

RESIDENT CURATOR PROGRAM – ASH GROVE HOUSE

March 15, 2018 PUBLIC INFORMATION MEETING

MEETING SUMMARY

A public meeting was held at the McLean Government Center on March 15, 2018 to introduce the community to the Resident Curator Program and Ash Grove House as a candidate for the program. The meeting convened at 7:00 p.m. and was facilitated by Judy Pedersen, Public Information Officer, FCPA. The names of 9 attendees were captured on the sign-in sheets. Also in attendance were:

- Tim Hackman, FCPA, Board Member
- Judy Pedersen, FCPA, Public Information Officer
- Cindy Walsh, FCPA, RMD, Division Director
- David Buchta, FCPA, Heritage Conservation Branch Manager
- Stephanie Langton, FCPA, Resident Curator Program Manager
- Chrissy Meade, FCPA, Public Information Administrative Assistant
- Margaret Puglisi, FCPA, Heritage Conservation Technician
- Bob Beach, AIA, History Commission

OPENING REMARKS & INTRODUCTIONS

Judy Pedersen welcomed all in attendance and asked everyone to fill out a comment card if they had any questions to ask and to sign in to stay informed as the project moves forward. Judy explained that the meeting's purpose was to discuss the curator program and Ash Grove's potential as a Resident Curator property.

Judy introduced staff and Park Authority representatives. She then explained the schedule of the meeting. Due to the small group, the public comment period could be more of a conversation.

Cindy Walsh welcomed the group and provided background about the formation and fine-tuning of the program. She mentioned that Ash Grove would be the second property, following success with Stempson House in Lorton. She concluded that Ash Grove is a wonderful property and that its curator would be the community's new neighbor.

David Buchta took the podium to discuss the Resident Curator Program. With so many parks and structures acquired with limited resources, the Park Authority had to figure out what to do with them. He explained that the Resident Curator Program would help the Park Authority care for approximately 27 properties in the future.

He continued by discussing Ash Grove's history with emphasis on the original elements that remain despite a fire in the 1960s, and concluded that he agreed Ash Grove would be a great opportunity for a curator.

Judy then introduced Stephanie Langton to present.

PRESENTATION

Stephanie's PowerPoint presentation began with a brief background on the program, including how it came about in the County and the status of the properties involved in the program currently. Next, she presented an overview of the application and evaluation process for curatorship, describing the steps in the application process and the criteria for evaluating the eligibility of the applicants. Stephanie then focused specifically on the historic Ash Grove property. She discussed the history of the site and the potential for its use as a Resident Curator property. To conclude, Stephanie announced the open house scheduled for Saturday, April 21st and the tentative deadline for the Ash Grove application.

PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD

At the end of the presentation, Judy opened the floor for questions from the audience.

Claudia Diamond, the President of HOA, commented that the HOA considers Ash Grove a neighbor within their gates. She expressed concern about the long term goals of the property, parking, and people entering the community.

David Buchta assured Claudia that there is a process to the program. As a residential area and a park with limited parking, all of these concerns will need to be considered. He encouraged her to be a part of the process as a public component.

Claudia acknowledged that the house is in need of maintenance and that it is not a well-known park in the community, but the HOA is concerned about the use of the house and the amount of traffic that will result.

David expressed that all of those issues would be taken into consideration and that he hoped the HOA would be involved because the house serves no purpose when it is vacant.

Claudia had the opportunity to meet with Lee Sherman at the house, and Lee was upset about the state of the house and its use as storage space.

David assured the members at the meeting that the inventory has been removed in anticipation of Ash Grove being a candidate for the Resident Curator Program, and that he will make sure she is on the stakeholder list.

Claudia clarified that the HOA is concerned as a community, and they just want to make sure that all of the considerations are addressed.

David mentioned that Ash Grove is a unique situation, surrounded by townhomes.

Cindy Walsh explained that the applicants would present their proposals directly to the public before a decision is finalized.

A citizen who had not named herself ask if the house would still be open to the public if it becomes a private residence.

David explained that, as part of the Resident Curator Program, the applicant must propose a public benefit, and an example would be the blog written by the Stempson House curator. Another option could be an annual tour.

Judy mentioned that Oak Hill also has a requirement for public access each year that is satisfied by holding an annual open house.

David expressed that Ash Grove is such an important house and it should be celebrated.

John Lavon, a member of the Westwood Village HOA, confirmed that the community sees Ash Grove as another house in their neighborhood and that the future curator will be a part of the neighborhood. John was also curious about the benefits to the curator for maintaining the property and the logistics that are involved.

David explained the Fair Market Rental Value which is established by an appraisal, maintenance costs, and taxes. Those amounts are used in a formula to generate an annual rental fee. The Fair Market Rental Value is used to determine the length of the lease.

John asked about the maximum length of lease available.

David confirmed that the maximum lease length would be 20 years, possibly 30 years, based on the value of the house and the cost estimate of the recommended treatments. He then explained that the amount of work needed and the higher taxes in the surrounding area would affect Ash Grove's length of lease.

John was curious about the benefit to the person moving into the house if they pay a significant amount but do not own the property.

David explained that the benefits include not paying rent as well as living in a beautiful and remarkable place. The curator still has to pay taxes and the house continues to be owned by the Park Authority. The program is designed for someone who is passionate about preserving the county's historic structures.

An unnamed citizen asked if there is an inspection of the property.

David answered that the mechanical, electrical, plumbing, and the house itself are inspected as part of the treatment plan.

Claudia asked how often the program manager checks in on the curator.

David replied that with such a new program, staff are hypervigilant right now, but check-ins are projected to be once a quarter in the future.

Cindy clarified that the check-ins are also based on when major projects such as replacing the roof are scheduled.

David informed the attendees that Ash Grove is very close to being move-in ready.

Paul Koulerberger, a longtime resident and a member of the McLean Historical Society, wanted to know why Ash Grove is not being supported as a historic site. He would like the property to be a publically available asset.

Cindy explained that the point of the program is that the Park Authority does not have the funds to manage another house museum. House museums are not successful in America right now, and the Park Authority would have to maintain, restore, and make it ADA accessible.

When Cindy asked how Paul would like to see Ash Grove used, he responded that it could be used for the purpose of having historical house tours, small meetings, and weddings.

Judy explained that the Park Master Plan identified various options, but ultimately, the Park Authority properties were being neglected. After a long period of evaluation, the Resident Curator was determined to be the best solution, followed by two years of preparing for implementation.

David added that house museums are a dying preservation strategy because they are difficult to maintain.

Paul commented that he understands the community's concern, but it would be a shame for Ash Grove to not be publically available, and he would like to help raise funds for that purpose.

David clarified that the program would certainly accept a proposal from an organization that wants to turn Ash Grove into a house museum.

Judy explained that the door is open to all proposals but they all need to be evaluated by the program, the neighbors, the Park Authority Board, and the Board of Supervisors. She encouraged Paul to submit a proposal. During the Turner Farm application process, the program received a variety of different proposals, and ultimately chose a proposal with a unique blend of uses. Judy expressed that it is exciting that people are interested because the program enables the Park Authority to pursue its mission to protect these historic properties.

David reminded the attendees that the Ash Grove Open House is scheduled for Saturday, April 21. There may be a shuttle to help with parking. Application information will be added to the Resident Curator Program website in the next few days.

An unnamed citizen expressed that she thought the program was a great idea, and that hopefully Ash Grove will be used as a residence instead of a public use due to the parking issues.

Judy and David acknowledged the traffic issue, and the meeting was concluded at 7:39 p.m.