

CITY OF PORTSMOUTH



City of Portsmouth Announces African Burying Ground Construction Start and Consecration Ceremony

August 15, 2014

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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Between 8:00 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. Monday through Thursday

Between 8:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. on Friday

PORTSMOUTH – The City of Portsmouth and the Mayor’s Blue Ribbon Committee on the African Burying Ground announce the start of construction on the African Burying Ground Memorial Park – We Stand in Honor of Those Forgotten. Construction begins on Monday August 18th.

“The Community’s journey for honoring those buried at Chestnut Street is about to enter its final stage as we seek to return this ground to sacred space” said Vernis Jackson, Chair of the African Burying Ground Committee. “This Memorial will give a voice to those long buried beneath the street and it will give the Community a place to reflect on this history and acknowledge the accomplishments of some its earliest residents”.

A Consecration Ceremony sponsored by the Mayor's African Burying Ground Committee will be held on Sunday August 17, 2014 at 4:00 p.m. in preparation for the start of construction. All members of the public are invited to attend. The Committee invites those attending to bring white flowers and to wear white or African styles to the ceremony.

Representatives from the City and project contractors met with residents and abutters lining Chestnut Street last week to go over construction-related details. “We continue to see deep and sustained support for this site from abutters, both residents and businesses” said Deputy City Manager Dave Allen.

“There are so many people who have worked so hard to make this project a reality. We are extraordinarily grateful to Mayor Lister and the Portsmouth City Council for their steadfast support of this project over the years and City Manager John P. Bohenko” said Jackson.

In addition, the community has come together to make sure this project becomes a reality. A great number of residents from Portsmouth and beyond have come together to raise funds for the effort through a number of public outreach events, fundraising events, and educational efforts to raise awareness and funds for the project. "The support from these

individuals has been extraordinary; their dedication to this site and the people buried there is awe-inspiring".

"Gifts from individuals and families have ranged from \$5 to \$70,000; many donors have given over \$10,000 to the project, and we have received report from several foundations. The lead gift to the project has been \$250,000 from the City of Portsmouth" said Jackson. "The Community has risen to the challenge and we continue to raise the remaining funds to put the project over the top".

Members of the African Burying Ground Committee include Vernis Jackson, Chair; Mary Bailey, Vice Chair; City Councilor Chris Dwyer; Kel Edwards; and Ex-Officios Assistant City Attorney Suzanne Woodland and Director of Public Works Peter Rice.

Members of the public wishing to make a donation to the project can send checks to African Burying Ground Trust, 1 Junkins Avenue, Portsmouth, NH 03801 or visit www.africanburyinggroundnh.org.

About the African Burying Ground Memorial Park (www.africanburyinggroundnh.org)

The African Burying Ground Memorial Park, We Stand in Honor of Those Forgotten will be erected on the site of an 18th century cemetery that had been paved over, built over and overlooked as Portsmouth grew in later years. In October 2003, human remains were rediscovered during a street improvement excavation. Subsequent DNA testing under the direction of the State Archaeologist identified eight individuals of African descent. This careful treatment and the painstaking laboratory analysis make this the only archaeologically verified African Burying Ground of its era in all of New England, and give it national significance. Only one other site in the US –the National Park in lower Manhattan – is of comparable age, size and historical importance.

Since 2004, the African Burying Ground Committee, working with public forums, the Chestnut Street abutters, the Mayor and City Council, have worked to implement a plan to create the African Burying Ground Memorial Park. Designed by sculptor and artist Jerome Meadows and local landscape architect Roberta Woodburn, the memorial is intended to connect the people of Portsmouth today with Portsmouth's past through sculptural figures, plantings, information about Portsmouth's black history and a burial vault for the reinterred remains.

A fundraising effort to raise the \$1.2 million dollars for the project is nearly complete and has included funding from private foundations, governmental entities, and hundreds of individuals and families.

To learn more about the African Burying Ground, to make a donation visit www.africanburyinggroundnh.org.