



## News Release

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### City Council Moves Forward on Auction Block Preservation, Interpretation

**(Fredericksburg, VA)** June 13, 2019 -- On June 11, 2019, the City of Fredericksburg Council voted 6-1 in favor of moving the slave auction block from its current location at the corner of William and Charles Streets to the Fredericksburg Area Museum. This decision by Council followed the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience Final Report. This report, the final of three phases of community engagement work in the City conducted throughout 2018, was received by Council in March 2019.

This report and the other information on the slave auction block can be found at: <https://www.fredericksburgva.gov/1287/Slave-Auction-Block>

The City Council decision-making process, specific to the future of the auction block, has been taking place within the larger context of a community dialogue about race, history, and memory. City residents have been integral to these discussions since 2017 and Council's actions have sought to reflect the voice of our community. These efforts are consistent with Council's 2036 Vision Statement of Sharing Our Past, Embracing the Future: *The people of Fredericksburg are building a 21st century urban center on the foundation of this historic city at the fall line of the Rappahannock River. Fredericksburg is the hub of regional economic activity, a city with a multicultural population and thriving cultural scene, a place that works for everyone, a community where the people are writing the next chapters of Fredericksburg's history.*

Where did this discussion begin? The City had a lengthy community dialogue in 2017 about the slave auction block. Councilor Frye placed the topic on the City Council agenda for August 22, 2017 following the previous Sunday night, when a group of about 100 people had gathered downtown to pray for reconciliation and healing, at the site of the slave auction block. The Council then directed staff to engage the community about the future of the slave auction block.

The discussion led the City to seek broad input through community meetings and an online survey. More than 600 people responded to the online survey, and more than 100 attended a special community meeting at James Monroe High School. With that input in mind, City Council voted on September 26, 2017, to preserve the slave auction block in place and to focus on better telling a more complete history of Fredericksburg.

On telling a more complete history, after some research, The International Coalition of Sites of Conscience (ICSC) was hired to assist the City of Fredericksburg in turning "dialogue into action." Members of ICSC spent approximately a year working with the community in three phases of work 1) an audit of how we, as a City, tell our story today 2) discussions on how the auction block is to be portrayed moving forward 3) discussion on telling our more complete story moving forward.

The Phase 1 sessions were held during April and May 2018 with approximately 140 individuals participating in small focus groups. ICSC sought to gain an understanding of what "story" the City has told in the past, is telling in the present, and wishes to tell in the future about the auction block and the context that surrounds it. Community engagement continued in Phase 2 with a focus more specifically on the slave auction block. A series of six public brainstorming sessions were held in August and September and focused on a design and signage.

Phase 3 public discussions occurred during October through December 2018 with all meetings held at the downtown Fredericksburg Library. The public engaged in the topics of "Telling the Whole Story," "Creating Reflection and Connecting Past to Present," and "Education and Next Steps." These discussions explored topics that were heard during the first two phases and included ways in which people talk about our history. In all, more than 250 people participated in over a dozen public meetings, promoted on the City's website, through a citywide mailer, in paid advertising and through social media.

The Final Report was released on March 13, 2019 at a special meeting of Council. In their Final report, ICSC identified "concerns that the present location, as currently constructed, would be extraordinarily difficult to provide the "whole story" and context that the community wants. If the block is moved, the Coalition recommends that there still be an acknowledgement plaque at that location." The report goes on to state that "there is no way to tell the "whole story" on Charles and Williams Streets - or in any singular space."

On May 14, 2019, Council accepted the final ICSC Report, and requested that the Memorials Advisory Commission be tasked to work to tell a more complete City story (which includes a review of City related tourism printed/online material, scripts, signage and to make recommendations as to how the story is told moving forward at Charles and William Streets). Community groups such as the NAACP, NPS, HFFI, UMW, Museum Council, City staff, among others, will be included as Council now takes steps to put the ICSC recommendations into place.

Staff has been directed to prepare a plan for removal of the auction block, and to execute removal by the end of this calendar year. The Fredericksburg Area Museum has agreed to accept the slave auction block and is coordinating on logistics, and planning interpretation now. The Memorials Advisory Commission is already on task and working though materials delivered to them at their meeting on June 5, 2019. Their work is likely to take several years to accomplish.

For more information feel free to visit [www.Fredericksburgva.gov](http://www.Fredericksburgva.gov) or call the City Manager's Office at 540-372-1010.

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