



November 11, 2024

Honorable Kisten Nye, President
City Council
City of Richmond
900 East Broad Street
Richmond, VA 23219

Dear President Nye and Councilmembers Robertson, Larson, Lambert, Jordan, Addison, Lynch, Newbille, Trammell, and Jones,

On behalf of The Cultural Landscape Foundation (TCLF), a Washington, D.C.-based education and advocacy non-profit, I write in support of ordinance 2024-283, which would reestablish the city-owned 1.2-acre site at 1305 North 5th Street – part of the larger 31-acre Shockoe Hill African Burying Ground – as an official cemetery.

For nearly four years TCLF has been working with Lenora McQueen, a descendant of one of the estimated 22,000 freed and enslaved African Americans interred between 1816 and 1879 at the Shockoe Hill African Burying Ground, to see the site properly acknowledged, protected, and respected. When in active use and after its closure, the Burying Ground suffered a palimpsest of abuse, despoiled over the past two centuries by grave robbers who sold cadavers to the University of Virginia and Hampden-Sydney medical schools (the latter is now part of Virginia Commonwealth University), municipal building projects, highway construction, and other depredations. Today there is little indication of the sacred site that once existed.

TCLF included the Shockoe Hill African Burying Ground in the thematic report and digital exhibition [*Landslide 2021: Race and Space*](#), and has been part of a broad coalition supporting Ms. McQueen's efforts, which has resulted in the site's designation as a Virginia Landmark and other important advances. Thanks to Ms. McQueen and several subject-area experts, historians, and others, we know more about the Shockoe Hill African Burying Ground than we did even a few years ago. Her advocacy has not only revealed a wealth of historic information, but it has also highlighted the need for much more. The passage of ordinance 2024-283 would provide this hallowed ground much needed recognition and protection, and, it is hoped, would lead to greater protection for the entire 31-acre site.

Thank you for your attention and consideration.

Sincerely,

Charles A. Birnbaum, FASLA, FAAR
President & CEO

