

[EXTERNAL]RELOCATION OF PLAYGROUND AT FORT WARD PARK

Phylus Burks

Thu 3/16/2023 5:50 PM

To: Judy Lo <Judy.Lo@alexandriava.gov>

Judy:

I believe that **Option B** offers the best site plan for movement of the playground at Ft Ward Park. Besides offering the best hope for no disturbance of cultural artifacts connected to the Fort Community, it is highly more accessible to users than the current location. It also offers an easier transport for equipment and materials necessary for the relocation process.

I sincerely hope that Option B will be chosen for the playground relocation.

Thank you.
Phylus Burks

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[EXTERNAL]Relocation of Playground in Ft Ward

Jason Wood

Fri 3/24/2023 3:22 PM

To: Judy Lo <Judy.Lo@alexandriava.gov>

Hello Judy Lo,

In regards to the movement of the playground in Ft Ward Park. I am in favor of Option B, which will move the playground from the current location to a more accessible location at the top of the hill. Option B also appears to be located where it is less likely to contain sensitive cultural resources connected to the Ft. Community. Additionally, Option B would be the easier site to reach with equipment and materials necessary for construction.

I strongly urge that Option B is the site chosen for this relocation .

Thank you.

Sincerely,
Arminta Wood

Sent from my iPad

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Fort Ward Park Playground Accessibility Feedback

#2

COMPLETE

Collector: Web Link 1 (Web Link)
Started: Wednesday, March 15, 2023 1:00:11 PM
Last Modified: Wednesday, March 15, 2023 1:01:47 PM
Time Spent: 00:01:36
IP Address:

Page 1

Q1

Please provide questions or comments related to Site B (near the existing playground) and/or Site D (near the amphitheater).

This is to record the unanimous agreement of the Officers of the Friends of Fort Ward that the Fort Ward Playground Project (FWPP) be relocated to "Site D", adjacent the Fort Ward Park's westernmost boundary, and near its Amphitheater.

Also, we believe that the "Concept Study" is sufficiently thorough and in compliance with the Fort Ward Management Plan; that it provides for the protection of cultural and natural Park resources, limitation of ground disturbance, and provides for close coordination and collaboration by the City's Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities, and the Office of Historic Alexandria, especially the Archaeology division.

Furthermore, we believe and trust that all proper protective measures will be undertaken in the best interest of tree preservation during the construction phase. Moreover, we believe the alternate "Site B" under consideration is too close to the access road, and too close to the historically preserved Fort Ward bastion and the protected Civil War rifle trench.

Finally, we would like to thank the Alexandria staff for their continuing engagement with the community through their hosting of on-scene, field surveys, open houses, and zoom meetings for continuous feedback and input, and their extraordinary professionalism and steadfast commitment to completing this project.

Sincerely,

Larry Knisley
President
Friends of Fort Ward

Dedicated to the preservation, advancement & public recognition of Fort Ward

Comments on the Fort Ward Park Playground
March 29, 2023

Dear Ms. Lo/ Judy,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the City of Alexandria's proposal to relocate the existing playground in Fort Ward in order to comply with the American Disabilities Act. I appreciate the effort you have made to listen to the public.

Last year I submitted comments on your proposal and would like to have them remain in the public record. The new location has been complicated. Although the park management plan was adopted by the City Council and reflected a serious commitment to a planning process, it did not reflect a consensus agreement between those who helped the city prepare the plan. As you may recall there was a significant disagreement about the need to locate and protect people who are buried on parkland.

Unfortunately the city's decisions during the preparation of the plan as well as after the approval hinder reaching agreement on current decisions within the park. For example, Mr. Mallamo of the Office of Historic Alexandria announced in 2012 that the city would not look for more graves. His announcement in a press release was made outside the management planning process and was counter to earlier statements he and other city officials had made.

The relocation of the playground, within the management plan as well as during this recent process is counter to plan provisions, has not included inputs from families who lived on the lands being considered, the identification of historic trees and does not reflect or respect the plan's provision for sacred areas. City staff and managers seem to selectively consider portions of the management plan and disregard others. The provisions of the plan are also frequently used with including direct input from the African American descendants of "The Fort" community.

