well as the inappropriate management decisions regarding the protection of those resources and public involvement, warrant consideration of a different approach to the management of this park. If approved, this change could be announced as part of the City's 2011 sesquicentennial celebration of the Civil War.



We appreciate your willingness to work with the residents of the City and other park, Civil War, African American, and historic interests to protect, conserve, manage and maintain Fort Ward Park for the education and enjoyment of this important historical park.

Dear Mr. Kincannon:

We, the descendants of African Americans, who lived and worked in the Ft. Ward and Virginia Theological Seminary communities and who founded the Oakland Baptist Church more than a century ago, wish to thank the City of Alexandria's Department of Recreation for the opportunity to comment on the proper future uses and projects we hope will maintain and preserve the historic significance of Ft. Ward. Several of us have attended the recent public meetings and contributed to the community process of determining what's best for the 32-acre historic site as the city moves forward into this century.

We understand the current environmental concerns, particularly of the Friends of Ft. Ward and the neighboring communities, like the Seminary Civic Association on Quaker Lane, Woods Avenue and Woods Place, where many of the descendant families still reside.

It is our premiere desire that the long overlooked and neglected history of the African Americans, who worked the land, owned the land, are buried on the land, and were summarily displaced from the land, be restored, preserved and commemorated in a formal fashion, especially as we come upon the Sesquicentennial of the Civil War.

Our greatest fear is that the historic areas of the park, which contain marked and unmarked graves, will be further desecrated and the valuable contributions of African-American slaves, contraband and freedman will be lost forever if overburdening recreational uses at Ft. Ward Park are expanded before mandatory archeological and historical studies are conducted and completed.

As discussed during the recreation department planning meetings this year, we encourage:

- Removal of trash, debris, equipment, etc., from around the gravesites of Clara Adams and her husband, that are currently located in the city's park and recreation maintenance yard and nursery on the east side of Ft. Ward Park.

Page 2- Seminary Civil Association

- Eventual relocation of the maintenance yard and nursery which we are certain is the location of other unmarked graves, a former school, church and homes of African Americans dating back before, during and after the Civil War.



- Fencing or some other protective barrier around the marked graves outside of the Oakland Baptist Church Cemetery and near the maintenance lot.
- Establishing a walking tour of the historic Ft. Ward African-American community after further historic and archeological study.
- Inclusion of historic markers throughout the park that note significant points about the Ft. Ward African-American community.
- Inclusion of an exhibit about the Ft. Ward/Seminary African-American community in the Ft. Ward Museum.

We offer our support and assistance in making improvement to Ft. Ward Park that we believe will benefit all Alexandrians and future generations in knowing the full history of our great city.

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Dear Ms. Durham

The March 18, 2009 meeting provided a wonderful opportunity for the City, affected communities, and members of the Oakland Baptist Church to dialogue and come to tentative agreement regarding proposed changes to the historic Fort Ward Park. I visited the Park two days after the meeting and was gratified to see that the City had moved with such due diligence and alacrity to preserve the sanctity and dignity of the gravesites by removing all of the maintenance equipment from the area.

We have read carefully the remarks of Dave Cavanaugh and concur wholeheartedly with his comments and recommendations. It is our wish that the Department Directors, Mr. Kincannon and Mr. Mallamo, come forward with a firm budget and policy commitments that implement a plan protecting the park, preserving the history of the African American community, post Civil War, and the preservation of the grave sites, and ensuring it will be ready for the Civil War Sesquicentennial.

We also believe that the suggested written Memorandum of Understanding to be provided by the City detailing the plans for the park as set forth in the March 18 meeting would go a long way to ensure that the City and involved communities are on the same page, thereby, combating confusion and frustration as we go forth.

As an African American community whose ancestors are buried at the Ft Ward Park, who are post-Civil War residents of the community, who have made repeated sacrifices and displacements through the decades for the betterment of all Alexandrians, i.e. widening of King Street, TC Williams High School, Ft Ward Park itself, we now ask that the city recognize our many contributions. We ask that you preserve our history and honor our ancestors with a firm written commitment to the plans presented on March 18, returning Ft Ward to its original historic mission while at the same time including the African-American presence.





We look forward to working with you in whatever capacity necessary to bring this project to a successful and much anticipated conclusion. For I, too, have family members lying at rest in Ft. Ward. Thank you for your consideration and the opportunity to have input.

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Dear Ms. Durham

The March 18, 2009 meeting went along way to alleviate some of the citizen concerns regarding proposed changes to the historic Fort Ward Park.

