



Timothy J. Baroody

MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor Greenlaw and Members of City Council
FROM: Timothy J. Baroody, City Manager
Dave King, Director of Public Works
Kate Schwartz, Historic Resources Planner
DATE: July 2, 2019 (for the July 9 City Council meeting)
SUBJECT: Relocation Plan for the Slave Auction Block

ISSUE

In response to the City Council's June 11, 2019 decision to relocate the Slave Auction Block to the Fredericksburg Area Museum, this memorandum provides an overview of the course of action proposed for implementation.

RECOMMENDATION

Accept recommendations, and direct staff to proceed and execute plan.

BACKGROUND

The block is situated in the sidewalk at the northwest corner of the intersection of William and Charles Streets in downtown Fredericksburg. The site has been the catalyst for a larger conversation about race, history, and remembrance as well as the interpretation of African-American history in Fredericksburg that began in August 2017. This conversation led Council to a vote on preservation of the slave auction block in its current location, and to undertake an energized effort to tell a more complete story of the City's history. After some discussion the City engaged the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience (ICSC), an organization that worked with participants in an extensive year long series of community conversations. City Council accepted the Final Phase III report from the ICSC and requested the Memorials Advisory Commission to work on telling a more complete history on May 14, 2019. Then on June 11th, after participating in many of the community conversations, the City Council voted 6-1 to relocate the block from its current location to inside the Fredericksburg Area Museum (FAM).

Dovetail Cultural Resource Group performed archaeological testing of the block and provided a report in January 2019. Their work included a test unit that was excavated beside the block, with the assistance of staff in the Public Works Department. Dovetail provided an in-depth examination of the physical components of the block and its ground-setting profile. They found that the total height of the block is approximately 3.6 feet, with 2.3 feet exposed above the current brick sidewalk, leaving about 1.3 feet below grade. The block is surrounded by compacted soil and the base rests on a pad of bricks. While the block is not encased in concrete, a thin layer of hardened sand/cement base material is located beneath the brick sidewalk. Some of this material was successfully removed for the test unit without damage to the block.

RELOCATION PLAN

Preliminary Planning: Prior to the physical relocation of the block, a number of preliminary steps are recommended to ensure that Fredericksburg can continue to interpret and understand the historic significance of this object. Recent archeological investigations of the block resulted in the finding that the block is not individually eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, but is a secondary resource associated with the United States/Planter's Hotel. Interpretation and displays at the future location of the block can convey its historic association with its original context.

As the block is an historic object located within the City's local historic district, the proposed relocation plan will also be reviewed by the Architectural Review Board. The Board's review should include both the relocation plan for the block and the plan for alterations to the corner of Charles and William Streets, though these two phases of review would occur at different points in time. The Memorials Advisory Commission is responsible for planning the interpretation of the site (the corner of William and Charles Streets) and implementing the recommendations of the ICSC. It is understood that the ultimate appearance of the site will not be determined prior to relocation of the block. To ensure that all City processes are coordinated as the project moves forward, it is recommended that a member of the ARB serve as a liaison to the Memorials Advisory Commission. The ARB's review of relocation of the block can be scheduled for its August 12, 2019 public hearing.

By engaging in consultation and review with VDHR staff and the ARB prior to relocation of the block, the City can assure that this process does greatly reduce the chance of any adverse impacts on the historic significance of the districts. The City will rely on the FAM's expertise in the display and interpretation of the block inside its facility, but it is recommended that the historic association with the Planter's Hotel be made clear and that the sandstone be protected utilizing the best practices in material conservation. A long-term loan agreement, in consultation with FAM, will be formalized as a component of the relocation plan.

Additional planning will also be necessary for activities on the day of relocation. To ensure that this action is clearly recognized in full view of the community, work will be conducted during daytime hours. The block will likely be prepared for moving, and potentially lifted out of the ground, in the days prior to relocation. A ceremony, if desired by Council, may occur. The block will be moved to the FAM in a manner that ensures the safety of the block, the public, and work crews. If a ceremony is desired, City staff, the Memorials Advisory Commission, the FAM, and others as determined appropriate will work together to plan the ceremony, schedule the course of events, plan for street closures, and distribute information to the public.

