

CITY OF CHARLOTTESVILLE, VIRGINIA
CITY COUNCIL AGENDA



Agenda Date:	December 5, 2016
Action Required:	Approve a resolution to name the proposed Vinegar Hill Park and provide funding for wayfinding signage
Presenter:	Edwina St. Rose and Melanie Miller, Co-Chairs, Charlottesville Historic Resources Committee (HRC)
Staff Contacts:	Mary Joy Scala, Preservation & Design Planner, Department of Neighborhood Development Services (NDS) Alex Ikefuna, Director, NDS
Title:	Proposed Vinegar Hill Park – Resolution to name and provide \$15,000 for signage

Background:

The Charlottesville Historic Resources Committee has been working for at least four years to replace (or supplement) the current Vinegar Hill marker (Attachment 1) with a series of interpretive markers. Recently, the Committee agreed that the best location for new Vinegar Hill interpretive markers would be the west end of the Downtown Mall, in close proximity to what was the heart of the Vinegar Hill business district. Edwina St. Rose, a Co-Chair of the Historic Resources Committee, introduced the idea that the location could be appropriately named as “Vinegar Hill Park.”

Lawrence Halprin’s original plan for the Downtown Mall supports this concept. In the attached drawing (c.1974), he depicts “Vinegar Hill Park” located at the western terminus of the Mall, in the current location of the Omni Hotel. (Attachment 2).

The HRC had a concept plan with signage details prepared *pro bono* by landscape architect .Laura Knott, ASLA (Attachment 3). This plan shows the proposed park to include the plaza on West Water Street, the plaza at Old Preston Avenue, and the linear landscaped walkways in between. Carrie Rainey, Urban Design Planner for the City, has reviewed the proposal in the field and has confirmed its feasibility.

To assist with writing the markers, Edwina St. Rose, Co-Chair, contacted Scot French, a digital/public historian, who has documented the history and razing of the Vinegar Hill neighborhood in his comprehensive study, “The Vinegar Hill Project” and in film, “That World is Gone: Race and Displacement in a Southern Town”. Scot has agreed to help tell this important story on a series of interpretive markers. The HRC will also offer expanded information and photos on our www.charlottesville.org/historicresources website.

Committee members also met with Elizabeth Meyer, local scholar of Lawrence Halprin, who will act as an advisor on the project. (Attachment 4) is a timeline of the Downtown Mall.

Discussion:

In order to implement the proposed concept plan, the HRC is requesting two things: (1) that City Council officially name the portion of City right-of-way encompassed by the two plazas and the area connecting them as “Vinegar Hill Park;” and (2) that City Council identify and approve funding for \$15,000 to install signage to identify that area as “Vinegar Hill Park.”

The concept plan is intended to be simple in design and cost, so that the park could be named and dedicated immediately. The signage and markers could follow soon, likely within the year. In the future, a Phase 2 plan could be developed and funded as desired.

Phase 1

1. City Council names this area as “Vinegar Hill Park.”
2. City Council funds new signage (similar to the existing green wayfinding signage on the Mall) to be located at both ends of the new Vinegar Hill Park as follows:
 - i. At Water Street plaza replace the existing monument sign, “Downtown Mall” with a new monument sign, “Welcome to Vinegar Hill Park Downtown Mall;”
 - ii. At Water Street plaza add two new double signs, “Downtown Mall” and “Vinegar Hill Park” on two lamp posts;
 - iii. At Old Preston Avenue plaza add two new single signs, “Vinegar Hill Park” on two lamp posts.
3. The HRC produces and locates up to four historic markers (single-sided kiosks) that tell the story of Vinegar Hill life (housing, businesses, institutions) and its razing (events leading up to it; where the residents were relocated). Scot French and Elizabeth Meyer have agreed to assist with the text, and the HRC will pay for these markers.
4. The Department of Parks & Recreation is currently researching, and the Board of Architectural Review will be approving, additional seating for the Downtown Mall. If appropriate, some of the seating could be located in Vinegar Hill Park.
5. There could be upgrades to landscaping in the existing planters. The Omni Hotel has upgrades already planned on their property.

