

Executive Summary:

The City Council approved a Memorandum from the City Manager dated June 19, 2009 establishing a Fort Ward Park and Museum Area Stakeholder Advisory Group. The SAG was tasked with the following:

- a. Advise staff with a goal of finding appropriate balance between the different uses of the park, including active, passive/environmental and historic/archaeological interests.**
- b. Provide staff with recommendations on balancing park uses, implementing education and outreach opportunities and reviewing the success of recently implemented changes; and**
- c. Advise staff on Fort Ward issues and opportunities related to the interim park/historic area use, management of Fort Ward and long term goals to be refined through a city-wide park master planning process.**

Findings:

- Management of the park the responsibility of the Department of Recreation Parks and Cultural Activities (RPCA). The Office of Historic Alexandria (OHA), a subordinate office within RPCA, is responsible for managing the museum and maintaining the historical character of the fort and park.**
- The park is on the National Register of Historic Places.**
- Conflicting interests of the recreation and history has led to a loss and gradual change in the historic character of the park. It is noteworthy that at an early public meeting the then Director of RPCA was unaware the park was on the National Register of Historic Places.**
- Measures taken by RPCA over several years have been deleterious to the historic character of the park. Maintenance and operations, the establishment of a Fort Ward District Park Maintenance Operations in the park, proposed expansion of park facilities, and insensitive treatment of cultural and historic sites has raised significant public awareness and concern.**
- For far too long the history presented at the park has overlooked the underlying cause of the Civil War and the contribution and experience of African Americans to during and after the Civil War.**
- Efforts to create an informative, more diverse, complimentary history at the park have been stymied by budget constraints, conflicting management goals, reduced staffing and a lack of expertise.**

Recommendations:

- **The Mayor and City Council should reaffirm the historic character of Fort Ward Park and Museum and provide oversight to ensure improved operations and management of the park.**
- **Management and budget responsibility for operations and maintenance should be reviewed and clarified to ensure the different recreational uses allowed in the park are compatible with the historic character of the park.**
- **The delegation of authority for management of the park and museum should be reviewed and if necessary updated to clarify joint responsibilities for maintaining and operating the park. Any funding or disagreements regarding management should be elevated to the Office of the City Manager.**
- **The RPCA should initiate a resource management plan immediately that can be incorporated into a city-wide park master planning process. The resource management plan provides land use planning and management direction guiding future actions and complimentary uses in the park. The RMP would provide general guidance on overall maintenance and operations to ensure protection of the natural, recreation, historic, and cultural resources.**
- **The Office of Historic Alexandria should complete archaeological field work on areas where there are potential conflicts in park use that may be insensitive or harm cultural or historic resources.**
- **Any new permanent historic interpretive signs in the park should supplement the regional significance of the park and museum with special attention to the African American transition from slavery, to freedom and the struggle for inclusion into American society after the Civil War.**
- **Management leadership and funding should be focused on ensuring exhibits and events, presented at Fort Ward Park during the 150th Anniversary incorporate significant information regarding the underlying cause of the Civil War, the active involvement of African Americans in the Civil War, and their struggle to be part of American democratic society.**
- **The information posted on the Fort Ward website should be updated to incorporate the contribution of the United States Colored Troops to Union victory.**
- **The City Council should establish an ad hoc advisory committee to oversee implementation of City Council approved recommendations and drafting of a resource management plan.**