

# PARK WILL GIVE 'VOICE' TO AFRICAN HERITAGE

■ *Ceremony to mark start of work  
on Burying Ground memorial*

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**P**ORTSMOUTH — Eleven years after the remains of 13 Africans were found on Chestnut Street, work will finally begin Monday on a memorial park dedicated to them and others of African descent buried hundreds of years ago in the city's slave burying ground.

"This memorial will give a voice to those long buried and it will give the community a place to reflect on this history and acknowledge the accomplishments of some of its earliest residents," said Vernis Jackson, chairwoman of the African Burying Ground Committee.

A consecration ceremony will take place at 4 p.m.

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# MEMORIAL: Work to begin on African Burying Ground site

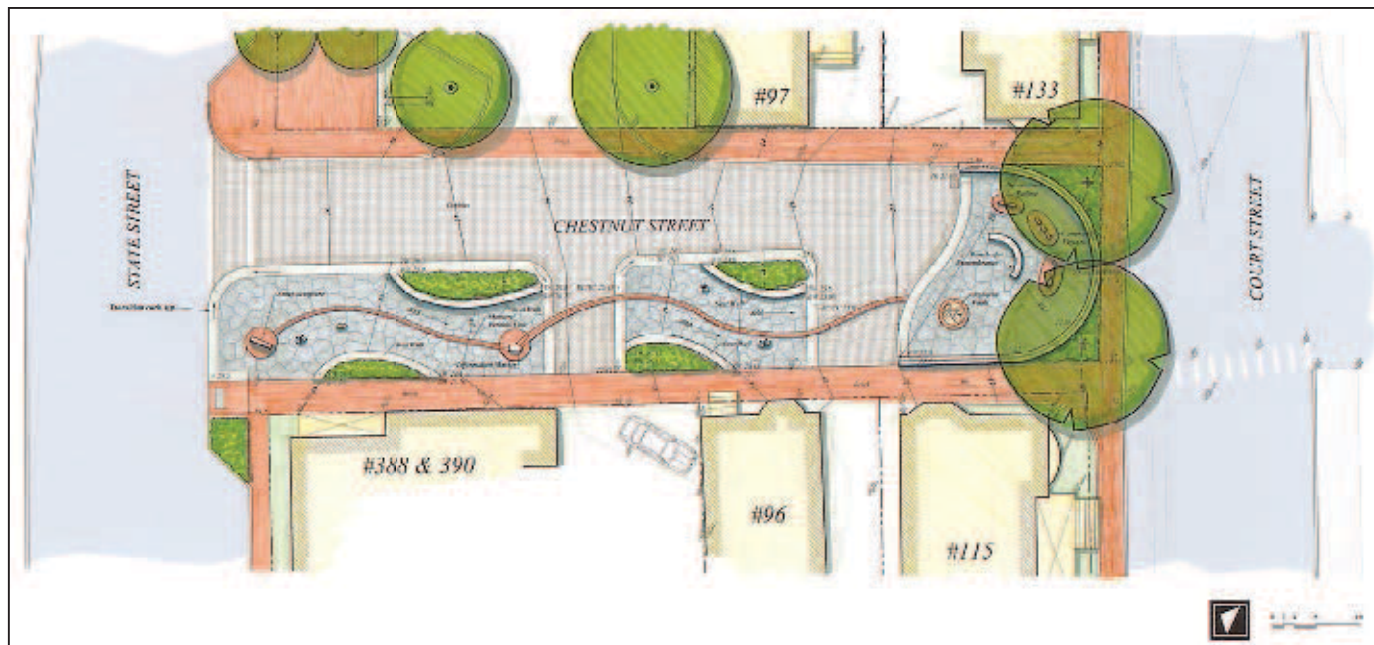
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Sunday, Aug. 17, in preparation for the start of construction. All members of the public are invited to attend, to wear white or African colors and to bring white flowers.

The memorial park will be located on Chestnut Street between State and Court streets. It was there during some routine utility work in 2003 that the workers discovered the remains of the Africans — believed to be among more than 200 people of African descent buried in that part of the city.

In 2004, the city of Portsmouth created the African Burying Ground Memorial Committee to determine how to respect and honor those buried in what was in the 18th and 19th centuries called the city's Negro Burying Ground.

Since then, the group has been working to raise more than \$1 million for a park on that site. Central to the project is a granite wall on the State Street end that will have a figure representing "Mother Africa" on one side and a Portsmouth slave on the other. The wall and the park are designed by artist and sculptor



COURTESY IMAGE

Work is set to begin on the African Burying Ground memorial on Monday, Aug. 18.

Jerome Meadows of Savannah, Ga., and local landscape architecture by Woodburn & Co.

According to Assistant Community Development Director David Moore, the project will take roughly three months to complete. During that time, Chestnut Street will be closed to all but residents and businesses.

Asphalt will be removed sections at a time, Moore said. The first phase of work will begin at the Court Street end, where a shallow drainage system and an electrical conduit will be installed. That area was specifically chosen because it is known that there will be no disturbance of additional remains.

The possibility of finding additional remains on Chestnut Street "is driving the whole design," said Dave Allen, deputy city manager. As crews from contractor Piscataqua Landscaping do the work, there will be times when they will have to dig by hand "to ensure we're as minimally invasive as possible," Allen said.

The state archaeologist and a project archaeologist will be closely monitoring the work throughout the building of the park.

As time approaches for placement of the granite wall and Meadows' installation, the artist is expected to come

to the city. This fall, he will be working with Portsmouth Middle School children to create tiles for the park.

A special re-interment ceremony is expected to take place in the spring of 2015.

The committee has thus far raised more than \$1 million, but still had \$165,000 to go when the City Council in June agreed to loan it the remaining money.

City Councilor Chris Dwyer, a member of the committee, said in just the past month some \$65,000 has been raised.

"People are really stepping up, now that they know it is becoming real. And many people who have given before are giving again. I think there's a real broad sense of ownership in this project," she said.

Dwyer said she also feels the park is coming at a good time for city residents, who have been dealing with "modern dilemmas" like development, helicopter noise and other "anxieties of life."

"Hopefully, this will give people the longer view. We've been here a long time and a lot of things have happened during that time," she said. "It's important to pause and think about where we've come from."