At the meeting, Kirk Kincannon, Director, Department of Recreation and Parks and Cultural Activities and Lance Mallamo, Director, Office of Historic Alexandria provided assurances that nothing would be done at the park to disturb known grave sites.

However, the draft Action Plan presented at the meeting was a list of “possible immediate solutions”, with no clear plan or commitments addressing citizen concerns. The PowerPoint presentation left many questions unanswered making it difficult to provide constructive comments. The Department Directors should come forward with firm budget and policy commitments that implement a plan protecting the park and ensuring it will be ready for the Civil War Sesquicentennial.

One slide provided only a glimpse of what may be considered an “Action Plan”.

“Possible Immediate Actions” (Power Point Slide)

- Staff/community working groups.

Questions: Who would establish the groups? What would be their responsibility? Would an ad hoc group suffice?

- Phased plan for relocation of maintenance facility.

Questions: Again who would develop plan? What would be the conditions for evaluating a reasonable timetable for removal of the maintenance yard and restoring the area to the park?

- Community notification of park and nursery operations.

Questions: Who would provide notification? Does this infer consultation with neighborhood groups? Does notification occur before or after a decision is made?

- Two week moratorium on rentals, with longer term reductions in site availability.

Questions: What purpose does a two week moratorium on rentals serve? What other measures will be implemented immediately to prevent overcrowding, unacceptable noise levels and alcohol consumption in the park.



- Controlled access available for grave sites.

Questions: Does this infer the maintenance yard will not be moved anytime soon? Does it also mean the gravesites in the maintenance yard will be excluded from historic interpretation of the African American experience? Is a maintenance yard on a historic area of the park with graves an appropriate use of park land?

- Signage and enforcement of “no alcohol” and “no amplified noise” without permit policies.

Questions: When will RPCA adopt, implement and enforce provisions prohibiting no alcohol and no amplified noise? Under what circumstances would RPCA permit alcohol and amplified noise?

- Early April walking tours w/working group and public.

Questions: Is a walking tour the only acceptable method for recognizing the African American contribution to the Civil War period? Who would be the lead on developing the walking tour? Would the walking tour be incorporated into the historic interpretation of events at Fort Ward during and immediately after the Civil War? How can a meaningful walking tour be developed when the location of the school and the gravesites are behind locked chain linked fences?

Although the presentation was well received, it failed to outline a meaningful process to protect resources and mitigate problems identified by citizens.

Much of information regarding an African American School, the Clara Adams gravesite and other burials was available to the City when the Park was first developed. Regretfully, this period of in-action and disregard for the African-American experience during and after the Civil War makes it more compelling that the City take action now, not later.

Under the circumstances I suggest a process and a plan to develop interim guidance for managing the park and develop a more diverse interpretation of historic events in time for the Civil War Sesquicentennial. This plan integrates park maintenance, operation, resource protection and a more inclusive interpretation of history at the park.

City staff is in a difficult position responding to public pressures and attempting to balance the changing needs of the community. Your success and our success is dependent on establishing trust relationships, working together towards consensus, and groups being receptive to thoughtful comments and suggestions regarding management of public resources. Public support of decisions regarding use of public historic parks can reduce maintenance, operations and resource protection costs.



I recognize this is a busy time for City staff. However, citizens have rallied and provided responses to requests for comments and suggestions regarding management and use of the park. It is my hope that all interested parties can sit down together and collectively work through the various issues identified at the public meetings.

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Dear Ms. Durham,

Attached is my letter in response to the city's presentation March 18, 2009 of its plans for Ft. Ward Park going forward which seem to indicate that the your agencies listened to community concerns particularly regarding honoring the marked and unmarked gravesites on the property. However, the main point of my letter is to seek a firm detailed and written commitment, as well as the verbal assurances we received at the meeting, that the city intends to use its resources to preserve the park for its original intended purpose as a historic park for which the African-Americans made major sacrifices. It is my fervent hope that the rental uses o the park are not expanded until the history is fully investigated and honored preferably with permanent exhibits, also as pledged during the March 18 meeting.

Also, I would like to request that in the future, we have more than one week to gather and present responses to city meetings.

Again, thank you for this opportunity to have input in this project and I look forward to working with the appropriate agencies going forward.