The Fort Ward effort has been underway since the 1950's and that time period reflects a period of significant change within our city. The park was created during segregation and actions that were taken then, including the removal of grave markers, burning of homes, burying graves with fill and the preparation of the park's first plan in the 1960's reflect a disrespect for African Americans, their history and the history of the Civil War at Fort Ward. While most would argue

that Alexandria has changed there are many who worked for and work with the city who continue to embrace the ideas of that era.

Mr. Spengler of the Recreation Department has stated that this park is about history and culture, yet his department resists many efforts to embrace the African American history of the park and "The Fort". The endorsement of the idea of burying possible graves for the playground continues the city's tradition of walking-back changes that have been made and continuing to erase the history of the residents who owned land and lived where the park was created. Recent actions by you, Jack Browand have been positive and have begun to repair the damage done to the city's creditability with past and present Alexandria residents.

Unfortunately your good work is undermined by city managers at the highest level of the Alexandria government who last year said that "we do not want to find any more graves". The management planning process as well as the plan itself assured people that archaeological research would be done to find other graves. Although the research of the Office of Historic Alexandria has been excellent it has not included the use of oral history interviews, ground-penetrating-radar, or cadaver dogs despite that these techniques were discussed and agreed to be used by city managers.

Some members of the Office of Historic Alexandria will say that "test-pits" were dug and no additional graves were found. Managers of that office have stated publicly that test-pits are not effective in locating graves. Standing behind incomplete research further erodes the city's creditability with Alexandria's past and current residents. Adhering to the city's long-time practice of further burying African American graves moves us back to practices of disregard and disrespect. Putting non-sacred park areas on top of sacred areas is wrong-head and needs to stop. Erasing African American history is wrong and needs to stop.

Perhaps some of these matters are most likely addressed during the annual Fort Ward Park implementation public meeting included in the approved management plan. Unfortunately the city has unilaterally decided to eliminate those meetings.

My comments on the current proposal to consider two alternatives for the relocation of the playground follow.

1. The proposal to relocate the playground on the St. Stephens-St. Agnes side of the park, between the amphitheater and the restrooms best meets your original criteria. After walking the site numerous times I believe that there is a way to move construction equipment past existing trees without damage. It would be helpful if the city would identify which trees are important to the park. I believe that certain trees that could be damaged are non-native. If this option is not selected the report should suggest how this area will be used and managed in the future.

2. The proposal to relocate the playground at the top of the hill from the existing playground seems less desirable given the distance to the restrooms and access to them only by the auto-loop. If this option is selected it needs to avoid impact to the existing rifle trench and the Shorts properties. If this option is selected the recommendation should include what the plans are for remediation of the old playground site and reducing stormwater and soil erosion on the slope down to residents homes and there stormwater detention pond.

3. Adopt a policy within the city for Fort Ward Park that no future projects will be proposed on properties previously owned by African American families until they are contacted and oral history interviews are completed and applied and the land is investigated to identify graves using archaeological digging, ground-penetrating-radar and, or cadaver dogs. Consider these lands as sacred places, as described in the approved management plan.

Your task has been a difficult one given the COVID virus and the fact that not everyone that is very interested in this decision has access to a computer or is a Zoom-call user. Given the park's history and the dichotomy between the Office of Historic Alexandria and the Recreation Department your effort has been noteworthy. Please strive for a consensus agreement on this decision.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Glenn

J. Glenn Eugster
Fort Ward Observer
Alexandria, VA.

[EXTERNAL]Comment on Fort Ward Playground

Tom Fulton

Mon 2/27/2023 7:11 AM

To: Judy Lo <Judy.Lo@alexandriava.gov>; Susan Cumbey <Susan.Cumbey@alexandriava.gov>; Eugster Glenn

Dear Judy,

Although I have tried to attend all City meetings regarding the placement of the playground at Fort Ward, I was unable to attend the most recent zoom meeting. However, I would like to make a comment. By way of background my name is Tom Fulton and I have lived next to Fort Ward since May 1984. My daughter, now 37, grew up playing at the existing playground and now my grandchildren do as well.

In June 2009, I chaired a Citizens working group charged with advising the City on better management of Fort Ward Park. Over the course of two years this group, meeting biweekly, considered a wide range of issues including the location of the playground.

