

City of Alexandria, Virginia

# Douglass Cemetery Drainage and Preservation Updates



April 9, 2024  
Lee Center



## Meeting Agenda

- Introductions
- Douglass Cemetery History Overview
- Current Cemetery Conditions
- Archaeology Updates
- Plans to Mitigate Drainage Issues & Design Updates
- Timeline
- Preservation Updates and Next Steps
- Adjourn before 6:45 and regroup on site



# Introductions



- Office of Historic Alexandria
- Department of Project Implementation
- Transportation and Environmental Services
- Recreation, Parks & Cultural Activities
- Descendant Advisory Group, Friends of Douglass Cemetery
- Social Responsibility Group

# Historic Douglass Cemetery

A force of workmen [is] employed in opening up the walks, grading the ground and grading an entrance at the new Douglass Memorial cemetery for colored people, on the western outskirts of the city. The owners of the property preparing to erect a monument in the center of the cemetery to the memory of Fred. Douglass.

*Alexandria Gazette*, October 18, 1895

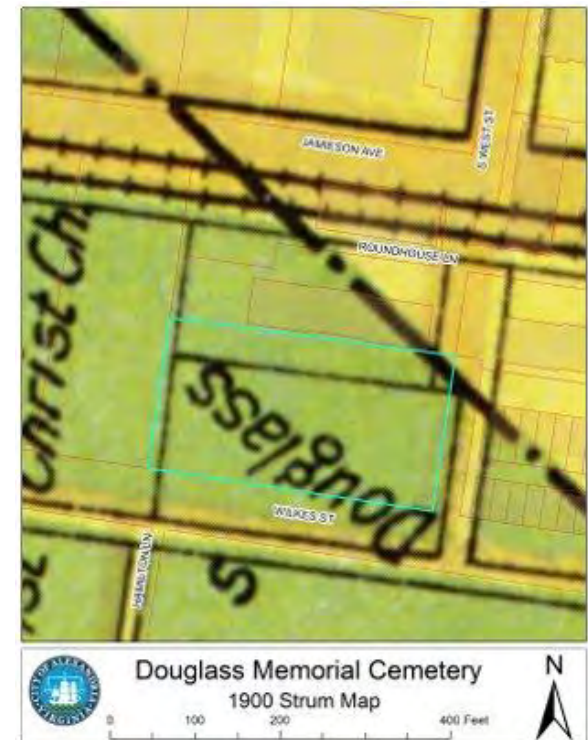
The Douglass cemetery, the new burying ground for colored people, which has been established here recently, was a day or two ago conveyed by the Washington owners to a board of trustees, consisting of Revs. Porter, Waring, Fields Cook and W. B. Dulaney and M. B. T. Murray, all colored, who will have control of the land in the future and who propose to make the cemetery a very handsome one. The trustees have organized by electing Rev. Porter president; Rev. Fields Cook, vice president, and M. B. T. Murray, secretary and treasurer.

*Alexandria Gazette*, February 26, 1896



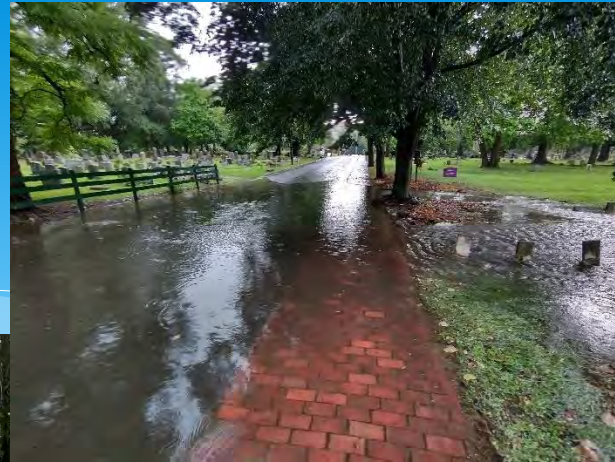
Cemetery boundaries shown in blue.  
Earliest map of the cemetery.

- Established in 1895 as a non-denominational, African American Cemetery in memory of Frederick Douglass (1818-1895).
- In use through 1975 when it was closed.
- 2,256 documented burials
- Headstones: 605 (including footstones and other markers)
- Many burials are unmarked.
- First known burial: 1896
- Last known burial: 1975
- City maintained property since 1976





# Douglass Cemetery Conditions



Storm event, July 2023.

