

Re-invest proceeds from Battersea sale into historic resources — Editorial Letter

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To the Editor:

As president of the Petersburg Museums Foundation and life-long student of Petersburg's unique history. I feel the sale of the Battersea Plantation is in the best interest of this important home and its environs. Add the fact that the sale was made to the Battersea Foundation - a group whose credibility and stewardship of the property has already been proven - and this is a win for all involved.

This sale could not come at a better time, for not only is the city government released from the financial obligations for upkeep of the property, but the significant sum of \$200,000 is being added to the city coffers. The community needs to see this as an opportunity to re-invest money back into the historical resources of the city. It is my understanding that in the past, money derived from such liquidation of city assets has gone back into the general fund to address revenue shortfalls in other areas of the city budget. The city has, if not a legal, a moral and economic obligation to reinvest in its history.

Long range strategic planning for historic resources is a key component in economic development. Tourism is the number two industry in Virginia - leading to more jobs, tax revenue, and educational opportunities. In a recent address to the Petersburg Chamber of Commerce, Gov. Bob McDonnell stressed job creation as the hallmark of his administration. He is committed to supporting heritage tourism. This is strengthened by his call to view the upcoming 150th anniversary of the Civil War as an important chance to reflect on the end of oppression and slavery in Virginia and facilitating heritage appreciation leads to job creation in localities.

The city currently spends a relatively small percentage of its budget for historic preservation efforts. Two recent federally funded reviews have shown that city-owned museums (Blandford Church, Centre Hill Mansion and the Siege Museum) are not on track to become fully accredited. This is unconscionable in context of the City's responsibility to the future generations. However, I am certain the City Council and staff will remedy this situation by working with the Petersburg Museums Foundation to 1) Develop long range strategic goals and 2) use the financial windfall from the sale of the Battersea to invest in the unequaled historic resources owned by the City of Petersburg.

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