

Approved Minutes

SPECIAL JOINT MEETING

STATE REVIEW BOARD and BOARD OF HISTORIC RESOURCES

1:00 p.m. October 10, 2018

At the New Life Deliverance Tabernacle, 900 Decatur Street, Richmond, VA 23224

State Review Board Members Present

Dr. Elizabeth Moore, Chair
Joseph D. Lahendro, Vice-Chair
Dr. Sara Bon-Harper
Dr. Lauranett Lee
Dr. Carl Lounsbury

Historic Resources Board Members Present

Clyde Paul Smith, Chair
Dr. Colita Nichols Fairfax, Vice-Chair
Erin B. Ashwell
Frederick S. Fisher
David Ruth

State Review Board Members Absent

Dr. Gabrielle Lanier
John Salmon

Historic Resources Board Members Absent

Dr. Ashley Atkins-Spivey
Nosuk Pak Kim

Department of Historic Resources Staff Present

Julie Langan, Director
Marc Wagner
Jennifer Pullen
Randall Jones
Gray O'Dwyer

Jim Hare
Elizabeth Lipford
Brad McDonald
Preston Page
Austin Walker

Guests present (from sign-in sheet) –

Staff from Other State Agencies Present –

Opening Prayer from Rev. Dwight Jones

State Review Board (SRB)

Chair Elizabeth Moore called the SRB meeting to order at 1:14 p.m. and explained the role of the SRB and the process of Register designation. She invited the SRB members to introduce themselves, and welcomed everyone in attendance.

Chair Moore asked for a motion to adopt the October 10, 2018 meeting agenda. With a motion from Dr. Lee and a second from Dr. Lounsbury, the SRB voted unanimously to approve the agenda.

Board of Historic Resources (BHR)

Chair Smith called the BHR meeting to order at 1:19 p.m. He explained the role of the BHR as an official policy-making Board of the Commonwealth, and asked each of the Board members to introduce themselves.

Chair Smith asked for a motion to adopt the October 10, 2018 meeting agenda. With a motion from Ms. Ashwell and a second from Mr. Fisher, the BHR voted unanimously to approve the agenda.

Chair Moore introduced DHR Director Julie Langan, who proceeded to deliver the Director's Remarks.

Director's Remarks:

Director Langan began by recognizing a number of people whose efforts have been integral throughout the outreach process surrounding the two nominations being presented. She first offered her thanks to Rev. Dana Sally Allen, head of the Blackwell Civic Association, for her extensive work and support in facilitating DHR's community outreach efforts during the past several months. She continued by thanking Rev. Dwight Thomas for his willingness to step in on short notice and provide the opening prayer for today's meeting. Director Langan went on to recognize all of the community residents and other individuals who have invested time and effort throughout DHR's outreach process. She thanked DHR Community Outreach Liaison Preston Page, a Manchester resident, for his exhaustive commitment to

engaging with the Blackwell community and establishing stronger relationships within the neighborhood on behalf of DHR, and she expressed her gratitude to the Boards for their willingness to hold this special session. Finally, Director Langan thanked Pastor Winfree and the congregation of the New Life Deliverance Tabernacle for hosting DHR for the third time, with the church having also provided space for two previous community meetings.

Director Langan then offered a brief summary of the sequence of events surrounding the Blackwell Historic District nomination, noting that the situation had provided an opportunity to forge relationships with the Blackwell community and refine the department's approach to community outreach in what had ultimately been an overall positive experience for DHR staff. Director Langan offered a brief timeline chronicling the evolution of the Blackwell nomination as well as the various problems faced and solutions developed by DHR staff. She noted that a single nomination for the Manchester Residential and Commercial Historic District 2018 Boundary Increase had originally been scheduled for Board review at the June 2018 meeting, with the first public hearing for the district held that month. At that hearing, members of the community proposed changing the name of the nomination to the Blackwell Historic District, given the strong sense of self-identity in the neighborhood – a proposal that DHR staff accepted. In addition, skepticism expressed by residents at the hearing over the perceived lack of previous community outreach prompted DHR staff to attend several other regular community meetings, including those of the Blackwell Civic Association. At these meetings, resentment held by many in the community towards the developer funding the nomination became increasingly clear, ultimately leading DHR to postpone the nomination at the suggestion of the community to allow for more time for residents to be informed about National Register listing and its potential outcomes. The Blackwell Historic District was then placed on the agenda for the September 2018 meeting, with DHR staff continuing to attend community meetings and arrange additional outreach efforts in anticipation of this meeting. However, a mailing issue that occurred during DHR's legal notification process meant that the department could not meet regulatory deadlines in time for the September meeting. As a result, a special meeting of the Boards was scheduled for October 10, 2018. During this interim period, DHR Register Historian Lena McDonald consulted with Jim Gabbert of the National Parks Service, who recommended that the single historic district be separated into a stand-alone Blackwell Historic District and a revised Manchester Residential and Commercial Historic District 2018 Boundary Increase, creating two distinct nominations to be considered by the Boards.

