

City agrees to sale of historic home

BY F.M. WIGGINS (STAFF WRITER) Published: February 17, 2010

PETERSBURG - City Council approved the sale of one of the city's most historic homes last night. For the buyer, the real work will begin in the very near future.

With a unanimous vote, Battersea and its surrounding acres will be sold to the Battersea Foundation.

"We're very pleased with the City Council for approving this," said Battersea Foundation Board President Barbara P. Moseley. "Now we have a lot of work to do. We will continue in our endeavor."

Battersea is an important Colonial plantation house that was constructed near the banks of the Appomattox River in 1768 for John Banister, first mayor of Petersburg, a Revolutionary delegate, congressman and framer of the Articles of Confederation. The sectional massing of Battersea displays the neo-Palladian style as popularized in England in the 18th century and embraced in Colonial Virginia.

Moseley said that the board will kick off a \$1 million capital campaign March 1.

Only two residents spoke during a public hearing on the sale - one in support of the sale, the other saying that it seemed "like a pretty good deal."

The historic home was acquired in 1985 by the city. City Manager B. David Canada said that since that time, the Historic Petersburg Foundation and other entities including the Battersea Foundation have made improvements to the site and the historic home.

Since the foundation's inception, it has raised \$484,515. Nearly half of that - \$227,210 - has been spent on stabilizing the villa and outbuildings.

But much more needs to be spent to bring the villa back to its former glory. "We estimate that it could cost up to \$3 million," said foundation Vice President Sandy Graham at the Feb. 2 regular meeting during a presentation on the group and its activities.

After last night's meeting Graham said that he too was pleased with the outcome of the public hearing and Council's decision.

"I believe it's time that the foundation should own Battersea," Graham said.

As part of the sale agreement if the Battersea Foundation should ever dissolve, the property will return to the city at no cost. Additionally, if for whatever reason the foundation would wish to sell the historic property, City Council would have to approve the sale.

Canada said that the property will also remain accessible to the public for special events, particularly the annual Revolutionary War re-enactment held each April.

Canada and the acting city attorney will continue to complete the transaction between the city and the foundation. The completion of the sale is also dependent on determining who owns a fourth parcel. Canada said that the city believes land north of the railroad tracks belong to an existing parcel, while titles indicate otherwise.

Josh Greenwood, one of the two residents to speak during the public hearing, said that he is the owner of the disputed parcel of land.

"I'm very concerned about the preservation of the house and the property," Greenwood Said. He added that to the city's credit, the house has been preserved to this point. He also said that he wasn't opposed to the sale of the property to the Battersea Foundation. "I'm for it."

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