



### MEETING SUMMARY

- Purpose:** Section 106 Mitigation Measures Ramsey Homes Development Site
- Date/Time:** November 29, 2016, 6:30 PM
- Location:** Charles Houston Recreation Center – 901 Wythe Street, Alexandria, VA
- Attendees:** Connie Staudinger (ARHA), Audrey Davis (Alexandria Black History Museum), J. Lance Mallamo (Historic Alexandria), Catherine Miliaras (City of Alexandria Planning & Zoning), Boyd Sipe (Thunderbird Archeology/Wetlands), Purvi Gandhi Irwin (Chair, Parker-Gray BAR), Leroy Battle (ARHA), Anthony Lowe, Al Cox (City of Alexandria Planning & Zoning), Eric Keeler (City of Alexandria Office of Housing), Roger Kirchen (Virginia Department of Historic Resources), Roy Priest (ARHA), Gail Rothrock (HAF, HARC), Seth Tinkham, Martha Harris, Penny Jones, Charles Ablard, Bill Hendrickson, McArthur Myers, Kendrick Meyers
- Attachments:** Attachment 1 - Presentation, City of Alexandria  
Attachment 2 - Presentation, Thunderbird Archeology, a division of Wetlands  
Attachment 3 - Presentation, Alexandria Redevelopment and Housing Authority

---

Eric Keeler opened the meeting by introducing himself and explaining that the Office of Housing has been delegated the authority to manage the Section 106 process on behalf of the responsible federal agency which is HUD. He further informed the attendees that this was our third Section 106 meeting.

Mr. Keeler presented a series of slides (see Attachment 1), which illustrated the prior nine-month history of the project, including recalling the City Council's decision in approving the current development plan.

Mr. Kirchen asked that someone describe the process the Council went through. Mr. Keeler stated that there were several Work Group Meetings that were open to the public as well as community meetings and public hearings to get public input. Mr. Kirchen asked if there were meeting minutes available for those meetings. Mr. Keeler confirmed that minutes were available. Bill Hendrickson stated that it was his opinion that the Council's decision did not result from consultation with the public. Mr. Keeler stated that Mr. Hendrickson's view was a matter of interpretation.

Connie Staudinger informed Mr. Kirchen and the attendees that the VHDLLC website [[www.vhdllc.us](http://www.vhdllc.us)] includes a full history of the proceedings and other relevant information on all of the iterations the development concept has taken to get to the current approved concept.

Mr. Keeler continued his presentation with slides that illustrate the current architecture and elevations, along with photos for site context. Finally, a slide was presented showing a list of public meetings held for the purpose of soliciting community input.

The presentation continued with a representative of Thunderbird Archeology, Boyd Sipe, who reviewed the legal justification for the Section 106 process and offered the attached presentation (see Attachment 2)

Mr. Kirchen asked if considerations were made to record findings under the existing buildings. Mr. Sipe stated that data recovery would address those issues as a part of the demolition of the buildings. He stated that they were not sure what was under the buildings, but assumed that any findings would be in the shallow soil strata within 20 inches in soil depth. Mr. Sipe further stated that the Phase I and Phase II studies were required by the City and were performed in accordance with the City guidelines and the Section 106 obligations.

Mr. Cox stated that the architecture is significant in illustrating the Modernist style, as was the use of early precast concrete (Fabcrete). This was not shown on Mr. Sipe's presentation but was documented in the completed documentary study (Thunderbird Archeology's October 2016 History Report). Mr. Cox stated both the cultural aspects as well as the historic architectural aspects of Ramsey Homes were well documented in the report. Ms. Staudinger pointed out that the earlier reports noted that the buildings had been altered significantly from their as-built condition. Mr. Cox disagreed with the findings in the report that concluded the buildings had been so far altered that they had lost their significance, and in his opinion the changes were limited to additions like shutters and a hipped roof, both easily reversible.

Mr. Mallamo asked if there was evidence of a Revolutionary War Encampment. Mr. Sipe stated that there was no evidence of an 18<sup>th</sup> century occupation of the site.

Mr. Sipe then presented the ideas recommended by the Historic Alexandria Resources Commission (HARC) in a recent letter forwarded to the Virginia Department of Historic Resources (DHR). Ms. Staudinger asked that all ideas offered be priced out and prioritized due to the limitations on the project budget. Mr. Keeler stated that cost should be only one of several factors that should be considered and that we would discuss this further.

Gail Rothrock stated that she believed the information in latest edition of the Thunderbird History Report to be a "game-changer," and as such, we should reconsider saving at least one of the buildings. Mr. Kirchen responded that, while Thunderbird's report stated that the buildings are individually eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places, he would not interpret it as a "game-changer". He stated that there were no regulations that required saving such structures unless they are of national significance as determined by the National Park Service.

Mr. Battle presented additional slides (see Attachment 3) which included mitigation alternatives being recommended by ARHA, including: community gardens to recall early uses of the site, incorporating the building foundation as a part of the open space design, and historical documentation displayed on historical markers. Mr. Sipe pointed out that the historic markers used at the James Bland development are the City standard and, in many cases, are the only items that are required for mitigation. In addition, an example was provided illustrating historic mitigation at the University of Virginia, which provided for a decorative wall outlining a prior structure occupied by Catherine Foster, a freed African-American woman who lived near the University between 1833 and 1863. Mr. Kirchen stated that he was familiar with this site at the University and that DHR was involved in the project.