Phase 2 (possible future CIP item)

1. Upgrade the brick in this area, and upgrade the concrete bands to granite, similar to 2009 upgrades to the rest of the Mall.
2. Explore opportunities for a mural, possibly a view of the former commercial buildings that lined this part of West Main Street.
3. Have the entire park re-designed, including the plazas, walkways, stairs, planters and landscaping. Consider terraces, or a water feature.

Alignment with City Council’s Vision and Strategic Plan:

The project supports City Council’s Vision, specifically “Community of Mutual Respect,” and “Charlottesville Arts and Culture.” It contributes to Goal 2 of the Strategic Plan, “Be a safe, equitable, thriving and beautiful community,” specifically Objective 2.5, “Provide natural and historic resources stewardship;” and Objective 2.6 “Engage in robust and context-sensitive urban planning.” It contributes to Goal 3, “Have a strong and diversified economy,” specifically Objective 3.4, “Promote diverse cultural tourism.” It contributes to Goal 5, “Foster strong

connections,” specifically Objective 5.1, “Respect and nourish diversity,” and Objective 5.2, “Build collaborative partnerships,” and Objective 5.3, “Promote community engagement.”

Community Engagement:

The HRC called a public meeting on September 1, 2016 at City Space to present the proposal to other groups that might have an interest in the project. The following Charlottesville groups were invited: Blue Ribbon Commission on Race, Memorials and Public Spaces; Board of Architectural Review (BAR); Historic Resources Committee (HRC); Human Rights Commission (HRC); Downtown Business Association (DBAC); Planning Commission; African American Heritage Center; Parks & Recreation Advisory Board; PLACE Task Force; and City Council. All comments were positive.

Budgetary Impact:

The current request for \$15,000 from Council to fund the proposed signage to identify Vinegar Hill Park is a one-time request. **October 2019 Note: \$15,000 request was not allocated**

The Historic Resources Committee intends to pay for the four interpretive markers from the \$5,000 annual budget funding it receives from City Council to implement its mission “...to advocate for historic preservation; to promote an appreciation of local historic resources, ... and to encourage and coordinate ... the documentation and interpretation of local history.”

Recommendation:

Staff recommends that City Council take action to officially name the portion of City right-of-way encompassed by the two plazas and the area connecting them as “Vinegar Hill Park,” and to identify a funding source for the requested funding for \$15,000 to install signage to identify that area as “Vinegar Hill Park,” as proposed.

Alternatives:

City Council could choose not to name this area as Vinegar Hill Park, or Council could choose to name this area as Vinegar Hill Park, but not to fund the signage. Council could also choose to defer action on both requests. The HRC will continue to work on the interpretive markers in any case.

Attachments:

1. The current Vinegar Hill marker
2. Lawrence Halprin’s Proposal for Vinegar Hill Park, from an article in Magazine of Albemarle County History, Volume 68, 2010.
3. Concept Plan and Signage Details for proposed Vinegar Hill Park by Laura Knott, ASLA July 20, 2016
4. Timeline of the Downtown Mall
5. Cost estimates