The groups recommendation, made unanimously and posted on the City's website in January 2011, was that the playground should not only be made ADA accessible, but it should be placed in an area not as prone to soil erosion. In my view, Site D meets both the spirit of the City's ADA requirements but also its soil erosion reduction goals.

Importantly, Site D is flat. It is located within a few feet of a restroom. There is parking including handicap parking nearby. The amphitheater, a gathering place, is also nearby, Alexandria's Office of Archeology has determined that there is a low probability of African American graves on Site D. Suitable precautions can be made to protect mature trees nearby. Site D meets ADA criteria AND soil erosion requirements. Site B does not.

Soil erosion down the hill where the playground is currently located continues to negatively impact the property of Park neighbors living on Fort Ward Place. Mitigation of that erosion is as important as relocating the playground. Moving the playground to site B could result in increased erosion of the hill onto adjacent property. Removing the playground from its current location and relocating it to Site D would allow a complete remediation of erosion off the hill.

Cost should also be considered. Leveling Site B adds to its cost. Site D is level.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Tom

Sent from my iPad

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[EXTERNAL]RELOCATION OF FT WARD PLAYGROUND

Michelle Hogan

Sat 3/18/2023 4:56 AM

To: Judy Lo <Judy.Lo@alexandriava.gov>

Hello,

I had an opportunity to speak with a couple of my neighbors. We support relocating the playground in Ft. Ward from its current site, to the top of the hill, as indicated in **Option B**. This, to us, is the sensible solution. **Option B** offers ease of access for construction purposes, it offers accessibility for users of the playground, and it seems to pose no threat to Fort Community cultural resources. We highly recommend the implementation of **OPTION B**.

Thank you,
Michelle Burks Hogan, President
Seminary Civic Association

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From: Aprile Belk
Sent: Thursday, March 30, 2023 3:08 PM
To: Judy Lo

Cc: Aprile Belk
Subject: [EXTERNAL]COMMENTS FOR Fort Ward Park Playground Options B and D

Judy,

My name is Aprile Belk and I have been part of the many meetings over the past year about the location of the playground at Fort Ward Park. I am descendant of Clara Adams and lived on Fort Ward Park as young child before the city forced us to move by eminent domain. The option I am for is Option B moving the the existing playground to the top of the hill. The reason for my option, less impact to natural resources, restrooms are within walking distance, existing water source, easier construction access, less cost, same general location as the playground have been for last 20 or more years and closer to parking lot to playground which make it easier for people with handicap to access playground.

When will a decision be made and by who for the playground location. Please acknowledge receipt of email.

Thank you.

Aprile Belk

Judy Lo

From: FRANCES TERRELL
Sent: Thursday, June 23, 2022 10:35 AM
To: Judy Lo
Subject: [EXTERNAL]Fort Ward Playground Meeting

Judy, Wanted you to know that I was having technical issues last night and could not get into Zoom last night. Heard it was a great session, and want you to know that I, a descendant, support "B". I understand there was a recording made. Is it possible for me to receive a copy of it? Thank you

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From: Bonnie Petry
Sent: Friday, June 10, 2022 11:07 AM
To: Judy Lo
Cc: Russell Bailey; Jack Browand; Oscar Mendoza; Andrew Benjamin; Rod Simmons; Carter Flemming; Kurt Moser; Bethany Znidersic; Garrett Fesler; Susan Cumbey; [REDACTED]@hotmail.com; a [REDACTED]@verizon.net; Elizabeth Charles; [REDACTED]@gmail.com; Kurt Moser; Justin Wilson
Subject: [EXTERNAL]Ft. Ward Playground Site Options

Good morning, Judy,

I want to thank you for sending out the Ft. Ward Playground relocation maps and for being responsive to descendants' concerns about relocating the Ft. Ward playground to Site E.

I am inclined to agree with Carter Flemming's email below, that if there is another walk-through that it be after work or on a weekend, say a Saturday morning.