Ms. Irwin stated that the buildings could be scanned and printed in a three dimensional form for mitigation. Mr. Keeler reiterated additional ideas including: establishing an online database to include an oral history of the site, outlining the building footprint, including the use of bricks engraved with the names of people who lived at the site, walking tours, and way finding signage.

Mr. Sipe suggested that by the next meeting we should have a catalog of ideas for mitigation shared by the Consulting Parties which would form some basis for a draft Memorandum of Agreement that would be forwarded to the Department of Historic Resources. Mr. Keeler asked that ideas be submitted by the end of December 2016. Mr. Sipe stated that he would send out letters to confirm the December deadline. [Note: The deadline was later revised to January 6, 2017 in a letter that went out to each of the Consulting Parties]. It was agreed that we should attempt to meet mid-January.

Mr. Tinkham asked, if the open space and mitigation are not both resolved, how can we determine what we are mitigating? Mr. Kirchen stated that he understood Mr. Tinkham's concern in that we do not have a full understanding of what the impacts of the mitigation may be. Mr. Kirchen stated that in other projects, there are design constraints and objectives whereby one could contain the impacts regarding height, setback, and even design review. He stated that he does not like to have one process define the other, but they could go forward concurrently and added that there are always post-review discoveries whereby DHR may be required to reach a determination as to whether there was an impact that was not considered at first.

Mr. Sipe stated that archeological monitoring was conducted on the James Bland site, but that none of the buildings were determined to be significant. Ms. Irwin asked if a determination could be made to prevent demolition from taking place. Mr. Kirchen stated, that it is not likely a determination that DHR would make. He stated that the level of documentation that has been required by the City and produced by ARHA is more than DHR has required on other projects for Section 106 based on the analysis provided. He stated we must have a balance between project needs, economics, and preservation. DHR would not come back with a requirement that the buildings be preserved. He stated that DHR is only acting in an advisory capacity. If DHR made a recommendation and the City disagreed, it could go to the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, but the Advisory Council's decision would not be binding.

Mr. Kirchen further added that the City should be commended for the number of meetings that have taken place, and cautioned that preservation is not a mandate of the Section 106 process. He stated that his role is to police the process, but he is not an expert on the financial analysis and economics of the project.

Ms. Irwin reiterated her opposition to the demolition of the buildings. She also restated Mr. Cox's comments that the hipped roof could be removed, along with the porches and shutters, to restore the buildings to their earlier appearance. As a BAR member, she stated that we are losing something that is unique and, again, recommended saving a building as an option. She stated that as BAR members appointed by the City Council, we believe preservation should be an option.

Mr. Hendrickson stated that he never saw evidence that there was a thorough vetting for to why the building could not be saved. He stated that he asked Council Member Justin Wilson, who responded that the HUD Disposition process would not support the renovation of a building.

Mr. Myers asked if we had considered moving one of the buildings and stated that he is concerned about the interpretive impact and structural impacts on the Watson Reading Room and the Black History Museum and asked if an in-kind contribution was an alternative. His concern now was to see how we can make this better for the community-at-large.

Ms. Staudinger stated that as a result of input from the BAR, ARHA has moved the proposed building south twenty feet from Wythe Street so that it would not overwhelm the scale of the Watson Reading Room and Black History Museum.

Mr. Priest stated that ARHA respects the decision that the City Council made and added that ARHA is carrying out the will of the public body. ARHA exhaustively studied various mitigation options for nearly two years, and the Council made its decision which completely surprised all of us, but we accept their decision.

Ms. Jones asked how we would make a decision on which mitigation options to accept going forward. Will we vote? Mr. Keeler stated that we hope that we can get a consensus, but the decision ultimately rests with the City, ARHA and the State. Mr. Priest stated that the development process established a \$50,000 threshold in the approved development conditions.

Ms. Jones again asked if there were any ideas on the list that were objectionable. Mr. Tinkham stated that he has seen many disrespectful websites and that phone apps can quickly become obsolete if they are not maintained.

Mr. Priest stated that we should come to an agreement on a range of options that are a meaningful manifestation of what we could do.

Mr. Cox stated that he agreed, saving a portion of the existing walls and incorporating it into the current architecture would not be appropriate. Ms. Irwin added that she agreed and was against “façade-ctomy”. She stated that a single façade of the building is insignificant. Mr. Cox added that the shape of the proposed building was to recall the current rhythm of the existing buildings which contributed to the current “W” shaped building.

Mr. Myers stated that having a list of the former residents would be helpful. Ms. Staudinger responded the Wetlands had found some of those names and they could be reviewed in the report.

Ms. Irwin stated that having something that preserved the volume [three-dimensional aspect] of the building would be desirable.

Mr. Tinkham asked if there was consideration for creating an endowment for similar efforts going forward. Mr. Cox responded that since Virginia Tech has a campus in town, perhaps there could be an endowment going forward by creating a relationship with the University. Mr. Tinkham reinforced that the effort should be about more than just the building – that it should be about the history, about being black in this City, and many other things.

Mr. Keeler stated that we would attempt to put costs to the mitigation suggestions as well as develop ways to vote and get additional ideas. He then adjourned the meeting at 8:55 PM.