

PROPOSED 2010 ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS FORT WARD HISTORICAL PARK

September 28, 2010

On October 5, 2009, City Council allotted funds for archaeological research in Fort Ward Park. The proposed archaeological investigation will provide information about the locations of unmarked gravesites and family burial plots identified to date through historic research and ground penetrating radar and shall test for locations of possible Native American sites and other features, especially those relating to the African American community on the property. The work will consist of archaeological testing in three non-contiguous areas of the property: the former maintenance yard of the Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities, where oral history has indicated that graves were present, and the adjacent burial area known as the Old Grave Yard; the Jackson Cemetery; and the lot identified from historical research as the home site for Burr and Harriet Shorts. Information about these sensitive areas of the park will be provided to the Stakeholders Advisory Group for Fort Ward to aid in their recommendations to City Council. This work represents the initial phase of archaeology in the park. It is expected that this will be a multi-year project, as funding becomes available for additional historical and archaeological research.

The goals of the proposed 2010 archaeological investigation are to:

- Locate and confirm the presence of human burials in the survey areas. All possible burial locations identified during the 2009 ground penetrating radar survey (GPR) will be explored, as will areas where graves were not identified. The use of GPR as a method to identify burial locations will be assessed. No excavation of, or disturbance to, human remains will occur.
- Delineate the boundaries of clusters of burials or individual graves in same areas.
- Map all identified burials utilizing City surveyors who can place precise locational information on city base maps of the property.
- Locate, record, and evaluate sites of the African American schoolhouse, church, and other structures that were present in the survey areas into the middle twentieth century and test for other cultural resources (such as Civil War and Native American site areas) through standard shovel testing, metal detection, and mechanical trenching.

Standard archaeological survey methods will be used for this project, including shovel testing, metal detection, hand-excavated units, and both hand and mechanical stripping:

- Shovel Testing: Shovel tests pits (STPs) are small archaeological excavation units (approximately 1 to 1.5 feet in diameter), generally

dug in a grid pattern across a survey area to locate and identify potentially significant site areas. The shovel tests also provide information about the depth of the soil that will need to be stripped in later phases to look for graves and other archaeological features. They extend into what archaeologists call the sterile sub-soil, the natural soil layers that have no evidence of human activity. Initial investigation at Fort Ward will involve the excavation of a maximum of 200 STPs placed in a systematic grid pattern, generally using a sampling interval of at least 30 feet across the project areas. In some of the areas of greater potential, a closer interval for the STPs may be used. If features, such as possible grave shafts are identified in an STP, excavation of the shovel test will stop and the area will be explored using other techniques.

- **Metal Detection:** Metal detection will be used to identify locations of Civil War period encampments as well as locations of structures that are unknown from historical documentation. In general, metal detecting will be conducted across the survey areas prior to stripping any soils to look for graves and other features. If fill soils are present that are deep enough to preclude effective metal detecting, additional work may also occur as the stripping is being done.
- **Stripping in trenches and/or scraped areas:** Locations of graves and other archaeological features are identified by stripping off the topsoil and looking for obvious evidence of human activity, such as a buried foundation, or for more subtle remnants, such as changes in soil color or texture that indicate disturbance to the natural soils. Archaeologists identify burial locations by looking for evidence of grave shafts, indicated by an oval or rectangular soil stain (usually 6 to 7 feet long and 2.5 feet wide—smaller for child burials) on an east/west axis cutting into the natural soils. The locations of the areas to be stripped at Fort Ward are based upon the possible burial locations identified during the GPR survey, the oral history accounts of grave locations, and other historical information about structure locations. No burials will be excavated during the course of this project.

The stripped area locations will be changed and refined as more information becomes available throughout the course of the archaeological work. Hand stripping will occur in areas that are near trees (see tree preservation plan below) and in the Jackson Cemetery in the glacis of the Civil War fortification. Other areas will be stripped by a backhoe using a grading bucket, carefully monitored by an archaeologist. The archaeologist will identify the top of the subsoil as the backhoe strips the upper soil layers. Mechanical excavations will stop at this level, and the stripped area will be scraped by hand to identify grave shafts or other archaeological features. A minimum of

600 square feet of hand stripping and 5500 square feet of mechanical stripping will occur during this archaeological work.

- Hand-excavated units: Hand excavation in 5-foot square (or 2.5 by 5-foot rectangular) units will be conducted, if needed, to gain more information about potentially significant features or areas, excluding the grave shafts, that are found during the course of the excavation. Hand-excavated units are dug by natural soil levels, and all the soils are screened to collect artifacts. A maximum of 125 square feet will be excavated in this manner.

The City Engineering Department is preparing a grading plan that shows the archaeological survey areas and includes erosion control and tree preservation plans. Erosion control will include silt fencing or bales of straw on the downhill sides of all excavations. Silt fencing is also planned for the property line between Fort Ward and Marlboro Estates. The tree preservation plan has been worked out with the City Arborist and stipulates that there will be no mechanical excavation within 6 feet of any tree. Efforts will be made to keep all mechanical excavation a prescribed distance away from individual trees, according to the following formula: a distance in feet equal to the diameter of the tree trunk in inches. This circumference will be marked on the ground around the trees.

LEGEND

- Possible burial locations from GPR
- Hand-excavated archaeological units
- Mechanically excavated archaeological areas
- Silt fence for erosion control
- Bales of straw for erosion control

TREE PRESERVATION:

NOTE: Exact locations of all excavation units (including trenches, scraped areas, and hand-dug units) within the limits of disturbance may change as a result of findings during the course of the archaeological work.

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