- Primary condition: Periodic flooding and standing water
- Other preservation issues:
  - Gravestones generally in poor condition, in addition there are unmarked burials (Gravestone Condition Assessment, 2022)
  - Gazebo needs repair
  - Recently resolved (November 28, 2023) clouded ownership

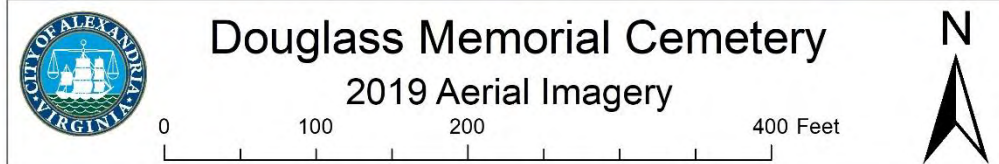
# Douglass Cemetery Drainage Analysis Review: Findings and Recommendations



Stormwater pipe runs N/S under walkway and gazebo



- Aging, clogged, and undersized stormwater pipe does not properly convey water to and through the cemetery
- Slope of swale does not promote drainage and water run-off
- Low spot fills with water during rain events with overland relief
- The design phase has started with Jacobs Engineering.





## Archaeological Testing

- Due to the sensitivity of the site, advance archaeological testing occurred in January.
- Goals: test GPR anomalies and to document the size and impact of the existing drainage pipe, ditch, trench
- Fieldwork: four trenches and two test units, mapping of all excavations and any subsurface deposits or features encountered during excavation.
- One grave was shaft identified
- Draft management summary submitted by Gray and Pape archaeologists.
- Gray and Pape provided data to Jacobs allowing for the establishment of a corridor within which ground-disturbing activities associated with the currently proposed project could likely be carried out without impacts to adjacent burials.



7 Excavation location map, Gray and Pape Draft Report

# Archaeological Testing



- Because the utility corridor boundaries were based in part on extrapolation rather than direct observation, Gray and Pape archaeologists recommend that all ground-disturbing activities associated with the installation of the new drainage system be monitored by a qualified archaeologist.
- Anticipatory Burial Permit remains open and will be revised when construction work is scheduled to occur.



Photo by Michael Johnson



Photo of existing utility trench by Gray and Pape



# Stormwater Project Design Updates (Project Components)



Limit of Disturbance  
New Drainage Ditch



**Douglass Cemetery**  
Proposed Grading Plan  
Date: 4/5/2024

Alexandria Archaeology

0 50 100 200 Feet

N

Test Pits and Trenches

Proposed Berm  
Proposed Storm Pipes

- **Replace** existing stormwater pipe in Douglass Cemetery and under Wilkes Street including replacement of southern inlet.
- **Raise** grade in the cemetery. Create a berm to prevent water overflow from Wilkes Street into Douglass Cemetery. Fill in low spot. Remove and reset about 250 gravestones. Create gentle slope from south to northern drainage swale.
- **Install** new drainage ditch between the low spot and the northern drainage swale to promote water flow.
- **Regrade** northern drainage swale to ensure water flows away and under Jamieson Lane.

# Stormwater Project Components: Replace Existing Pipe



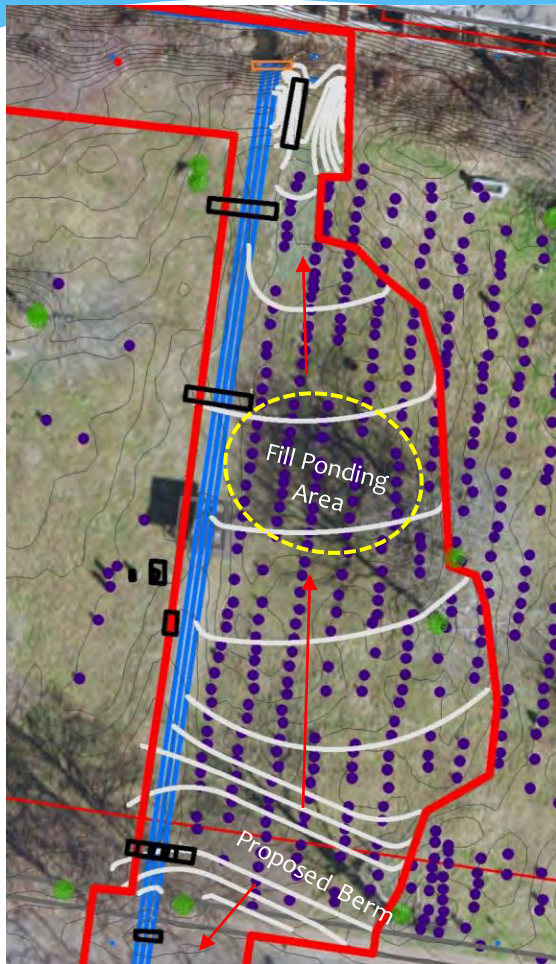
Existing Gazebo to be removed

- **Replace** existing stormwater pipe in Douglass Cemetery and under Wilkes Street including replacement of southern inlet.
  - Remove gazebo
  - Work from north to south within clearly demarcated utility corridor
  - Monitored by Archaeologists

