

## **Fort Ward Park and Museum Area Interagency Annual Report for FY2020**

**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 FY2020.

### **RPCA:**

**Pandemic impact on Park operations.** Barricades were installed at the entrances to the Park and at St. Stephens/St. Agnes School in March to minimize large groups, and public restrooms were closed at this time for public health safety. The parking lots, restrooms and playground reopened on June 12. The Park picnic shelter opened July 1, and picnic areas are open on a first-come basis.

**Management Plan projects.** A [community meeting](#) was held in December of 2019 to update the community about park improvement projects currently in the pipeline for 2020. These projects include an [accessible path to the picnic shelter](#), Van Dorn Street pedestrian connectors, improvements to accessible parking, tree planting, and playground improvements. These projects are currently in design and expected to be complete in 2020. In June, the design consultants, Lardner/Klein, recorded a [virtual presentation](#) on the proposed playground improvements. The playground will be relocated from Area 1 to Area 5, as recommended in the Management Plan. Responses to community feedback and modifications to the playground design will be posted on the website. The playground is anticipated to be under construction summer of 2021.

### **OHA:**

**Pandemic impact on Museum operations.** Fort Ward Museum, like other OHA sites, closed to the public in March. As part of a phased re-opening of OHA museums, in conjunction with building renovation projects supervised by General Services, the Museum is expected to resume reduced open hours by October 1. While most staff have teleworked on projects, the Museum Director has been on site during the closure to monitor the building, historic areas, and supervise contractor projects and other Museum operations. The historic fort and other areas of the Park grounds remained open to visitors who walked into the Park.

**Interpretive Plan projects.** The development of the Fort Ward Interpretive Plan, led by OHA staff and a committee of citizens in conjunction with consultants Design Minds, Inc., was completed in 2019. This Plan identified a series of educational projects aimed at improving and expanding the interpretation of the full scope of Fort Ward's history, with emphasis on the Civil War period and post-Civil War African American Fort community. The range of specific projects includes a new Fort Ward brochure, interpretive signage in historic areas of the Park, a new overview Museum exhibit, and future signage and projects to be connected via an

interpretive trail of significant Fort community sites. In March of 2020, the first of these projects to be implemented was the publication of a new Fort Ward brochure entitled “Bastions of Freedom.” OHA staff is now preparing an RFP for the next phase of project implementation: two Park orientation stations that introduce the public to historic features on the Park grounds, and replacement of deteriorated interpretive markers in the Civil War fort area. Production and installation of both signage projects is targeted for Fall and Spring of FY2021. Funding for phased implementation of Interpretive Plan projects has been allocated through RPCA in conjunction with the Capital budget for the Fort Ward Management Plan.

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

**Maintenance and preservation projects.** Significant improvements to buildings and the historic fort, most with Capital funding provided by the Department of General Services, included:

- Exterior painting of the Museum, Officers’ Hut and Maintenance Building; the painting of the roofs of each building is scheduled for August of 2020.
- Rebuilding and staining the platform to the Ceremonial Entrance Gate.
- Replacement of a deteriorated gun carriage in the restored Northwest bastion.
- Refurbishment of the reconstructed fort well.
- Erosion repair and sodding of a section of the Northwest bastion wall.
- 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.
- Mulching of beds at gateway to Park and around Museum.

**Archaeology.** There have been no active excavations in the Park this past fiscal year, but City archaeologists continue to monitor ground disturbing activities such as tree plantings and removal, and supervised a fuel oil spill recovery that occurred from an Episcopal High School construction contractor’s truck parked in the front lot. Archaeologists and Museum staff have also participated in RPCA meetings regarding relocation of the playground to the West side of the Park, and Park improvement projects for the picnic shelter area and alternate path into the Park from Van Dorn Street. Archaeologists have provided guidance to RPCA and consultants on protecting historic resources in those areas.

**Support from the Friends of Fort Ward.** The Museum’s friends group sponsored the annual Civil War Christmas in Camp event, and funded the acquisition of a Civil War-era checkerboard and dominoes for the Museum’s soldier life collection. Members also participated in the Interpretive Plan development process.

**TES:**

TES Stormwater Management worked with RPCA staff to design and install a new trench drain system and connection to an existing storm sewer serving Marlboro Estates at the bottom of the hill below the existing playground, where there was nuisance ponding and spring activity. The project was completed in late Fall 2019.

**DGS:**

General Services has coordinated with OHA staff on implementing several building improvements projects with CIP funding. Floor upgrades with deteriorated tile replacement, new carpet, and new stairwell treads were completed in April. Interior painting of the Museum, painting of roofs to the Museum, Officers' Hut and Maintenance Building, replacement of doors and windows, and bathroom renovations are being planned for the summer and early Fall of 2020. DGS will coordinate with RPCA regarding roof painting of the Maintenance/Restroom building for scheduling closure during roof painting.