

Fort Ward Park and Museum Area Interagency Annual Report for FY2022

Introduction: In accordance with the Fort Ward Park and Museum Area Management Plan, adopted in 2015, and an interdepartmental MOU adopted in 2018, representatives from City departments that are responsible for managing Park operations have met quarterly to discuss issues and coordinate projects related to management of the Park's grounds, facilities and historic areas. These departments are: Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities (RPCA); the Office of Historic Alexandria (OHA); Department of General Services (DGS); and Transportation and Environmental Services (TES). This annual report summarizes the accomplishments and status of projects and initiatives for FY2022.

RPCA:

In FY2022, RPCA spearheaded two major projects aimed at improving accessibility to Park facilities. These projects prompted [four public meetings](#) to inform and gather feedback from the community. A virtual public meeting held on January 24, conducted jointly with OHA staff, summarized the scope and status of major Park initiatives, and emphasized the commitment of City staff to establish greater communication and collaboration with Park stakeholders on a variety of issues and projects. This more effective communication has resulted in periodic email updates sent to more than 100 stakeholders about Park and Museum projects and news, which are also posted online, more public meetings on specific topics, and greater personal outreach to Fort community descendants and other stakeholders. Notable RPCA-led projects this year, that have included significant contributions from OHA staff, especially Archaeology, were:

Picnic Shelter Accessibility Improvements. A community site meeting was held on April 9 to review plans and address concerns for constructing an accessible route and parking improvements to the Picnic Area 2 shelter area. The accessible route connects to the picnic shelter, ADA parking spaces, and to a new accessible pedestrian entrance at Van Dorn Street. Planning with City Archaeologists and arborists helped provide guidance for a design and approach that would protect mature trees in this area, and avoid cultural resources related to the historic Fort community Javins family homestead located near the construction zone. On April 25, Sagres Construction began work on the new pathway, which uses a permeable pavement to treat stormwater runoff. As of June 2022, the project was 60% complete, with all drainage systems completed for the permeable pavement, and most of the paver surfacing installed. The picnic area is expected to re-open to the public in the Fall of 2022.

Playground Accessibility Project. In response to public concerns about the relocation of the Park's playground to an area that might impact cultural resources associated with the post-Civil War Fort community, this accessibility project was paused to consider other location options, and to gather feedback from the community on alternatives. RPCA and OHA staff identified several options, and a community Park walk was held on May 21 to discuss these potential sites, which was followed by a virtual meeting on June 22. Responses from the community have so far favored two options, one near the amphitheatre (site D on the meeting map), and the top of the hill from where the playground currently stands (site B on the meeting map). Staff continue to study the options and receive community input. A follow-up public meeting will be scheduled in

the Fall of 2022 to share data gathered by staff on these areas, and community thoughts and preferences.

Natural Resource Management projects. In May and June, in cooperation with community requests, Natural Lands Management staff implemented several maintenance clean-up projects on the east side of the Park. Maintenance of the Hendryx Memorial area included removing invasive and dead vegetation. This Fall, landscape restoration will continue, and regular landscape maintenance of this area will be implemented by RPCA going forward. In June, a specialty contractor, Invasive Plant Control, treated much of the eastern half of the Park for invasive vegetation, including perimeter fence lines, the Oakland Baptist Church Cemetery fence line, the ravine swale, and the Hendryx Memorial.

OHA:

Archaeology. Archaeologists and Museum staff have also participated in RPCA meetings regarding relocation of the playground, and Park improvement projects for the picnic shelter area and alternate path into the Park from Van Dorn Street.

- **Picnic Shelter project.** Archaeologists provided guidance to RPCA and contractors on the picnic shelter site project, and monitored the work that is in progress. A report on the archaeological monitoring of this project is pending, and will be posted online in the future. As part of the historical assessment of this project area, Archaeology prepared a background report on the Javins property that is posted online. Archaeologists also prepared maps that defined the historical perimeters of the Javins homestead in relation to the construction design that were shared with the public in virtual and on site meetings.
- **Playground Relocation Project.** Archaeology prepared a background report on the Peters/Lewis family site (southwest corner of the Park, where the original playground relocation was proposed). Although the relocation of the playground to this area is unlikely to be located within the properties owned by the Peters or Lewis families, a background study is being compiled for those properties, and will be available online in the future.

Museum Open Hours. Fort Ward Museum re-opened to visitors on October 1, 2021 at reduced days and hours, following a schedule based on other OHA museums, although the historic fort and Park grounds remained open daily. Public events resumed, including Civil War Artillery Day, Christmas in Camp, Civil War Women's Day, and Civil War Camp Day.

Interpretive Plan projects. Work continued on interpretive projects, such as compiling content for the revision and production of new historic fort markers, and two Park orientation stations. Content for the replacement of historic fort signage is planned to be submitted for fabrication in September 2022, with a production and installation goal for some in November. Orientation station content will be submitted for production in early 2023. In FY2022, Museum staff began work on content for a new permanent Museum orientation exhibit that focuses on Fort Ward's history, focusing on the Civil War to the Fort community. Content for the Museum exhibit will be developed for production in 2023.

Park Memorial projects. OHA staff led a public Park walk on July 31 to discuss further protection and recognition of cemetery and burial areas related to the historic Fort community,

with emphasis on the Old Grave Yard, Adams family burial plot, Amanda Clark burial site, and the Jackson Cemetery. Permanent metal fencing to define and further protect these areas was discussed, and community feedback has reflected a preference for a “hair-pin” style of fencing popular in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Staff is researching vendors for this fencing style. Staff also began working on memorial projects in collaboration with descendants from the Fort community. A design for a memorial stone for Fort community resident Robert Adams, husband of Clara Shorts Adams, is pending, and staff have also collaborated with Jackson family descendants on ideas for a Jackson Cemetery memorial monument.

Oral History Interviews. OHA is ready to assist with oral histories of Fort community members and descendants in conjunction with the Interpretive Plan initiative.

Building improvements and preservation projects. Significant improvements to the Museum and historic outdoor areas, included:

- Installation of new exhibit floor lighting.
- Planning for the partial replacement of deteriorated revetment in the restored Northwest bastion, scheduled for August and September 2022.
- Supervision of mowing operations in historically sensitive areas of the Park.
- Coordination with RPCA arborists in removal or trimming of trees in historically sensitive areas and other parts of the Park.

Support from the Friends of Fort Ward. The Museum’s friends group sponsored the annual Civil War Christmas in Camp event, funded the production of a portable interpretive panel on the Fort community for special events (this was developed for the U.S. Colored Troops encampment that was scheduled for May 2022 but cancelled due to inclement weather), and sponsored a Civil War musical performance by the 8th Regiment Green Machine Band for Civil War Camp Day.

DGS:

General Services coordinated with Museum staff on replacement of the building’s doors, windows and blinds. DGS also began planning with OHA on maintenance and preservation projects in the historic fort, such as renovation of the Fort Ward Ceremonial Gate, and the replacement of deteriorating stairways and platforms leading into the fort.

TES:

No storm water, survey or other projects were conducted in Fort Ward Park during this fiscal year.