

African Burying Ground Stewardship Committee
Meeting Minutes
July 2, 2019

Members present: Chris Dwyer, Vernis Jackson, Valerie Cunningham
Members Absent: Towny Manfull, Janet Prince
Staff present: Deputy City Attorney Suzanne Woodland, Economic Development Manager Nancy Carmer
Others present: Ellen Marlatt and Kathleen Wheeler of Independent Archeologist Consultants, NH State Archeologist Mark Doperalski, NH Black Heritage Trail Executive Director JerriAnne Boggis

Serving as Chair pro tem, Deputy City Attorney Woodland opened the meeting at 11:08 AM.

1. Introductions

Committee members and invited non-committee members introduced themselves.

2. Election of Chair

In response to the call for nominations of a Chair, Ms. Carmer informed Committee members that Janet Prince is unable to serve on the Stewardship Committee at this time so there is a vacancy. Ms. Dwyer suggested that, with only of three committee members present and one vacancy, it might be wise to postpone the election until all members are present and the vacancy filled. Other members concurred. On a motion by Ms. Dwyer to postpone the election, seconded by Ms. Jackson, the Committee voted unanimously to postpone the election of the chair until the Mayor has an opportunity to appoint additional members.

3. Review of Past Work

Ellen Marlatt of Independent Archeological Consultants provided the background of the African Burying Ground site that began with a City construction project on Chestnut Street in 2003 and the ensuing archeological analysis of the site. She described the controlled research completed by Dr. Jackson of Boston University on the soils and human remains exhumed from the Portsmouth burying ground which indicated that the genetic markers of the individual remains analyzed were of African descent. Dr. Jackson is now deceased and the materials analyzed have been returned and are stored in Independent Archeological Consultants' lab in Portsmouth. Ms. Marlatt said additional analysis was contemplated, but never occurred and that there are 8 teeth and more soil samples that were set aside for future analysis. This material is also in her lab, but as she is now retired, she feels it is probably best to think about storing it at an alternate site. She shared some potential alternate locations based on her research of places that have proper environmental, security and best practices for such storage.

Following the original analysis of the Portsmouth burial remains, Ms. Marlatt was encouraged by a colleague to reach out to Dr. Owsley, Division Head of the Department of Anthropology at the Smithsonian Institute Museum of Natural History. Dr. Owsley is doing research in the field of 17th, 18th and 19th - century individuals of European and African ancestry recovered from Mid-Atlantic and Northeastern U.S. She contacted Dr. Owsley and their discussion resulted in a proposal letter in 2016 from Dr. Owsley to include the remains from the Portsmouth site in his research at no charge.

4. Discussion of Potential New Study

Ms. Woodland circulated a copy of Dr. Owsley's proposal letter and noted that, at the suggestion of Ms. Marlatt, she recently contacted Dr. Owsley to discuss his research and to determine if he is still interested in analyzing the materials from Portsmouth. It appears that there is interest in including the Portsmouth material in the ongoing research.

Before any action can be taken on further research, it is imperative that this Committee discuss the opportunity and seek permission from the descendant community to conduct additional research by Dr. Owsley or other researchers. This also raises the issue of long term curation of the material.

A discussion on technological advances in the methodology of analysis and current and future curation protocols ensued. The Committee agreed that a teleconference with Dr. Owsley to discuss these topics and what Portsmouth might glean from the analysis is a good idea as there is a strong desire to learn more about Portsmouth's ancestors and how that data impacts local history. All concurred that, "We don't know what we don't know," and a conversation with Dr. Owsley might inform that.

Mr. Doperalski stated that the State would have no issues sending out the Portsmouth burial material for further research as long as the descendant community approves. He also recommended that a comprehensive Letter of Agreement (Curation Agreement) be developed specifying the scope of work, data sharing, etc., be included in any future actions. Additional discussion ensued on potential contents of an Agreement and the inclusion of how Portsmouth can benefit from sharing the materials for further research.

5. Next Steps and follow up for next meeting:

- Speak to Mayor about potential candidates for filling community vacanc(ies)
- Research and report on the balance of funds in the African Burying Ground Trust
- Research meeting minutes from previous approval by the descendant community
- Research maintenance plan for Burying Ground including replacement of tiles
- Speak to Dr. Owsley's office to find a time for a teleconference during next meeting.

6. Next Meeting

The next meeting is contingent upon finding a date that Dr. Owsley is available for a teleconference to discuss his research and to answer questions from the Committee.

At 12:05 PM, on a motion by Ms. Dwyer, seconded by Ms. Jackson, the Committee voted unanimously to adjourn.

APPROVED, October 2, 2019