

**Fort Ward Park and Museum Area
Interagency Annual Report for FY2023
(July 1, 2022 – June 30, 2023)**

Introduction: In accordance with the Fort Ward Park and Museum Area Management Plan, adopted in 2015, and an interdepartmental MOU adopted in 2018, representatives from City departments that are responsible for managing Park operations have met quarterly to discuss issues and coordinate projects related to management of the Park's grounds, facilities and historic areas. These departments are: Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities (RPCA); the Office of Historic Alexandria (OHA); Department of General Services (DGS); and Transportation and Environmental Services (TES). This annual report summarizes the accomplishments and status of projects and initiatives for FY2023.

RPCA: In FY 2023, RPCA continued to make progress on accessibility projects and natural lands management.

Picnic Shelter Accessibility Improvements. In May 2023, Sagres Construction completed construction of the picnic shelter accessible pathway and associated improvements. The picnic area was reopened in time for the summer and fall rental season. Additional improvements included new stairs to the pavilion, new handrailing, new barbeque grills and re-paving of the loop road adjacent to the accessible parking spaces. The final archaeological monitoring report was also completed and incorporated findings from the loop road excavation (Refer to Archaeology section below for report).

Playground Accessibility Project. In FY 2023, the City held [four community meetings](#) and open houses concerning the relocation of the playground. Initially five locations were proposed in 2022, with two preferred locations, Site B (moving the playground to the top of the hill) and Site D (moving the playground south of the amphitheater) were determined to be the most viable based on community feedback. Staff and consultants studied both locations in-depth, completing studies of each location. The study evaluated impacts to cultural and natural resources, including construction related impacts, and weighed the concerns and opportunities of each location. Site D was considered advantageous due to its proximity to restrooms and other uses such as the amphitheater and picnic areas. However, concerns about Site D include situating a playground on land formerly owned by the Peter and Jackson families, construction access, impacts to mature trees, and playground visibility.

At the [May 11, 2023 community meeting](#), staff presented the final recommended location, known as Site B which moves the playground to the top of the hill from its current location. This site was overwhelmingly supported by the Fort Community descendants. Most notably, the location has remained largely undeveloped with little evidence of dwellings and structures associated with the Fort Community or the Civil War era, likely because of steep terrain. While there were concerns about Site B including stormwater management, and proximity to the loop road, Rifle Trench, and Shorts property, those concerns could be effectively mitigated during the design process by incorporating best practices to reduce disturbance such as low impact stormwater management, design and construction.

Natural Resources Management. Staff held an on-site community meeting on November 19, 2022 to review the process to restore the meadow area and its boundaries. Throughout FY 2023, staff and contractors employed best management practices to treat all non-native invasive plants in the meadow area and throughout the park. Practices included large scale manual removals of woody vegetation to address successional growth, periodic foliar treatments, and annual/bi-annual mowing.

Fort Ward Accessible Parking Improvements. This project will provide an ADA compliant parking space in each vehicular parking area. Test pits, monitored by Alexandria Archaeology, were completed in February 2023 in the Museum parking lot and the front entrance gravel lot. The test pits would help determine the approximate depth of disturbance needed to construct the ADA parking spaces. The engineer consultant, Adtek Engineers, completed the 90% design plans.

OHA:

Archaeology. Alexandria Archaeology has continued to oversee a variety of projects within the park.

- **Picnic Shelter Accessibility Improvements project.** Archaeology played a significant role in the upgrades to Picnic Area 2 that included a new accessible route and parking improvements for users of the picnic shelter area. An archaeological consultant monitored the project, identified and recorded several significant archaeological resources. A summary of the findings is available here: https://www.alexandriava.gov/sites/default/files/2023-02/Fort%20Ward%20ManSum%20_Picnic%20Shelter_Final%202-15-2023rs.pdf

Prior to the initiation of the Picnic Shelter project, Alexandria Archaeology prepared a documentary assessment of the project area. In the early twentieth century, the project area was owned and occupied by the Javins family, one of the founding families of The Fort community. The background report can be found here:

<https://www.alexandriava.gov/sites/default/files/2022-04/Fort-Ward-Management-Summary-Javins-Site-2022.pdf>

- **Playground Accessibility Project.** Archaeology has worked closely with RCPA and community members during the process of choosing a site for relocating the park's playground. Two final locations were considered, and Archaeology conducted background research on the historical uses of both locations within the park. The assessment of both prospective playground locations can be found here: <https://www.alexandriava.gov/sites/default/files/2023-02/Appendix%20PAA%20for%20Option%20B%20and%20D%20final%20February%202023.pdf>
- **Monitoring Projects in the Park.** Alexandria Archaeology has continued to be on-call for monitoring any ground disturbing activities that could potentially impact sensitive archaeological resources in the park. Archaeological monitoring took place this year: 1)

when a new gravestone was installed for Robert Adams; and 2) for initial testing for new ADA parking spots in two of the existing parking lots.

Interpretive Plan projects. Staff continued work on several interpretive projects, notably finalizing content for the revision and production of ten new historic fort markers to replace old, deteriorated ones. Interpretive signage was designed according to the new design template adopted by the Fort Ward Interpretive Plan process.

Park Memorial projects. Staff worked with a descendant of the Adams family to have a memorial stone produced to mark the grave site of Robert Adams, which was installed next to the burial site of his wife, Fort community matriarch Clara Adams. Flat stone markers were also installed to recognize the two grave sites in the Amanda Clark burial area. Staff continued to collaborate with Jackson family descendants on ideas for a Jackson Cemetery memorial monument. OHA staff led planning efforts to research fencing styles and procure a vendor for the installation of permanent metal fencing to protect and further recognize Fort community cemetery and burial areas.

Building improvements and preservation projects. Significant improvements to the Museum and historic outdoor areas, included:

- Replacement of deteriorated revetment in the restored Northwest bastion, and painting of the entirety of the revetment.
- Supervision of mowing operations in historically sensitive areas of the Park.
- Painting and waterproofing Museum basement walls.
- Coordination with RPCA arborists in removal or trimming of trees in historically sensitive areas and other parts of the Park.

Support from the Friends of Fort Ward. The Museum's friends group sponsored the annual Civil War Christmas in Camp event, and sponsored a Civil War musical performance by the 8th Regiment Green Machine Band for Civil War Camp Day.

DGS:

General Services coordinated with Museum staff on replacement of the bastion revetment, planning for renovation to the Fort Ward Ceremonial Gate, and planning for replacement of deteriorated stairways and platforms leading into the fort. DGS also supervised the waterproofing and painting of the Museum basement walls.

TES:

City surveyors performed survey work on the two grave sites in the Clark burial area to provide a context for placing stones on those burials. They also surveyed the Jackson Cemetery and the Clark and Adams burial areas to help plan for the fencing installation project.

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