



Alexandria, Virginia

# *Historic Alexandria Resources Commission*

*220 North Washington Street  
Alexandria, Virginia 22314-2521  
(703) 746-4554*



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By Email and U.S. Mail

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Julie V. Langan, Director  
Department of Historic Resources  
2801 Kensington Avenue  
Richmond, VA 23221

**Re: Vowell-Snowden-Black House (DHR Easement File No. 100-0111)  
Objection to Continued Approval of Construction Plans**

Dear Ms. Langan:

The Historic Alexandria Resources Commission (HARC) was established to advise the City of Alexandria on the preservation of historic sites and buildings, artifacts, and records from loss or deterioration; and promotes citizen and tourist use of historic sites such as the Torpedo Factory Art Center. Commission members are appointed by City Council and must be citizens of Alexandria.

We have recently learned of the extensive development plans to the historic property located at 619 South Lee Street in Alexandria (the Vowell-Snowden-Black House). An open space easement was granted to the Commonwealth of Virginia on the property by prominent Supreme Court Justice Hugo Black and his wife Elizabeth on 26 December 1969 just three years after the Open Space Land Act was created in Virginia. The easement was granted in perpetuity and allowed for no additional building or structures on the site to be built.

The current proposal for 619 South Lee Street would remove modern additions to the house that cover approximately 422 square feet of land and replace them with new additions that cover approximately 3174 square feet of land, or 750 percent more land coverage than the removals. Further, four of the proposed structures (two buildings and two connectors) will extend to the south of the historic house along the entire street front of the property obscuring the open space from public view. This expansive proposal clearly violates the spirit of the original easement granted by Justice Black and his wife, and the requirements of the Virginia Code.

The open space easement is governed by VA. Code Ann. § 10.1-1704, which provides that:

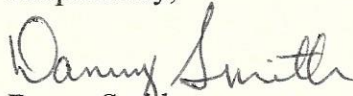
No open-space land, the title to or interest or right in which has been acquired under this chapter and which has been designated as open-space land under the authority of this chapter, shall be converted or diverted from open-space land use unless (i) the conversion or diversion is determined by the public body to be (a) essential to the orderly development and growth of the locality and (b) in accordance with the official comprehensive plan for the locality in effect at the time of conversion or diversion and (ii) there is substituted other real property which is (a) of at least equal fair market value, (b) of greater value as permanent open-space land than the land converted or diverted and (c) of as nearly as feasible equivalent usefulness and location for use as permanent open-space land as is the land converted or diverted. The public body shall assure that the property substituted will be subject to the provisions of this chapter.


The further development of the property at 619 South Lee Street is not included in any official comprehensive plan for Alexandria, and no other real property of equal or greater market value in nearly equivalent location has been designated as permanent open space.

Open space within Alexandria's Old and Historic District is limited. Your approval of changes to the open space easement on the property at 619 South Lee Street will set a dangerous precedent that opens the way for future development on other properties held in easements throughout Virginia.

The Commission will advise the City of Alexandria to reject the proposed plans for expansion at 619 South Lee Street, and we respectfully request that you reconsider the decision you made to approve the preliminary plans for development at 619 South Lee Street and reject the final proposal and any future proposals for development of this property that are in clear violation of the easement and Open Space Land Act.

Respectfully,

  
Danny Smith

  
Elizabeth McCall

Co-Chairs  
Alexandria Historic Resources Commission