I had an opportunity to walk the sites with you, of course, however I believe there are a good number more people who are interested in this issue now that it has become apparent that, two of the sites have resources concerns – Site C in terms of keeping soil compaction, grade changes, and digging/trenching out of the existing grove of trees (the grassy area between the parking lot and grove actually isn't that big, and Site D in terms of the impact to the adjacent Site E area and the large grove of trees.

I share Carter Flemming's strong concern about Site D. Site D appears to be the most problematic in terms of do severe damage to an irreplaceable natural resource, it appears that construction equipment and materials routing would occur over the Site E area, a historically sensitive area.

The whole purpose of doing this playground move is to create an ADA-accessible playground; **as such the ADA-compliant path/access to the playground is the most critical feature. With Site D, there is a sizeable grove of high value, mature native trees standing directly between the road and the playground site; constructing an ADA path through this grove would do serious damage to this grove and likely result in losing these trees.**

The actual digging, cutting through roots, and soil compaction involved with constructing the path would represent incredibly damaging disturbance, but so would bringing in the heavy construction equipment and materials to construct the actual playground.

Given the size and types of materials that would have to be brought in to build the playground, it also appears highly likely to me that the construction equipment would be, at least in part, run in through the clear, turfgrass lane to the South where Site E is. We all know that Site E is a sensitive area that definitely was a home site and could very well have graves as well; running construction equipment and materials back and forth over the descendants homesite and possible graves is disturbing and should be unacceptable.

As Carter Flemming said in her previous email, "we all know that the large playground equipment will not be dropped by drone onto the site."

Looking at the picnic pavilion ADA path is illustrative of what is entailed in building an ADA path – a good amount of very heavy construction equipment parked and running back and forth on top of critical root zones, compacting the Earth; trenching dug 4 feet deep where the path goes; and dug soil that was piled at least six feet high on top of the root zone of the White Oak Tree closest to the parking lot.

So much construction damage to trees is invisible, i.e. it does not involve cutting trees with chainsaws or knocking them down with bull dozers. Rather it involves cutting through root systems; compacting the soil above the roots systems, which deprives the roots of oxygen and the ability to absorb rainwater; and piling additional soil on top of the root zones (“grade changes”).

White Oaks like the ones in the grove at Site D, are our most valuable native tree species and are particularly susceptible to soil compaction and root damage.

The kind of construction damage to trees mentioned above doesn’t kill trees instantly, like chainsaws or bulldozers do; but rather the construction is done, by the next year the trees branches and crown show leaf die back, and by two or three years later, the trees are dead.

In the example of the picnic pavilion ADA path project and the previous planning cycle for the playground relocation (the one that chose Site D), back in the 2019 timeframe, John Marlin and Rod Simmons were involved in the review process, and provided input. In the case of the picnic pavilion path, they made clear the impacts to the mature White Oaks along the route. At least two of the 100-year old-plus White Oaks, are likely not to survive this project. But in the picnic pavilion area, the historical resources limited the options for the path.

But despite the significant Natural Resources located at two of these sites (the extensive grove at Site D that stands between the playground site and the road, and the native grove at Site C that could be avoided or impacted... Park Planning did not bring the Urban Forest Manager and Natural Lands Manager back into the process.

One thing that concerns me even more about this is that there is a location, Site B, *where natural resources do not have to be sacrificed* for the relocation of the playground.

At this point I don’t believe Park Planning had any malice in leaving the Natural Resources Division experts out of the process. I do see this an oversight, and one that I ask Park Planning to correct.

I do hope that, having been made aware of these concerns, Park Planning will now include Natural Resources Division in (a) a review of the plans; (b) any walk-through that is scheduled; and (c) have Natural Resources personnel at the June 22nd meeting so as to answer any questions that may arise about the natural resources impacts of the various options.

There is a widespread perception that, in Alexandria, “the trees always come last” in priority and consideration. Park Planning is now at a point where it can either reinforce that perception or take actions to contradict that belief.

Judy, you have an opportunity to show that Park Planning does in fact value our parks’ natural resources as much as it does our parks’ historical resources.

Kudos to you for appropriately involving Garret Fesler and Susan Cumbrey in this process; let’s now bring Natural Resources into the review and citizen engagement processes into it as well.

This project does not have to sacrifice natural resources for historical ones. There is an option or options that can accommodate human use without such a sacrifice.