Removal: Based upon information provided by Dovetail during the archaeological study and observations made by Public Works staff who provided assistance during the excavation, the extraction of the block from the site can be accomplished by Public Works staff with relative ease and without damage to the block. The Department has the equipment, manpower, and expertise to remove the block; however, it is recommended to have professional archaeologists from Dovetail involved with the planning and removal to help assure the integrity of the block during the process. In particular, special tools may be needed for removal of the sand/cement base material around the block, and Dovetail staff can help ensure this is done safely.

Physical removal of the block is expected to take two to three days to complete with Public Works crews and assistance by Dovetail. This includes restoring the sidewalk by filling the void with compacted stone, repairing the brick sidewalk, and installing temporary placeholder materials while permanent interpretive materials are under consideration. Staff estimates the cost for this work, including the installation of an interpretive wayside panel and sidewalk medallion, at approximately \$3,000. An additional cost of approximately \$2,000 would be anticipated for Dovetail's field crew assistance.

Infrastructure Repair: After removal of the block, the sidewalk will immediately be repaired to ensure pedestrian safety. The work of presenting the corner's history and the ultimate appearance of interpretive materials will be left to the Memorials Advisory Commission. This work will occur in tandem with the City's efforts to create pedestrian enhancements at the corner, including extending the sidewalk using bump-outs at the intersection. The location of the block will be temporarily marked by placing a concrete medallion in the sidewalk when the brick surface is repaired. The medallion will be approximately the same diameter as the block and will be set so the surface is level with the surrounding sidewalk. A temporary wayside panel will also be placed near the corner and will be used to provide information about the current status of the project, point to where the block is now housed and offer additional history.

Transportation/Relocation: The block will need to be transported just over two blocks to the FAM at 907 Princess Anne Street. This work can be accomplished by Public Works staff and can be done with existing vehicles. The block would need to be strapped to a pallet, which will likely be a custom size, to facilitate moving the block through the museum doorways and hallways. A special pallet jack and crew may be necessary. One such option for this would be to hire Professional Lock and Key (a current City vendor) who possess specialized equipment and personnel trained to move heavy objects into buildings. The anticipated expense to move the block inside the museum would be around \$500 - \$1,000. Additionally, with Dovetail's support, the block will be cleaned and prepared for display. The FAM will initially plan for a temporary exhibition of the block on the ground floor while they engage in the design and engineering of a permanent exhibit.

Fredericksburg Area Museum (FAM): The City Manager has discussed this plan with the President and CEO of FAM. In response, FAM has documented some considerations as we move forward in this dialogue. (See letter dated June 25, 2019). In brief summary, FAM is open to receipt of the block contingent on: adherence to accepted museum best practices, loan terms that are mutually agreed to; strong archaeology support during relocation; a mutually agreed to schedule; participation in Memorials Advisory Commission work related to the block; and funding to execute project.

The City Manager has assured the Museum President that an archeologist will be retained for this effort to mutually assist in this relocation, to ensure the block is well cared for, professionally cleaned and presented to the Museum in an exhibit ready state. The City Manager does not support interim storage and will work with the Museum to insure immediate display. Additionally, the City Manager has offered assurances that short term (likely first floor display) and long term exhibition at a different location in the Museum is acceptable. Lastly, the City Manager has agreed to work with the Museum President to ensure inclusion in Memorials Advisory Commission's work, and to work through budget matters to ensure that the City funds new expenses related to block exhibits.

CONCLUSION

At this time, the City Council is asked to endorse this proposed course of action. Preliminary planning steps will begin to be implemented, as further detailed below, in preparation for relocating the block by year's end.

The proposed near term next steps are:

1. Craft a long term loan agreement with Museum (likely 20 years, with renewal rights), to allow both the City and the Fredericksburg Area Museum flexibility on the future of block.
2. Assemble and schedule the appropriate implementation team for the physical relocation, including Public Works staff, professional archaeologists, and moving specialists as needed.
3. Engage in consultation on the relocation plan with the Virginia Department of Historic Resources and the Architectural Review Board.
4. Before relocation, prepare an interim display to ensure that the block is immediately available to the public after relocation. Work with FAM representatives, Memorials Advisory Commission, and others as necessary on design and budget for the interim and long term exhibition.
5. Consider planning a potential ceremony to occur at the time of relocation.
6. After relocation, provide temporary placeholders at the site while permanent interpretive materials and infrastructure improvements (at Charles and Williams Street) are in development.

If this path is endorsed by Council, specific dates will later be offered by staff.