Dear City Mayor, City Council Members, City Manager, City Staffers of the Alexandria Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Activities, and Fellow Alexandrians:

The March 18, 2009 meeting provided a wonderful opportunity for the City, affected communities, and members of the Oakland Baptist Church to dialogue and come to tentative agreement regarding proposed changes to the historic Fort Ward Park. I visited the Park after the meeting and was gratified to see that the City had moved with such due diligence and alacrity to preserve the sanctity and dignity of the gravesites by removing most of the maintenance equipment from major portions of the area.

I have read carefully the remarks of Dave Cavanaugh and Glen Eugster and concur wholeheartedly with their comments and recommendations. It is our wish that the Department Directors, Mr. Kincannon and Mr. Mallamo, come forward with a firm, written Memorandum of Understanding that spells out in detail the budget and policy commitments that implement a plan protecting the park, preserving the history of the African American community, post Civil War, and the preservation of the grave sites, and ensuring it will be ready for the Civil War Sesquicentennial.

As I mentioned in an earlier letter, I have relatives, including Clara Adams, Bernie and William Terrell and Randalls, who are buried on the Ft. Ward grounds. I am currently in the process of conducting interviews to collect more information from the descendants of the Ft. Ward families to further document the African-American experience in this part of Alexandria. The sacrifices the African-American families of the Ft. Ward and Seminary



communities have repeatedly made for decades toward the betterment of all Alexandrians include the relocation of their homesteads several times, for example, to make way for the widening of King Street, the construction of T.C. Williams High School, and the establishment of Ft. Ward as a historic city park. We are now asking that the city recognize our considerable contributions by providing the descendants with the opportunity to help the appropriate city agencies in efforts to restore and preserve our history and honor our ancestors with firm written commitments to the plans presented on March 18 that will return Ft. Ward Park to its original historic mission which will include the historic African-American presence going forward.

As Mr. Cavanaugh has noted, “at the meeting, Kirk Kincannon, Director, Department of Recreation and Parks and Cultural Activities and Lance Mallamo, Director, Office of Historic Alexandria provided assurances that nothing would be done at the park to disturb known grave sites.

However, the draft Action Plan presented at the meeting was a list of “possible immediate solutions”, with no clear plan or commitments addressing citizen concerns. The PowerPoint presentation left many questions unanswered making it difficult to provide constructive comments. The Department Directors should come forward with firm budget and policy commitments that implement a plan protecting the park and ensuring it will be ready for the Civil War Sesquicentennial.

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Although the presentation was well received, it failed to outline a meaningful process to protect resources and mitigate problems identified by citizens.

Much of information regarding an African American School, the Clara Adams gravesite and other burials was available to the City when the Park was first developed.

Regretfully, this period of in-action and disregard for the African-American experience during and after the Civil War makes it more compelling that the City take action now, not later.

Under the circumstances I suggest a process and a plan to develop interim guidance for managing the park and develop a more diverse interpretation of historic events in time for the Civil War Sesquicentennial. This plan integrates park maintenance, operation, resource protection and a more inclusive interpretation of history at the park.

City staff is in a difficult position responding to public pressures and attempting to balance the changing needs of the community. Your success and our success is dependent on establishing trust relationships, working together towards consensus, and groups being receptive to thoughtful comments and suggestions regarding management of public resources. Public support of decisions regarding use of public historic parks can reduce maintenance, operations and resource protection costs.

I recognize this is a busy time for City staff. However, citizens have rallied and provided responses to requests for comments and suggestions regarding management and use of the park. It is my hope that all interested parties can sit down together and collectively work through the various issues identified at the public meetings.”

As a journalist and historian gathering oral histories and attempting to piece together the African-American story regarding this critical piece of American history, I anticipate many visitors wanting to travel to Ft. Ward during the Sesquicentennial. It would be a shame if the City of Alexandria fails to invest in this historic jewel and misses this welcome opportunity to show the park’s significant role in the development of this nation by not ensuring that the value of this historic enclave is not displayed in its full glory, or worse, goes unnoticed.

Along with other descendants and members of the Seminary/Ft. Ward community, I look forward to working with you to bring this project to a successful and much anticipated conclusion. Thank you.



Dear Ms. Durham:

At the March 17, 2009, meeting of the Historic Alexandria Resources Commission, the members voted to support the “Resolution Regarding Future Uses of Fort Ward Park” written by The Friends of Fort Ward.

The members discussed the importance of preserving, honoring and interpreting all the historic resources of the site while recognizing the importance of the park for appropriate recreational purposes. In addition, the celebration of the sesquicentennial of the Civil War provides the City with an opportunity to re-examine the interpretation of the site, particularly with regard to the history of the African-American community at Fort Ward.