Attachment 1. The current Vinegar Hill marker



Vinegar Hill A Forgotten Neighborhood

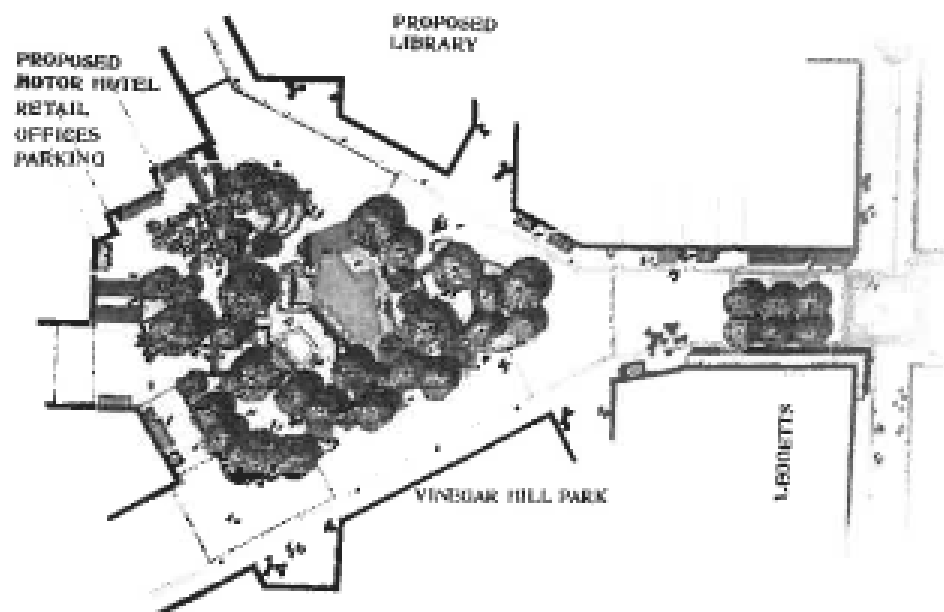
“Vinegar Hill,” one of the city’s first neighborhoods, was bordered loosely by Preston Ave., West Main St., and Fourth Street. It was established by Irish families in the early 1800s and incorporated into Charlottesville in 1835.

First called the “Random Row,” the origin of the name “Vinegar Hill” remains obscure. Ruled by the O’Tooles, the O’Traceys and the O’Donovans, the local tradition has it that National League pitcher Charlie Ferguson- a four time 20 game winner in the mid 1880s- was born and raised here.

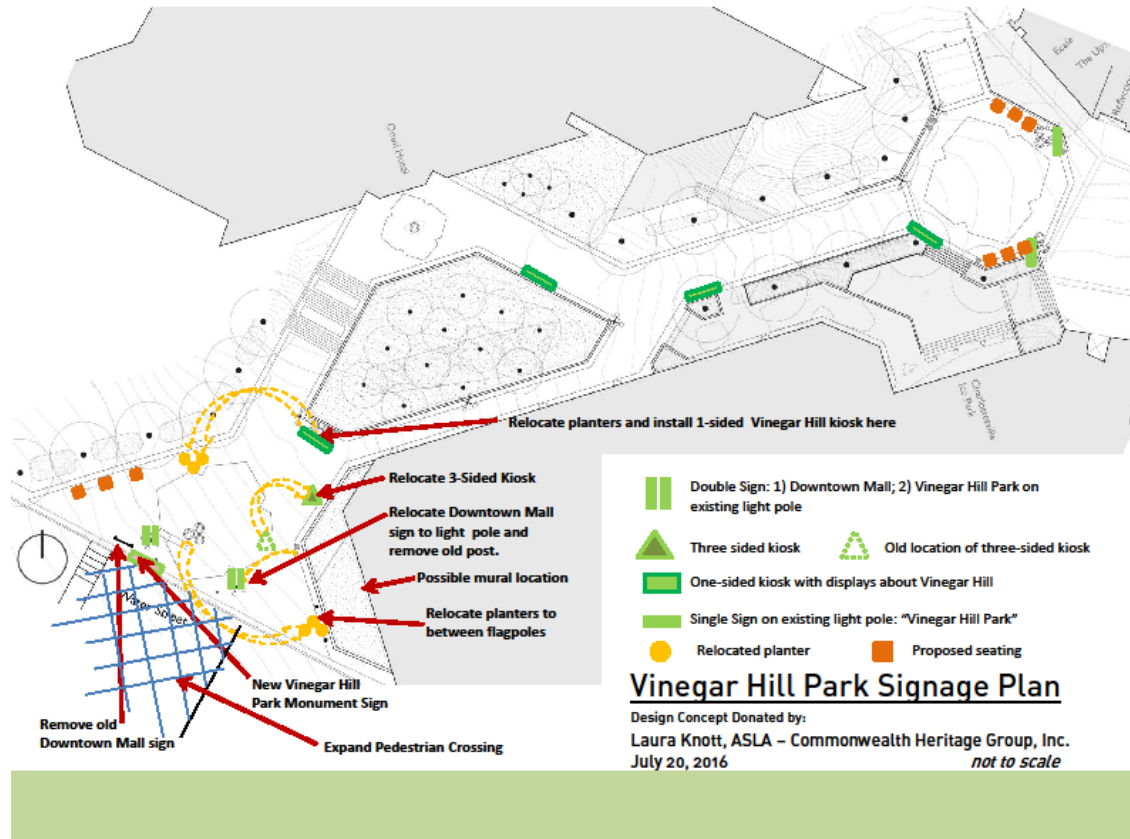
African Americans first moved onto the “Hill” after the Civil War. From the 1920s to the early 1960s it was the city’s principle black business district and the vibrant center of the community’s social life.