And I implore you not to sacrifice an entire grove of quality native trees for a construction project that can be done very successfully **without** harm to this park’s natural resources.

Sincerely,

Bonnie Petry

Re: [EXTERNAL]Follow up on Ft. Ward Park Map

Carter Flemming

Thu 6/9/2022 3:35 PM

To: Judy Lo <Judy.Lo@alexandriava.gov>

Cc: Bonnie Petry ;Rod Simmons ;Russell Bailey ;Elizabeth Charles

Jack Browand ;Oscar Mendoza [REDACTED]@gmail.com

[REDACTED]@gmail.com;Andrew Benjamin

Thanks so much for this information Judy. I had suspected that with Memorial Day, you might have been out of the office on holiday. I will let people know about the meeting on the 22nd now that it is confirmed. I will also ask if people have any interest in doing an additional tour before then. I was able to do a walk myself and see the different sites.

I will submit my question in writing to the chat for the webinar, but my main concern is that Site D is surrounded by mature trees which do provide wonderful shade to the area. But when I look over at the construction going on at the picnic pavilion with the very large machinery and the wide swath of construction area, I cannot visualize that grove of trees surrounding Site D being able to survive that kind of ground disruption. The ADA path over at the Pavilion involved some fairly deep trenching which would obviously cut into the tree roots on Site D when the ADA path is constructed there from the ring road. And I am pretty confident that the Descendents' Group would not want that heavy equipment coming across Site E in order to get to D without going through the tree grove from the ring road. And we all know that the large playground equipment will not be dropped by drone onto the site, so it will have to be transported through the tree grove as well. So I think we need to get a real sense of what destruction to the trees will be involved if Site D is chosen, rather than choosing that site because we are all assuming that the shade provided by those trees will be present once all the construction work is done. As we have all learned from watching other construction sites throughout the city, even when trees are "protected" by fencing, the compression to their root systems from the heavy equipment going back and forth ultimately kills many trees, even if not right at that moment. So I hope we will have some real conversations with the Natural Resources Division and the Urban Forestry staff about the long term viability of those trees at Site D if it is chosen. It just seems to me that Site B does not present such issues with trees, and that consideration ought to be an important part of the conversation the community has about the site selection.

Thank you again and I look forward to seeing you on the 22nd. Carter

Carter Flemming
[REDACTED]

From: Russell Bailey
Sent: Friday, June 10, 2022 1:41 PM
To: Bonnie Petry
Cc: Judy Lo; Jack Browand; Oscar Mendoza; Andrew Benjamin; Rod Simmons; Carter Flemming; Kurt Moser; Bethany Znidersic; Garrett Fesler; Susan Cumbey; Kurt Moser
Subject: Re: Ft. Ward Playground Site Options

Hi Judy:

This is to follow up on my email to you a couple days ago expressing my interest in participating in a walkthrough of the four possible sites for the new playground at Ft. Ward. I certainly would like to join such a walkthrough but evenings are tougher for me than for some. In particular, I have existing commitments next Wednesday evening (the 15th) as well as the evenings of the next two Mondays (the 13th and 20th). I also have a commitment the morning of Saturday (the 18th).

Thank you for sending the relocation maps. I believe, for the reasons set out below by Bonnie Petry, that Site B seems to be the preferable spot for the new playground. I would also like to see a consolidated playground (i.e., rather than a "big kids' playground" and a "little kids' playground") so that the area of the existing playground can be used for part of a tree planting that could join up the two forested areas on each side of the existing playground.

I think that it would be important to include representatives of the Office of Natural Resources and the Office of Urban Forestry in the site selection discussions and - if they are available - the additional walkthrough.

Thanks,

Russ

RE: Some Comments on Moving the Playground at Fort Ward Park

① You replied on Mon 5/23/2022 5:28 PM

BG Bill Gillespie
To: Judy Lo
Cc: Russ Bailey; Rita Leffers

Sat 5/21/2022 5:53 PM

Hello Judy,

Thank you for the thoughtful and helpful tour of Fort Ward this morning. After hearing comments from staff and stakeholders, we believe the best site for the playground is Site B. Site B appears to have important attributes. Here are our thoughts on Site B.