Director Langan concluded by stating her happiness at being able to present these nominations within the Manchester community, with the September Board meeting having been held in Petersburg. She expressed her hope that the community understood DHR's good-faith efforts to respond to concerns raised by neighborhood residents throughout the process.

Director Langan concluded her report, and invited Mr. Marc Wagner to present the nominations to be considered.

NOMINATIONS

The following Eastern Region nomination was presented by Mr. Marc Wagner.

Eastern Region.....presented by Marc Wagner

1. ****Manchester Residential and Commercial Historic District 2018 Boundary Increase, City of Richmond, #127-0856, Criteria A and C**

Following Mr. Wagner's presentation, Chair Moore opened the floor to questions or comments from those in attendance. After a brief clarification from that the Manchester Residential and Commercial Historic District 2018 Boundary Increase was now distinct from the Blackwell Historic District and would be consider separately by the Boards, there were no further questions or comments.

Chair Moore requested a motion from the SRB regarding the nomination for the Manchester Residential and Commercial Historic District 2018 Boundary Increase. Vice-Chair Lahendro moved that the SRB accept the nomination as presented with the understanding that DHR staff will add additional context regarding important community leaders to the nomination's statement of significance. Dr. Lee seconded this motion, and the SRB voted unanimously to approve the nomination with the provisions noted.

Chair Smith requested a motion from the BHR regarding the nomination for the Manchester Residential and Commercial Historic District 2018 Boundary Increase. Vice-Chair Fairfax moved that the BHR accept the nomination as presented with the understanding that DHR staff will add additional context regarding important community leaders to the nomination's statement of significance. Mr. Fisher seconded this motion, and the BHR voted unanimously to approve the nomination with the provisions noted.

Following the vote, Charles Vaughn, a community historian who contributed to the nominations, asked for clarification on the Boards' request for additional context related to important community leaders. Ms. Ashwell responded that the Boards wanted the nominations to serve as a document more comprehensively acknowledging and commemorating the contributions of significant individuals within a historically marginalized community even if the historic architecture associated with those individuals had been lost – as was often the case in such communities. Mr. Wagner noted that a community cultural heritage group has been convened at the request of Councilwoman Ellen Robertson as a way to explore other means of documenting and commemorating community history in cases where associated architectural fabric is no longer extant. Mr. Vaughn expressed his agreement and enthusiastic support for these initiatives.

Chair Moore invited Mr. Wagner to present the second nomination to be considered.

Eastern Region.....presented by Marc Wagner

2. ****Blackwell Historic District, City of Richmond, #127-5817, Criteria A and C**

Following Mr. Wagner’s presentation, Chair Moore opened the floor to questions or comments from those in attendance. An attendee stated that, based on his own research, there was no evidence in census records that the property named as James Blackwell, Jr.’s residence had historically been owned by a member of the Blackwell family, and asked Mr. Wagner for clarification on this point in the nomination. Mr. Wagner noted that this information had been sourced from a study citing census records, and that the property was widely acknowledged as Blackwell’s residence by those within the community. Charles Vaughn noted that James Blackwell, Sr.’s final residence had been located on 13th Street, and that the location of his son’s residence was established within the community’s history. He further noted that, in his view, the nomination had accurately presented the history of the Blackwell neighborhood and that the community should be pleased with the proposal being considered.