In the 1960s, noting “Vinegar Hill’s” large number of substandard homes, the voters of Charlottesville decided to redevelop the 20 acre neighborhood. Sadly, because of a poll tax, many of the residents were denied a say in their own future. By March 1965, one church, 30 businesses, and 158 families—140 of which were black—had been relocated. Today, “Vinegar Hill” is just a memory.

Attachment 2. Lawrence Halprin's Proposal for Vinegar Hill Park, from an article in Magazine of Albemarle County History, Volume 68, 2010.



Lawrence Halprin Associates, Proposal for Vinegar Hill Park (c. 1974). Penn Architectural Archives.



Attachment 4. Timeline of the Downtown Mall

1964 Vinegar Hill was demolished
1976 Five blocks of East Main Street were pedestrianized
1980 Two blocks of West Main Street were added to the pedestrian mall
1983 The federal courthouse was built
1985 The Omni was built and the mall extended to Water Street
1995 The Ice Park (Main Street Arena) was built
2005 The east end of the Mall from 6th Street NE to Belmont Bridge was completed
2009 The Mall was renovated from Old Preston Avenue to 6th Street NE

Attachment 5. Cost estimates

Staff found 2010 pricing for the existing green wayfinding signs, and added 10.5% to the cost:

Monument sign - A similar large sign with two posts and no stone base cost \$3,510 (\$2,493 material + \$1017 labor) 2016 cost= \$3,879

Pole signs - A single sign to attach to an existing pole cost \$1,040, which price included installation. 2016 cost = \$1,149 (x2 double and 2 single, or 6 total signs) = \$6,894

Total = \$10,773 (The HRC is requesting \$15,000 from City Council)

The HRC will be responsible for the interpretive markers:

The 1-sided kiosk cost \$5,690 (4,508 material + 1182 labor) 2016 cost= \$6,287 (x 4 signs)= \$25,148.

**RESOLUTION
TO RESERVE A PORTION OF THE DOWNTOWN PEDESTRIAN MALL,
AS DEFINED IN CITY CODE SEC. 28-2(b), AS AN AREA TO
BE NAMED "VINEGAR HILL PARK"**

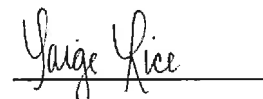
WHEREAS, the City's Historic Resources committee has recommended that, in commemoration of the historical significance of the Vinegar Hill neighborhood, a portion of the public right-of-way at the west end of the Downtown Pedestrian Mall should be reserved, landscaped and improved as an area to be known as "Vinegar Hill Park"; and

WHEREAS, this project will implement a concept originally shown within Lawrence Halprin's original plan for the Downtown Mall (ca. 1974) and the proposed improvements include signage and kiosks that will educate the general public about the historical significance of the Vinegar Hill neighborhood;