- It will be relatively easy to make Site B compliant with ADA requirements with the playground very close to the loop road.
- Site B is visible from the loop road so playground users can easily find it.
- Site B appears to avoid the disturbance of Civil War or African-American cultural resources.
- A construction staging area can be conveniently located along the loop road immediately adjacent to the new playground site. Other playground sites being considered are further from the loop road creating the potential for damage to trees and parkland between the loop road and the new construction site.
- It appears the construction of Site B will not result in the loss of a significant number of trees.
- There may be a benefit of leaving part of the existing playground under the big trees at that location since that area is nicely shaded.
- If the some or the entire playground is relocated to Site B, attractive stormwater Best Management Practices could be installed at the current playground location to control stormwater runoff.

Finally, here are a few comments on the other alternatives.

- Leaving the entire playground at Site A seems inappropriate. A 600 foot path with switchbacks, while ADA compliant, may still pose a impediment to disabled children. Other options appear much better than Site A.
- Site C is inappropriate because it is downward sloping, encouraging children to run downhill into areas where children can disappear into natural areas where shrubs and understory plants hide them. It is also remarkably loud because of street noise from Van Dorn Street and I-395. Perhaps most importantly, new fencing will be needed to prevent wayward children from running into Van Dorn Street.
- Site D would be our second choice of location after Site B. It has drawbacks however. It is quite some distance from the loop road which would require a fairly long access path to the playground. Some trees might be lost if the playground is moved to this location because construction equipment would need access to the site. Soil compaction and equipment movements might damage existing trees.
- Site E should not be pursued out of respect for the Africa-American community.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Very Best Regards,

Bill Gillespie and Rita Leffers

From: Larry Knisley
Sent: Sunday, May 22, 2022 9:56 AM
To: Judy Lo; Susan Cumbey
Subject: [EXTERNAL]Playground Accessibility Project: Site Surveys with community, 5/21/22

Thank you for the thorough on-site presentations, "Site Assessment Matrix", historic briefings, and addressing all questions (of which they were many) with extraordinary details and facts. And, many thanks for the bottled water too.

I believe Site D, (located in a level clearing on the Western side of Ft. Ward Park) stood out as the most favorable, optimal location. Also, it appeared that many of the participants spoke favorably for this Site. The important findings supporting Site D follow:

1. The site was level, closely accessible to parking, and nearest of the other options, to bathroom facilities.
2. The site provided ample space for the build out of the play ground in a beautiful setting surrounded (but set back) by large trees for shade, nearby picnic tables, and water fountains.
3. The site appeared to provide the most secure setting for young children, noting an existing fence on West side of the area.
4. Further, as noted by "The Archaeological survey testing and historic research", the site presented minimal to no impactful, negative issues to The Park, its cultural resources and infrastructure , or "The Fort community descendants", as noted by representative participants.

Thank you for your continued work and service, on development of the Ft. Ward Park, Playground Accessibility Project.

Larry Knisley
President of Friends of Fort Ward
Supporting Fort Ward's mission, operations, and educational programs

Sent from my iPhone

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From: J. GLENN EUGSTER
Sent: Wednesday, May 18, 2022 12:31 PM
To: Judy Lo
Cc: Susan Cumbey; James Spengler; Gretchen Bulova
Subject: [EXTERNAL]An Alternative Location for Fort Ward's Proposed Playground
Attachments: 14-3417_Archeology InvestigationsFort Community (1).jpeg

Dear Judy,

I'm unable to attend Saturday's meeting at Fort Ward Park. My comments on the alternative location for Fort Ward's Proposed Playground follows. Please consider this idea and include it in the public record for this project.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Glenn

J. Glenn Eugster

An Alternative Location for Fort Ward's Proposed Playground May 13, 2022

City leaders recently announced their efforts to find a new site for the proposed Fort Ward Park Playground. Although city staff have been working to find alternatives to an area they initially selected city leaders indicated a desire to hear from the community about possible locations. Included below is information on the meetings that will be held this month and next.

Unfortunately several key leaders believe that the current proposal for the playground is the best location even though research indicates that there may be African American graves on the site. Public and private leaders of note are holding firm with the city's initial proposal and have stated that "we aren't looking for any more graves". Others leaders have questioned whether the history of the people who lived on this land is significant enough to protect and, or alter development plans.

