Initial Recommendations for Archaeology and History at Fort Ward Park
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Although the Stage 1 archaeological investigation by the Ottery Group has not been completed in the park, I am preparing these recommendations at the request of the Advisory Group for consideration in their final report. All discussion below is based upon incomplete information without sufficient analysis. However, some general statements can be made at this time.

1. Usefulness of Ground Penetrating Radar in Identification of Graves

Archaeological work to date indicates that Ground-penetrating Radar (GPR) has some use for identifying graves at Fort Ward Park. While some graves have been identified through this method, other graves have not. To date, there is not a 1:1 correlation between GPR signatures and actual graves. More will be known after the Old Graveyard and Jackson Cemetery investigations are completed, but GPR appears to have mixed results. Many GPR signatures have not been associated with graves, and in some cases, more graves have been identified in the ground than signatures predicted. There may be future use for GPR in helping to identify the extent of the graves/boundaries of these cemeteries, but ground-truthing would also be needed to be assured that all graves are identified in a given area.

2. Old Graveyard

Given that the investigation demonstrated that there are more graves in the Old Graveyard than headstones and that these headstones are deteriorating, it is important to have a protection plan in place Consideration should be given to conducting more archaeological work to determine the boundaries of the Old Graveyard and historical research to understand how these graves are associated with the contiguous Oakland Baptist Church Cemetery and whether individual or family names may be identified. The protection plan can include elements, such as, fencing around the Old Graveyard, interpretive signage, methods of conserving and protecting the historic markers, new markers to identify additional graves, memorial, etc.).

3. Maintenance Yard

Much of this area has been changed, and in the areas investigated, little remains of the historic soils. However, some artifacts and subsurface features, such as graves, trash pits, privies, wells, etc., could still be present in unexcavated areas particularly around the school/church/home and in the southern section. The investigation has located the graves of Clara and Robert Adams and revealed that her headstone had been resituated on newer fill soils but still aligned with a grave. No other graves were found, and no GPR signatures proved to be graves. However, only a limited part of the yard was investigated. Graves and other archaeological materials can still be present in untested areas. A small portion of the school/church/home foundation has been found. There may be more evidence in the western portion of this structure, but additional work is needed to make this determination. In some areas, of the yard deeper features may be present, such as the privy/trash pit discovered with early 20th century artifacts. Planning is needed to determine uses of the yard in the future, whether the fence should be removed, marking the other grave, memorials, etc. Any ground-disturbing work outside the investigated areas should have archaeological testing and monitoring built into the planning process of these projects.

4. Jackson Cemetery

The work has not been completed in this cemetery, however, some graves have already been identified. A protection plan is needed that can include: fencing, interpretive signage, markers for graves, erosion-control measures and additional research to identify individuals who may be buried here

5. Shorts Family Lot

Shovel test pits document that the lot does have some archaeological integrity and features may be found. The trenches called for as part of the investigation have not been conducted here yet. Recommendations await completion of the work.

6. General Recommendations

At this point in the process, the following needs for the preservation and interpretation of Fort Ward Park's cultural resources can be outlined. The historical research should be conducted first. Completing the survey addressed in the second point is crucial to park planning and day-to-day management of ground-disturbing projects (tree planting, etc.) It should be noted that interpretive planning can be done throughout the following tasks and would greatly benefit the appreciation of African American history as well as the historic significance of the park as a whole. Public involvement should be a part of all these recommendations.

- Complete documentary research and report with context to provide understanding of the history of those living/working in what is now the park and the development of the park within the larger Seminary neighborhood and place within American History

- Archaeological Protection of Fort Ward Park: Conduct archaeological survey through shovel-testing across the rest of the park with the exception of the historic fort to identify areas with archaeological potential; Use metal-detection in selected areas across the park to find Civil War artifacts; Produce maps overlaying archaeological and metal-detection results on CAD & GIS-produced historic templates so that the archaeological information relates to families, buildings, landscape, roads, etc; Produce sensitivity maps of areas in the park which have archaeological/historical significance for park planning purposes; Prepare Protection Plan; Prepare recommendations for further archaeological study. .

- Cemeteries and Graves: Identify boundaries through investigation beyond identified graves to locate additional graves; Produce protection plans and consider marking all graves; Produce interpretive plans; Implement such plans. Use appropriate methods for identifying other graves in areas noted in additional historical research and oral history.

- Additional Archaeological Study: If there is interest in more information about the African American community, or others identified through survey measures, a research design can be prepared to more fully excavate the school/church/home area, features identified through this and future stages of archaeology, the Shorts Lot or other houses, outbuildings, etc.

- All ground-disturbing actions should be reviewed for potential impact throughout the park. However, no additional archaeological work is needed before planning for projects to improve drainage. But archaeological review during this process will identify necessary excavation and monitoring needs based upon engineering solutions. After archaeological survey across the park, it may be possible to identify areas in which ground-disturbing actions can occur without review. However, close staff coordination will provide efficient methods of preservation and park improvements.

- Continue to update the Cultural Resource Inventory and Protection plans as more information is acquired.

- Produce Interpretive Plan to include themes, messages, and methods using different mediums; Update plan with new information and community interests.

- Development and continuation of a public planning process for Descendent Family and community input on the above tasks.