We appreciate the opportunity provided by the City to participate in the community meetings on the future of Fort Ward.

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Dear Ms. Durham:

I appreciate this further opportunity to comment on the progress as well as the major problems that remain to be addressed regarding Ft. Ward. The problems include uncertainties about (1) the future of the maintenance area and (2) the future of the Park in general. As the owners of the home closest to the maintenance area, I and my family have a great deal of concern about the City’s plans (or lack of plans) for the maintenance area and the Park. My family’s struggle with the City dates back 5 years now to the very beginning of our purchase of the property when I called to protest the dozens of old tires that furnished an ideal breeding ground for tiger mosquitoes 50 feet from my back door. Since that time, we have been caught up in a long, slow, time-and-energy-consuming struggle against the absolute ugliness of the maintenance area and the intrusions on residential privacy by noise and other problems coming from the Park. I appreciate the steps that the City has taken to address these problems, but I can now see that the problems I’ve encountered are part of a much profounder insensitivity shown by the City.

Regarding the maintenance area and its future, the central point seems to me to be the City's default on historical responsibility, as exhibited by the unfortunate decision to convert an African-American burial area into a maintenance area and cover graves with mulch and paving material. It's quite simply an act of unbelievable desecration. Judith Smith's testimony at the March 18, 2009 hearing, when she spoke of being "heartbroken" by seeing the gravesites of her relatives where she used to play as a child covered with mulch, sawdust, and paving stones, was very powerful. Ms. Smith’s comments and the comments by others at the meeting indicated that, in the words of one of them, they “have waited a long time”—more than 40 years, in fact—to see the City undo the desecration. Given the callousness of the City’s original decision and the decades which have gone by, the City should NOT allow more time to go by without decisive action to restore the maintenance area.

As rapidly as possible, the City should develop a clear-headed, action-oriented, and adequately funded plan for treating the site with the respect befitting a cemetery and a site of African-American history. It should be unthinkable to leave the area as an



“unfunded mandate,” a victim of good intentions and no financial support. As an appropriate start, the City should make available the \$150,000 that Mr. Glenn Eugster suggests in his comments and at the same time search aggressively for other sources of funds, which I strongly believe will be made available if the City itself shows a decent commitment to funding remedial measures. Given the pattern of graves within the Baptist cemetery, graves immediately outside it, and graves in the maintenance area, I'm beginning to suspect that the whole area may have been a burial ground. If that's the case, it only underscores the urgency of reinstating a due respect for history in general and African-American history in particular. Using its own funds and funds from additional sources, the City should take steps to undo the parking lot and other intrusions on the black cemetery. As an interim measure, it should remove the parking lot and plant grass in the area. It should also explore the actual history of the site in accordance with archaeological procedures and standards.

This concern for restoring the Park's historical values should go hand in hand with the second major concern, that of restoring and reinvigorating the Park as the City's Arboretum. The Park is designated as the City's Arboretum, but the City has also had a hard time honoring this designation while it allowed the Park to degenerate into what I call Ft. Disco, a place for large crowds, amplified music, and consumption of alcohol. In visiting the Park since the early 1970s and in living next to the Park for the past 5 years, I've seen its trees and vegetation steadily declining. They have grown older or been cut down with apparently no corresponding replacements. I remember seeing (and counting) literally dozens of woodpecker nests in the 1970s. I expect there will be only a third as many this spring. The loss of habitat, the blind spot for nature that characterizes a great deal of modern attitudes and that has decimated bird species in the United States, has taken its toll in Ft. Ward as well. The City should balance a rediscovery of its respect for history in Ft. Ward with an equal emphasis on Ft. Ward as the City's Arboretum.

Organizationally, the best way to reinvigorate this emphasis on history and nature in Ft. Ward is to consider giving joint responsibility for Ft. Ward's future to the Department of Parks and Recreation and to the Office of Historic Alexandria. Such an approach would give additional leverage to the protection of Ft. Ward as a historical treasure. In giving greater visibility to the Park's historical identity, I believe that it would also help in obtaining funds from state and federal sources in undoing the damage to the Park's history. The Mayor and City Council should actively consider this suggestion of shared responsibility as a key administrative step toward protecting both the historical and natural values that should be uppermost in the City's plans for managing the future of Fort Ward.

Thank you for this opportunity for further comment.

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