Fredericksburg Area Museum

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June 25, 2019

Mr. Tim Baroody, City Manager
City of Fredericksburg
715 Princess Anne Street
Fredericksburg, VA 22401

RE: Relocation of the Auction Block to the Fredericksburg Area Museum

Dear Mr. Baroody,

Thank you for meeting with me to discuss the relocation of the auction block from the corner of William Street and Charles Street to the Fredericksburg Area Museum (FAM). This is a profoundly important project, and we look forward to working with the community and City Council to see it through to a conclusion that will make all of us proud.

As conversations are just beginning regarding relocation of the block, we feel it important that Fredericksburg City Council and staff understand the philosophy and approach the Museum brings to a project of this sort. Like many professions, the Museum profession is guided by “best practices,” as set forth by the American Alliance of Museums (AAM), as well as the policies and procedures established by the FAM to ensure that museum staff and the Board of Directors (BOD) uphold these standards. These standards help ensure the safety and conservation of museum objects, as well as their interpretation. We are wholly committed to best practices in all the work we undertake.

The FAM is guided by and committed to its mission statement. From collection management and accession of objects, to the interpretation of the collection, to our interaction and involvement with the community, our mission is what makes us a community organization. *“The Museum collects, researches, interprets, teaches, and preserves the history, heritage, and culture of the Fredericksburg region in an ever-evolving context. We serve a diverse community through a commitment to inclusion, integrity, credibility, and relevance. We will facilitate an understanding and appreciation of how the acts of those who preceded us have shaped both this community and nation at large—providing both lessons and inspiration as we work together to forge a greater community.”*

This accession, like all accessions, is subject to the review and recommendation of the museum’s collection committee. Collection Committee Chairwoman, Nanette (Tricia) Smelter, has convened a special meeting on July 10th, to discuss this further.

As we stand on the verge of this project, here are some of the issues that need consideration:

- We need more information regarding the size and physical condition of the object. Most importantly, the recent on-site investigation of the block by archaeologists only partially revealed its size and dimensions. The FAM strongly recommends additional archaeology to confirm the form of the block and weight of the block, a critical issue in determining how and where it can be displayed within the historic Town Hall building. In the interim (if necessary), I have secured a storage facility that meets environmental standards for collections to, if need be, store the object off-site until it can be exhibited. This organization is already working on a plan to have the object transported.
- We need to work together to establish a clear understanding of a workable schedule and the expectations of the museum, the City, and other interested parties as we move forward with this project.
- Mindful of the intense public interest in the block, we will work as quickly as we can to make the block available to the public—focusing first on an interim display of the artifact, while we all work on the complex issues and process associated with its permanent display. We are committed to facilitating a collaborative effort within the community to both interpret the block and to tell the larger story of the African-American experience within the Fredericksburg region.
- The same commitment to “best practices” as it relates to the treatment of objects also applies to their interpretation. The FAM will use the studies conducted by the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience as a foundation for this planning effort. We will also engage professionals in the field of museum interpretation and design to ensure a final product meets accepted standards for scholarship, accessibility, and design. I think you understand that the museum cannot endorse an approach that is at odds with those standards.
- We think it is critical that the City appoint a representative of the museum to sit on the City’s oversight committee for the project.
- And, of course, there is the question of the cost. This project will entail an effort well beyond maintaining our basic operations; undertaking an effort of this magnitude was not part of a work plan within our existing budget. Work will not only involve moving, cleaning, storing, and maintaining the object, but also developing exhibits to support its interpretation. On a larger scale, we are committed to overseeing the development of an interpretive plan that will establish a long-term goal of interpretation of the block with the “Whole Story” of African American history in the City, and indeed the nation.

The FAM will need additional financial resources from the City of Fredericksburg to make these things happen. As this is all moving very quickly, a specific amount has not been determined. A project as complex as this (focused on both the block and the larger story of African-American history) cannot be done without the acquisition of professionals committed wholly to the project. Beyond that, the cost of conserving the object, interpretive planning, and the design, and production of exhibits and materials to support both the interpretation of the block AND the larger arc of African-American history in the region will be significant. Our next task is to consult with you on developing a budget for the project.

There is tremendous work to be done! I look forward to working with City staff, City Council, and the community as we strive to make Fredericksburg a better place to live.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sara Poore". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Sara Poore
President & CEO