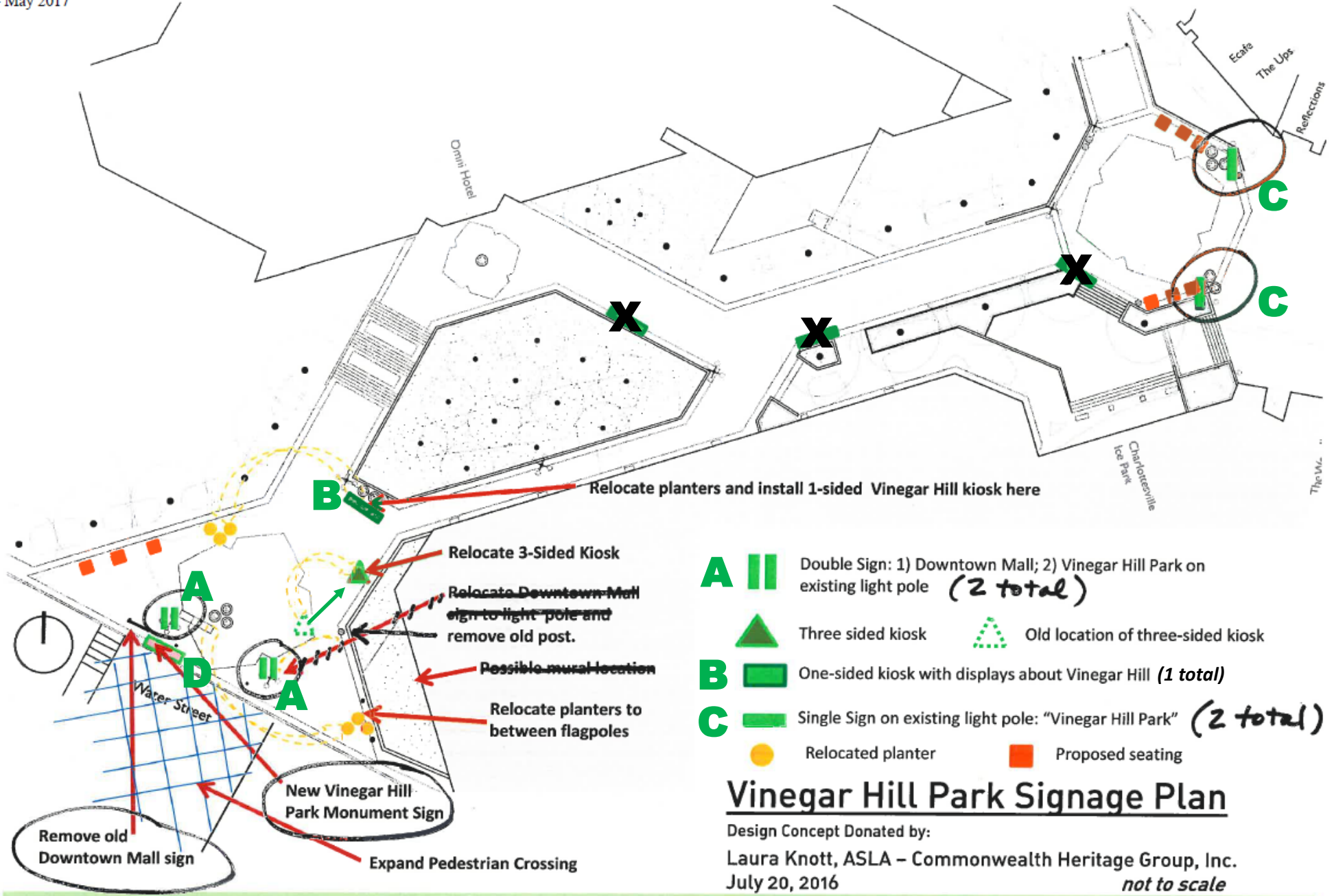
NOW, THEREFORE, be it resolved by the Charlottesville City Council that a portion of the public right-of-way located at the west end of the Downtown Pedestrian Mall, as that term is defined in City Code Sec. 28-2(b), shall be reserved and improved as shown within a document titled "*Concept Plan and Signage Details for proposed Vinegar Hill Park by Laura Knott, ASLA, July 20, 2016*", hereafter to be known as "Vinegar Hill Park"; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT Vinegar Hill Park shall be and remain part of the public right-of-way referenced in City Code Sec. 28-2(b). The NDS Director and the City's Fire Official shall update the maps referred to within Sec. 28-2(b), (c), and (d), as may be necessary as a result of the improvements authorized within this resolution.