Test Pits and Trenches



# Stormwater Project Components: Raise the Grade



 Test Pits and Trenches

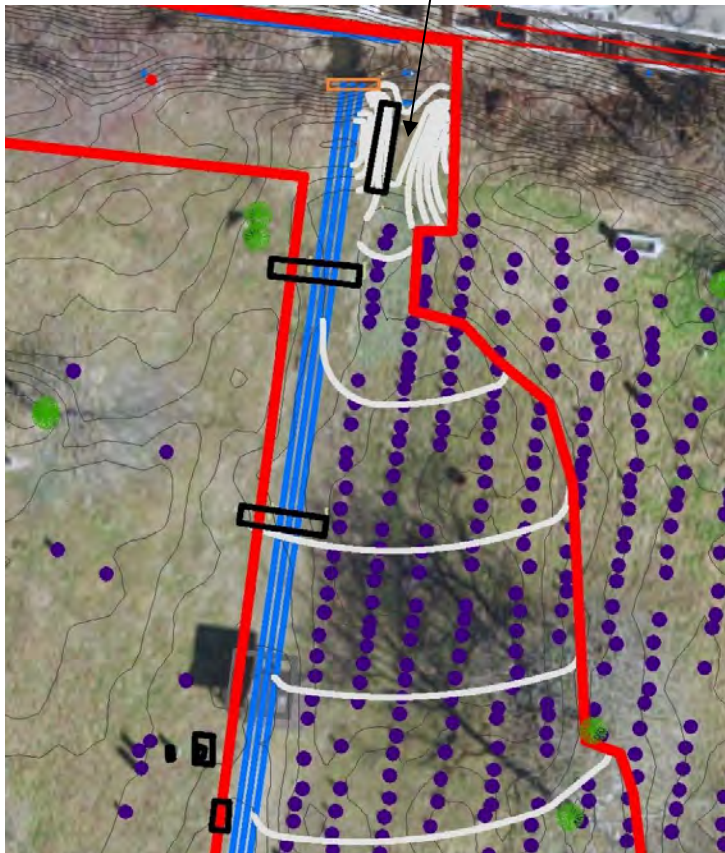
- **Raise** grade in the cemetery. Create a berm to prevent water overflow from Wilkes Street into Douglass Cemetery. Fill in low spot. Remove and reset about 250 gravestones. Create gentle slope from south to northern drainage swale.
- Gravestone conservator will support this work before, during, and after to ensure best practices.
- Gravestones will be carefully labeled and transferred to pallets and stored in secure fence.
- At the end of the drainage work, gravestones will be reset in exact location they were before infilling.
- Monitored by Archaeologists



# Stormwater Project Components: Install New Ditch



New Drainage Swale



 Test Pits and Trenches

- **Install** new drainage ditch between the low spot and the northern drainage swale to promote water flow.
  - Archaeological test trench indicated no burials present in this location.
  - Monitored by Archaeologists
- **Regrade** northern drainage swale to ensure water flows away and under Jamieson Lane.
  - Monitored by Archaeologists

# Projected Timeline



	2023 Dec	2024 Jan	Feb	March	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sep	2025 Late Spring
Archaeology	Burial Permit	Archaeological Testing									
Stormwater Design	Grading Plans				Permit Approval						
Bid Package							Bid Documents				
Bidding and Construction								Bidding and Procurement			Construction
Cemetery Preservation											

# Preservation Updates



Scope of work for Community History Project under development with the Descendant Advisory Group and Historic Alexandria

- Collection and Preservation of Oral History
- Defining Public Engagement and Permanence

Internship Program Continues with Historic Alexandria and Friends of Douglass Cemetery

Gravestone Conservation Project to begin in the fall for highest priority gravestones by Wellman Conservation, LLC. In planning phases for volunteer gravestone resetting project on the west side.



## Preservation Phase II - Next Steps



Next Phase: Douglass Cemetery Landscape Preservation

After the stormwater remediation:

- Civic and Stakeholder Engagement Process
- Secure additional funding
- Develop landscape design
  - Elements like: fences, benches, signage, gazebo, interpretation, central memorial to all those buried in Douglass Cemetery

## For More Information



### Visit the Project Page

<https://www.alexandriava.gov/historic-sites/douglass-memorial-cemetery>



### Contact Project Staff

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