

Armed Forces Retirement Home



Meeting Minutes

Meeting Title: Section 106 Committee Meeting re Draft Preservation Plan
Date: October 4, 2006, 9:00 – 11:30 AM
Location: AFRH Sherman Building
Attendees: See Attached Sheet

Tim Sheckler reviewed the background behind the meeting, e.g. to introduce the draft Historic Preservation Plan to the Section 106 Committee and provide an update on the development project. He introduced Emily Eig, Traceries, who provided an overview of the draft plan. (Presentation slides attached.)

Questions/Discussion

A summary of key discussion points / themes follow.

Q: Did Lincoln use the Home only in the summer months?

A: His use of the Home extended beyond summer months, perhaps to November, so could be considered "seasonal". It is the extent of his activities that make his time at the Home significant, rather than the frequency of his visits.

Q: What is the history of public use of/access to the site?

A: From minutes of the board of governors, it is clear that they viewed the Home as property belonging to the soldiers and not a public park. The site was bounded by a white picket fence initially and the stone and iron fence was constructed in 1876. It was treated as a military installation and to enter, permission was required. Later (1868) roads were constructed on the site and restricted public access was allowed during certain times.

Q: Wasn't that just their perception that this was soldiers and not federal property?

A: Yes, but there was always a concern about the safety of the residents, either from themselves due to drinking problems (Congress legislated the proximity of bars to the Home) or from people beyond the perimeters of the site. There was a crime wave of sorts in 1890. In the 1920s there was concern about crime and the site was closed for a period of time. In 1953, it was closed to the public vehicular traffic. Some sports activities were allowed to take place but the request to construct a public ball field was turned down. It is not clear when it was fully closed to the public in recent times, as some pedestrian traffic was allowed in the early 1960s. The minutes of the governors refer to the cost of allowing entry to the public and the burden on the Home in the absence of any federal funding source. As well, the board stopped funding landscape improvements and discussion of the cost and benefits of such expenditures was a regular theme in the minutes.

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Q: Will minutes of the board of governors be made available?

A: They are available at the National Archives.

Q: What criteria were used in the plan to evaluate the contributing resources?

A: National Register criteria were used. There are four criteria and relate to events, people, architecture and landscape architecture, and the ability of the resource to yield information.

Q: It is rumored that the Home has the first medical operating room in the country; is this true?

A: We found no evidence that the operating room at the Home was the first in the country.

Q: What is the historical significance of the golf course?

A: The original golf course is no longer intact and we haven't located its boundaries since the topography was altered to construct the reservoir.

Q: Some long-time neighbors remember that there were openings in the historic fence along Park View. Was this the case?

A: There was a gate but we have found no evidence of breaks in the fence itself.

Discussion ensued about the history of the fence and of the white picket fence as a symbol of the earlier, rural character of the Home and the environs, followed by urbanization and the construction of the stone and iron fence. Emily Eig commented that one way the Home may have kept urbanization at bay was by acquiring adjacent properties. For example, the Corcoran property was acquired when a cemetery was proposed there. St. Elizabeth's Hospital was mentioned and it was observed that a study of the approaches to containment/security at each campus would be interesting, particularly in light of current security concerns in general.

Q: Does the study address the history and development of surrounding areas? It would be useful to describe this urbanization and the Home's need to contain itself.

A: No, that was not addressed as such.

Q: With regard to the changing boundaries as the Home gave or sold land for road construction: was there any sort of compensation to the Home, such as a better fence or landscaping?

A: The Home was only compensated for land after the 1951 acquisition of the southern portion of the property for the DC hospital and VA facilities. Lands to the east of the current property were taken with no compensation. It is not clear if AFRH received any other considerations for road 'takings' in the 1950s.

Q: The southeastern area is shown as having no historic integrity yet some of us think there are important historic view corridors in that direction. Can space have integrity?

A: The viewsheds are described in the report as being contributing but the land itself in that area has been altered.

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Q: What about the smoke stack; is that contributing? The area where it is located is shown as non-contributing.

A: Yes, the smoke stack and heat plant are contributing. Contributing resources may be located in areas that are not contributing, as is the case for the smoke stack.

Q: Is the allee of trees along Pershing Drive in a contributing or non-contributing area? They are important and should be protected.

A: They are in character area 9 and are contributing.

Q: This discussion has focused on the Home and its resources. Did you address plans, such as the MacMillan Plan, that reference the Home? Was the MacMillan Plan addressed in the board of governors' minutes? It would be helpful to have information about other plans, such as plans prepared by NCPC, that address the Home so that there is a sense of how it was viewed in the context of the city as a whole.

A: Yes, the MacMillan Plan and Signal Corps, which used a tree and tower (both no longer in existence) at the Home to communicate with the White House during the Civil War. We haven't found that the MacMillan Plan was addressed in the minutes but can check again. We will meet with NCPC to get more information on other plans that reference the Home and include additional information on the Homes' relationship to the city as a whole, such as providing land for the reservoir..

Q: Given the significance of the Home to the Civil War, does the plan address the military significance?

A: Yes.

Q: With regard to replacing trees, it is important to consider the bulk of trees, and trees en masse, rather than simply providing directions for replacing individual trees. There needs to be a long-term plan for managing the image and presence of a wooded hilltop. And there needs to be room for large trees to grow. Has that been addressed? In addition, the topography of the land and the trees is significant on site and when viewed from various points in the city.

A: Yes, the plan looks at both. For example, Chapel Woods is a wooded landscape and should be maintained as such but the quadrangle is a designed landscape and replacement trees should adhere to that design. The plan also addresses views to and from the site. Some of the guidelines regarding landscape and trees pertain not so much to historic elements but to the need for design guidelines for plantings such as are included in the draft master plan. The recommendations in the preservation plan pertain to historic plantings.

Q: Will the 3 developers have sufficient information to understand the importance of historic preservation here?

A: GSA and AFRH are making a similar presentation to developers this week and they will also have access to the draft plan.

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Comments

Mr. Loza, representing Councilor Graham, explained that the Councilor was unable to attend due to a conflict but was pleased to be participating on the committee and to be part of a true consulting relationship with the community.

CFA noted that the fence / border is an important component in the development needs attention accordingly.

A comment was made raising the issue of how AFRH is seen fitting into the context of the city as a whole.

Rosemary Sullivan, new rector of St. Paul's Episcopal Church, introduced herself and said that she looks forward to being an active participant as well.

Next Steps

Emily Eig outlined the next steps for the preservation plan, shown in the attached presentation materials.

Tim Sheckler provided an update on the development project, shown in the attached.

Committee members asked for additional time to review the plan and that it be made available on CDs in addition to its posting on the web site.

Action Items

- Tim Sheckler will email the committee members to notify them when the Historic Preservation Plan is on the web and will mail CDs of the plan to committee members if they do not have a broadband connection. He will also provide a comment form and asked that members use that form when submitting comments. He will compile the comments and the compilation will serve as the basis of the next meeting.
- Members will provide their comments to Tim Sheckler November 17th. His email is tim.sheckler@gsa.gov
- The next meeting will be held during the week of December 4th.

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Section 106 Consulting Parties Meeting

4 October 2006

Sign-in Sheet

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