

September 15, 2022

VIA EMAIL

The Honorable Levar M. Stoney
The Honorable Members of Richmond City Council
900 East Broad Street
Richmond, VA 23219

Re: Evergreen and East End Cemeteries

Dear Mr. Mayor & Members of City Council:

We are representatives of established Richmond African American families, organizations, and neighborhoods as well as descendants concerned about the future of both Evergreen and East End cemeteries. These two historic African American cemeteries have been featured prominently in the news since the winding down of Enrichmond's operations. Enrichmond was established over 30 years ago by the City to support its parks and open spaces. However, in 2020, the City withdrew its funding including funding for historic Evergreen and East End cemeteries. This Foundation is the current owner of the cemeteries. We understand that the charter establishing the Foundation provided that upon its dissolution, its assets be returned to the City of Richmond. Evergreen and East End cemeteries are two of those assets, and we strongly support the City's acquiring them for the following reasons:

- These sacred grounds are the resting places for over 10,000 of Richmond's Black residents, including Maggie Lena Walker, John Mitchell, Jr., Rev. J. Andrew Bowler and Dr. Sarah Garland Boyd Jones, as well as many of the City's early Black history makers and trailblazers. These free people of color worked to rebuild the City and Virginia after the Civil War.
- In 2019, Evergreen was named a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Site of memory associated to The Slave Route Resistance, Liberty, Heritage. The only other African American so-named site in Virginia is Fort Monroe. The national and international significance of these burial grounds demand City stewardship.
- Your office and Richmond City Council jointly recognized the collective efforts of **descendants** and cultural affinity groups to develop a restoration plan. This gubernatorial award-winning plan was revealed to the Richmond community during a formal program you attended in February 2020 at the Maggie Walker House.

- The City has a Cemeteries Department, and these two cemeteries are the only ones NOT under the City's stewardship. This sends the wrong message. Such historic sites worthy of a UNESCO designation should be considered jewels among the City's cemeteries.
- There is a conservation easement on these grounds which was purchased by the Virginia Outdoors Foundation (VOF) to protect both cemeteries from ever being developed or used inconsistently with their original purpose. Through the conservation easement, the state has recognized the historic significance of these two sites. VOF is committed to the continued support of these sites; however, it is also time for the City to step up. Other funds are available through state legislation supporting historic African American cemeteries that would inure to the benefit of the City.
- The City has removed monuments to The Lost Cause at a cost of \$1.8 million dollars. Your office has committed its support to both the Shockoe Hill African Burying Ground and as well as preserving the African American Burial Ground in Shockoe Bottom. Are these properties any less worthy? We believe preserving the compelling history of Richmond's Reconstruction Era citizens is just as urgent.
- It is our understanding that your executive staff is working to bring forward a recommendation to your office that aligns with our position. In addition, Council Member Ann-Frances Lambert has committed to co-patron a paper supporting the City's acquisition of these two properties.

For these reasons, among others, we strongly support the City's acquisition of both East End and Evergreen Cemeteries and that the City chart a positive path forward for their continued reclamation and restoration.

Sincerely,

Delegate Delores McQuinn
Member, Virginia General Assembly, 70th House District

Viola O. Baskerville
Descendant
Genealogist
Trustee, Virginia Outdoors Foundation

John Mitchell
Descendant

Founder, Richmond Planet Foundation

Jerome Legions

Community Activist

President, Carver Area Civic Improvement League

Larry Clark

President, Afro American Historical and Genealogical Society, Greater Richmond
(AAHGS-GRVA)

Michelle Evans Oliver

Founding President, Association for the Study of African American Life and History,
Richmond Chapter (ASALH Richmond)

Rev. J. Elijah Burke

Baptist General Convention of Virginia

Director of Health & Wellness, Men, Social Justice & Sacred Spaces

Cc: Chris Suarez, RTD, csuarez@timesdispatch.com