



PUBLIC FORUM #2

Re: ***African Burial Ground Public Forum #2***

Date: ***June 19, 2007***

Notes: ***by Wendy Anderson, Reuben Hull and Robbi Woodburn.***

COMMENTS: **Tom Ferrini** stated that slavery in NE is not taught or told and shouldn't be ignored. He likes coffin, trade route ideas and harsh reality of #4 it describes what went on and why.

Robert Stiefel (UNH Humanities) likes number four feels that it invites you in. He likes the statue at the beginning of the space. He likes the symbols in the contemplation space (for example the triangle and coffin represent death and loss of and the circle represents eternity) and the words in middle/transition space. The circle could be enriched with the additions of blue stone for the ocean area. The ocean area relates to Portsmouth which was on the trade route.

Liz Wright is concerned that the focus needs to be clearer. She feels that the 1779 petition which is unique to Portsmouth and very important should be included. She has mixed feelings about the layout of #3 but could work with it. Likes the inlaid hexagonal symbols saying coffins are here. Could also work with the Declaration on Independence with the enslaved peoples awareness of its purpose; then relate it to the Emancipation Proclamation and tie it to the Lincoln Memorial.

Lydia Breen likes #4 but thinks the maybe trade route could be moved further down the walk and the contemplative area should be more for quiet thinking and not be informational. Also need to evoke Africa more.

Mary Anne Caprioli feels that #4 provides the most powerful commemorative and educational feeling. She believes that the center section should talk about the 1779 petition and the female voices and roles of women should not be forgotten.

John Maher is concerned about the durability of the trees and vegetation. Questioned whether there would be enough room for the trees, how to deal with snow removal and what to do about people making wrong turns in the area. There should be a sign at the entrance as to traffic restriction. He felt that people were in a rush to vote on the "right" solution and there should be more deliberation before selecting an option or design. He also wanted fewer but larger green spaces so the vegetation had a better chance of survival and so people would feel comfortable and welcomed.

Liz Wright would like to see white pine integrated to symbolize coffin material.

Eric Weinrieb (Altus Engineering) likes the landscaping on both sides. He thinks that 8-10 feet should be adequate for survival and would love to see Chestnut trees on Chestnut St. He feels that the street should be gateway to the city for pedestrians from the south side of Portsmouth and this layout is oriented to be experienced consecutively from State St. He did say that signage on the Court Street side of the retaining wall should help create the sense of a second entrance. The design should incorporate elements which can be accessed from both sides. Chestnut St. could be renamed for perhaps a local Civil Rights leader. A Chestnut tree was planted in



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Portsmouth in commemoration of the signing of the Declaration of Independence and might be done as part of this project.

Edna Feighner (NH State Historic Preservation Office) stated that the State would prefer no trees were planted because the tree roots would disturb the burials.

Comment: Trees are important in cemeteries, why is there a problem with them here?

Comment: They use trees in containers in places like Chicago.

Valerie Cunningham is concerned about what the trees, lawn and vegetation would look like in winter as well as summer. She would like to see the space as self sustaining and wanted everyone to think forward 50 years and what the space would look like.

Jack McGee likes #4 and trees.

Comment: There should be discussion with the State Historical Office and an archeological survey done for planting of the proposed trees.

Daniel Minter (Portland, Maine) likes all concepts, likes the circle. He felt that we have talked a lot about the trees but not about the internal concept. We should focus on the concept. He talked a little about the visceral feeling of parts of concepts.

Eric Weinrieb says that no bodies were found on the East side where the waterline was.

Comment: The whole street should be considered a burial ground despite historical sources.

Liz Wright said that #5 was reminiscent of the "Yellow Brick Road" and trading beads held a negative connotation. She felt that the trade beads had an association of "property" which was somehow troublesome and calming at the same time.

JerriAnne Boggis says that in #5, if someone sat on the bench, they would be turning our backs on and sitting on known burials.

Comment: The trees beautiful, natural process is ok but if we want to be safe we should put the trees where the bodies were taken out.

Comment: But the bodies will be re-interred close to where they come from.

Geraldine Palmer likes the simplicity of #3.

Vernis Jackson is torn between #3 & #4. She likes the concept of the circle but feels that the circle concept is over done in other burials. She wants this place to be different and unique; a place that says "this is Portsmouth. We are who we are and who we were." She also feels there is something to be said for simplicity.



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Liz Wright also likes #3 and feels that the 1779 petition would be important on bollards and at the end as it leads to nothingness or a sense of absence suggesting that the petition died away!

Comment: Words are important as well because most people do not think in abstracts like blank spaces suggesting absence in #3.

Vernis Jackson commented that some artifacts like the shroud pin and salt were found and should be considered as locally significant symbols.

Comment: There were 2 instances of culturally modified teeth, removal of incisors and tooth filing and reshaping.

Liz Wright talked about the sculpture at the NYC Burial Ground.?

Comment: Both the circle and the square work in all human cultures. They are symbols of completeness. Another thought about cobblestone that is pre-cast so can't be removed by tourists looking for souvenirs

Comment: Liked the suggestion that there be no beginning or end. The cemetery should flow and have formal entrances at both ends. It should look like a cemetery because that is what it is. Those individuals should be honored and the ground is sacred. That is part of what is important of who they were, as much as we know about them.