

Adopted 10-29-08

AFRICAN BURYING GROUND COMMITTEE

OCTOBER 8, 2008

PORTSMOUTH PUBLIC LIBRARY

4:00 P.M.

Present: Vernis Jackson, Chair; Mary Bailey, Vice Chair; Valerie Cunningham; Councilor Pantelakos, Suzanne M. Woodland (Ex-Officio), Steve Parkinson (Ex-officio)

Absent: Councilor Christine Dwyer; Jack McGee; Councilor Laura Pantelakos

Also Present: Cindy Hayden, Deputy City Manager; David Moore, Assistant Community Development Director; Robbi Woodburn of Woodburn and Company

Chairperson Jackson opened the meeting and welcomed the abutters to the African Burying Ground. She thanked the abutters for attending and recognized Mr. Moore who provided a background on the project. Mr. Moore indicated that he had spoken with most of the project abutters by phone to insure that they had received the meeting notice.

He said that since the re-discovery of the burying ground in 2003 the ABG has been working on creating a fitting memorial for the burying ground. In 2005, after meeting with the project abutters the Committee recommended a site configuration for Chestnut Street. Since that time, the Committee has been working on the design for the memorial which will occupy the space designated for the memorial. The Committee has worked with a landscape architect and held two public forums on the design process get input on design ideas for the memorial. The Committee also selected an artist to join the design team.

At its last meeting, the Committee indicated that it wanted to hear from project abutters. After this meeting, the Committee will recommend this design to the City Council and then present the design to the Community.

He then recognized Ms. Woodburn to present the design plan to the project abutters. After Ms. Woodburn completed her presentation abutters were invited to ask questions about the project.

Ms. Hammer, 115 Court Street, asked about how the site will be lit. Ms. Woodburn indicated that project elements would likely be up lit, but additional lighting had not yet been determined. She said light measurements need to be taken to determine what light currently exists on site. During the presentation, Ms. Woodburn addressed the location of the burial vault where the bodies would be reburied. Ms. Hammer acknowledged that the vault would be near her property on Court Street.

Mr. Rawling expressed interest in the plantings and indicated he thought they could be used to soften some of the proposed artistic elements. He said he thought the trees would create a canopy.

Ms. Woodburn then explained some of the other key elements of the design that would be developed further during final design. Those included lighting, drainage and the foundational components for the artistic elements.

Jeff Clifford, who works at 133 Court Street, commented that he liked the design. He and Ms. Woodburn discussed information related to the drainage which flow towards 133 Court Street to a catch basin on Court Street. He also asked about snow storage. Mr. Parkinson indicated that this site will need to be treated differently from all other sites in the City from a maintenance perspective. He is aware special attention will need to be paid to it during snow removal operations.

John Maher, owner of 386 State Street, indicated that he also liked the design.

Ms. Hammer inquired about trash removal. Mr. Parkinson said DPW would be able to back down the travel lane on Chestnut Street to service the two Chestnut Street addresses. Trash pick-up for the Court Street residences would remain unchanged. He indicated that the trash pick up on Chestnut and Court Streets are the same day.

Mr. Clifford and Mr. Maher expressed interest in the trees and indicated that they would provide an important visual element to the park. They were concerned about overhead utilities interfering with power lines and leaf removal in fall. Ms. Woodburn indicated that the leaves on the proposed honey locust are small and some maintenance and removal would be required for drainage purposes.

Ms. Hammer asked if Chestnut Street would be renamed. Members of the Committee indicated that this had come up before. It was determined that the addresses in two buildings on Chestnut Street would be affected by any street name change.

Ms. Woodburn then showed the digital sketch-up ® model, which showed the relationship between all of the elements in the project space. Ms. Woodburn pointed out the driveway transitions and the accessibility for wheelchairs throughout the project site.

Mr. Maher expressed concern that he did not believe many visitors would understand the reference to the “Middle Passage” on the standing figures in the memorial plaza. There was some discussion about how this could be made more clear.

Residents generally expressed concern about the artistic elements serving as potential targets for vandals. They suggested that the City take all steps to prepare for vandalism during design. Mr. Moore indicated that one of the hopes associated with project funding would be the creation of a fund which would provide for the future maintenance of the site, this would include repair of damage to artistic elements.

Ms. Hammer asked if the historic marker at 386 State Street would stay or be removed as part of the project. Ms. Cunningham indicated that the Portsmouth Black Heritage Trail marker would likely stay, because it is itself historical in that it pre-dates the rediscovery of the Burying Ground in 2003. Ms. Cunningham indicated the marker was installed in 2000.

Chairperson Jackson thanked everyone for attending. She said Mr. Moore and Ms. Woodburn would be available to answer additional questions after the meeting. The meeting adjourned meeting at 5:30 p.m.