Approved by Council
December 5, 2016



Clerk of Council



- A II** Double Sign: 1) Downtown Mall; 2) Vinegar Hill Park on existing light pole **(2 total)**
- B** One-sided kiosk with displays about Vinegar Hill **(1 total)**
- C** Single Sign on existing light pole: "Vinegar Hill Park" **(2 total)**
- Relocated planter
- Proposed seating
- Three sided kiosk
- Old location of three-sided kiosk

Vinegar Hill Park Signage Plan

Design Concept Donated by:
 Laura Knott, ASLA - Commonwealth Heritage Group, Inc.
 July 20, 2016 *not to scale*



Single Sign on Light:
Vinegar Hill Park

C

(on 2 lights)



Double Sign on Light:
Downtown Mall and
Vinegar Hill Park

A

(on 2 lights)

Historic Resources Committee
to develop text and graphics
for marker.



Single-Sided Vinegar
Hill Park Kiosk

B

(at 1 location)



Monument Sign, West
Entrance to Vinegar Hill Park

D

(at 1 location)

Vinegar Hill Park Signage Details

Laura Knott, ASLA – Commonwealth Heritage Group, Inc.
July 20, 2016

not to scale

Scott French - Outline - Feb 2017

Hi Edwina,

I do not have an update except to say I am working on this and hope to have draft text/images by next month (Feb. 15).

Best,
Scot

Historical Marker. I am still organizing my thoughts and materials and placing them in Google Drive to share with you, Mary Jo, and Charlene. I'm thinking we need to periodize the neighborhood's story so that it can be understood as a series of relatively distinct moments tied to larger state, regional, and national events.

- a) The neighborhood's multicultural origins in "Random Row" of antebellum/Civil War/Reconstruction eras - spotlight on intermingling lives, labors, and residences of European immigrants, native white Southern, African Americans of free or enslaved ancestry
- b) The rise of VH as Black Metropolis from late 19th c. through the Great Depression/WWII era. This is the period when African Americans acquired property and businesses on VH and, after 1912, found themselves increasingly "hemmed in" by Jim Crow residential segregation policies
- c) The post-war decline and demolition of VH (Urban Renewal/Removal), including neighborhood displacement/dispersal to geographically remote subdivisions and the first public housing development (Westhaven), fueled by economic change and federal/city planning policies targeting urban "blight"
- d) The aftermath and post-Civil Rights-era legacies, including desegregated schools and neighborhoods, VH preservation/commemoration efforts (JSAAHC, walking tours, etc.), and outreach to promote neighborhood-level civic engagement in public policy decisions.

I'm thinking, too, that we will need an organizing theme that brings it all together in a balance of civic pride (with focus on rich, vibrant community life that African Americans created in and around VH: owner-occupied homes, small businesses, clubs, churches, etc.) and critical self-reflection (what social, economic, and political forces gave rise to this segregated world, then led to the neighborhood's decline and destruction with little community input?). That's a lot to convey in a series of outdoor markers, but perhaps if we think of it in terms of 4-5 "boards," with well-chosen images, timelines, and vignettes, it will all fall into place!