

My name is John Richards, I am a member of the Board of Historic Alexandria Foundation, and I am here on their behalf.

Thank you for the opportunity to address you this afternoon

I am here to ask your help to avoid a preservation tragedy in Old Town Alexandria.

I am talking about the Justice Hugo Black House and the largest undeveloped garden in Old Town

The House and garden was certified as a Landmark by the VHLC in 1969 when the Black Family gave the second Open Space Land Act Easement in Virginia. Among other things, Mr. Chairman, Justice Black wrote the opinion that ruled that the time for all deliberate speed was over and finally desegregated the schools in Virginia.

Unfortunately, when the Virginia Landmark Register was subsequently put together, that designation was overlooked and it was not included on the register despite the landmark certification.

Two years ago, without any consultation with the Alexandria Preservation Community, your staff gave conceptual approval of construction plans to build three "Pavilions" on the protected open space and approved the demolition of a unique and noted architectural feature of the house.

Since we learned of the approval we have submitted 3 detailed letters requesting that the approval be reconsidered. Those were supported by letters from Professor Dick Howard at UVA and Professor Brown Morton the author of the Secretary of the Interior's Standards who has detailed how this approval misapplied the Standards.

Unfortunately, in part in reliance on the VDHR approval, and in part because it was not listed on the register, the Alexandria BAR has approved the project on a divided vote, and the City Council affirmed that approval.

I want to inform you that last week HAF filed a Petition for review of the City Council decision which will for the time being prevent the project from proceeding.

We in Alexandria implore you to place this matter on the agenda for your next meeting to review and reconsider the staff approvals of this project.

We also ask that you adopt a procedure to provide for prior notice to local preservation groups and an opportunity to be heard before such easement approvals are given.

Many ardent acolytes of the easement program who have actively promoted this program from its inception are now publicly questioning their support in light of the approvals that have been given. We therefore beg you to address this problem as a matter of urgency.

I would note that in addition to HAF this project has been public opposed by Preservation Virginia, The Historic Alexandria Resources Commission, the Alexandria Association, the Northern Virginia Conservation Council, the Old Town Civic Association, and members of the Black Family.

I have copies of the letters we have submitted, Dick Howard's Letter, Brown Morton's letter, Jo Jo Black's letter, and the HAF Petition of Appeal for those of you who would be interested in reviewing those detailed submissions.