Vice-Chair Fairfax argued that it was not worth getting lost in disputing the details of property ownership, given that James Blackwell and James Blackwell, Jr.’s contributions to the neighborhood as community leaders were the truly significant aspects considered in the nomination. She went on to note that Rev. Anthony Binga’s first wife was a notable community leader in her own right, arguing that it is vital to continue striving to note the significant contributions of African American women in community histories, given that they are often marginalized even more than African American men. Tracy Scott, a representative of the local NAACP chapter, further noted that property records and other official documentation are not necessarily accurate in reference to African American communities and that community and local historians often provide a critical source of information in comprehensively understanding the histories of marginalized groups.

Chair Smith briefly noted that the meeting was being recorded, and that the recordings would serve as an official record of the Commonwealth of Virginia as well as a documentation of an important community dialogue that could be referenced in the future.

Marty Jewell, a former member of Richmond City Council, stated that despite his initial concerns related to a perceived lack of community outreach as well as the loss of the “Blackwell” name from the initial nomination, he now felt that the residents seemed more reconciled with the process and what was being proposed as a result of DHR’s continued efforts. His only remaining concern was that DHR’s notification process did not begin early enough to allow for the adequate mobilization of residents to understand the process and educate others within the community, particularly the elderly. Mr. Jewell also expressed his desire for city government to make greater efforts to provide communities with information on programs such as senior tax relief and other housing-related initiatives. He also expressed his hope for renewed and substantive provisions for affordable housing in the community, given the previous history of broken promises on the part of local government. Chair Smith likewise encouraged the development of further tax relief solutions in Blackwell and elsewhere in the city, noting that real estate values will continue to increase regardless of state and federal historic district designation. Mr. Jewell noted that an increase of more than 10% on property taxes within the city can be challenged by residents at the administrative level.

L. Temple, a Blackwell resident, offered her thanks to DHR for helping to preserve historic properties within the community, noting her own three-year struggle with city government requests to demolish a structurally sound historic building. She also expressed her gratitude to Marc Wagner and DHR Community Liaison Preston Page for their considerable community outreach efforts. Ms. Temple then asked for clarification on what limited protections were provided by state and federal historic district designation. Ms. Ashwell replied that, for the most part, such designation would simply offer economic incentives to preserve historic fabric within the neighborhood rather than fully redeveloping the area. Mr. Wagner added that any work undertaken by the state or federal government within the boundaries of the historic district would be subject to DHR review. Vice-Chair Fairfax stated her recommendation that DHR explore hiring a full-time Community Liaison to continue the level of critical outreach undertaken by Mr. Page during the process surrounding the Blackwell and Manchester nominations. Dr. Lee stated her support for this recommendation, offering her thanks to all those involved with DHR’s community outreach efforts.

Amy Wentz, a community activist, read from a prepared statement expressing her appreciation to DHR for following through on its promises for greater community outreach in the Blackwell neighborhood and her willingness to support the nomination as proposed. She also noted the urgent need for city government to address the issue of rising property taxes in Blackwell, which threatened to displace longtime residents.

Marty Jewell asked if the two volumes of Laverne Byrd Smith’s *A Comprehensive History of First Baptist Church, South Richmond, 1821-1993* had been consulted in the writing of the nominations, noting that it contained exhaustive work on the history of the Blackwell community. Mr. Wagner stated that he was not certain and that, if not, he would look into the book as a resource for additional context.

Chair Moore requested a motion from the SRB regarding the Blackwell Historic District nomination. Dr. Lee moved that the SRB accept the nomination as presented with the understanding that DHR staff will add additional context regarding important community leaders to the nomination’s statement of significance. Dr. Bon-Harper seconded this motion, and the SRB voted unanimously to approve the nomination with the provisions noted.

Chair Smith requested a motion from the BHR regarding the Blackwell Historic District nomination. Vice-Chair Fairfax moved that the BHR accept the nomination as presented with the understanding that DHR staff will add additional context regarding important community leaders to the nomination's statement of significance. Ms. Ashwell seconded this motion, and the BHR voted unanimously to approve the nomination with the provisions noted.

The Joint Session of the Boards adjourned at 2:37 p.m.

Register Summary of Resources Listed: Historic Districts: 2
Buildings: 0
Structures: 0
Sites: 0
Objects: 0
MPDs: 0

- * Cost Share Sponsored Project
- ** Certified Local Government
- *** Certified Local Government Sponsored Project
- § Rosenwald School – National Parks Service Underrepresented Communities Grant Project