After the Civil War and before the city's creation of the park an African American community, called "The Fort", lived on the property. Many of the communities residents, freed after the war, worked for the Virginia Theological Seminary and Episcopal High School. More than ever the history of this community is yet another part of the story of Fort Ward. However, as is the case in many communities, issues involving the Civil War and African Americans can pit community interests against each other. The city's search for solutions at this Union fort in a southern city has the potential to once again spark racism and bad feelings. It may also offer park users and community interests the opportunity to have a park that helps heal the damage that was done during segregation and more recently disrespectful management actions toward descendants of the families that lived here.

Years ago the City of Alexandria prepared a map of African American properties and structures for Fort Ward Park. It is attached and entitled Fort Ward Cultural Resources "The Fort" Community (14-3417). As the search of an alternative location for playground moves ahead this layer of information needs to be a foundation for making a final decision. Obviously Civil War interests, historians and recreational managers will have other layers of data to be used.

I propose that City of Alexandria leaders would do well to respect "The Fort" properties for they are where the families lived. In some cases the properties have already been developed damaging artifacts and possible graves. However, as a way to avoid conflict and rebuild trust these areas could be set off-limits to new development. In the event that a property had to be considered for development serious archaeology would be conducted including ground-penetrating radar, conversations with family members, traditional paper research, and actual excavation. Once the results of that work were completed a decision could be made as to whether the proposed development would go ahead.

An alternative location for the proposed playground may be possible within the space above parcel #2. This area is flat, close to restrooms, handicapped accessible and close to existing parking and picnic areas. The site I've looked at is just between the footpath that connects the steps from St. Stephens-St. Agnes Middle School, with the area around the existing restroom, and the amphitheater.

Fort Ward Park's historians tend to avoid telling the stories about how people living at "The Fort" were forced off their land, moved to the Seminary/ Mudtown area, and then offered homes for purchase at Woods Place. The first two of these moves was done by threat of condemnation to create the park and a then, all-white high school. The city's offer to have the community suggestion possible new locations may reflect a new direction encourage by city officials sensitive history, social justice and community values. Time will tell how much we have changed as a city and how much we remain the same in how we view others.

Sincerely,

J. Glenn Eugster
Fort Ward Observer

- **Playground Accessibility Project: The May 21 site walk to review options for the playground**, will begin at the existing playground in Area 1. Please RSVP to judy.lo@alexandriava.gov We are also planning a virtual community meeting that will occur after the site walk on **June 9**. More details about the virtual meeting will be available soon.

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[EXTERNAL]Playground at Fort Ward

Tom Fulton

Tue 1/25/2022 8:44 AM

To: Judy Lo <Judy.Lo@alexandriava.gov>; Garrett Fesler <Garrett.Fesler@alexandriava.gov>; Susan Cumbey <Susan.Cumbey@alexandriava.gov>; O'Leary Jeanne

Ms. Lo,

I was listening to last night's presentation on Fort Ward when the question about the playground relocation was made. Unfortunately, I had an iPad with no keyboard so I was unable to offer an explanation.

In 2009, City Council created a citizens group to advise the city on measures to improve management at Fort Ward. A group of 10 citizens was brought together to form a working group which I chaired. That group submitted recommendations to the City and Council in January 2011. Recreation was an important component of the group's consideration and constitutes Chapter 3 of its report. Moving the playground was a major component of our discussion during formulation of this chapter. The current location did not meet ADA requirements and was located in an area of increasing land/soil erosion. The decision was made to relocate the playground to an area that was easily accessible, near handicapped parking, near public restrooms and within eyesight of parents who might be attending events at the amphitheater.

I attended your presentation about the proposed playground at meetings you held at the St. Stephen's Middle School and thought there was a general acceptance of what the city was proposing.

I also assisted the office of archaeology in its initial work using ground penetrating radar in Fort Ward.

I recommend (for what it is worth) that the city, working with affected descendant families, closely examine the area currently under consideration to see if concerns can be allayed to everyone's satisfaction.

Tom

Sent from my iPad

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