

Group set to buy historic site from city

FROM STAFF REPORTS

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PETERSBURG - The Battersea Foundation will be taking ownership of the historic property on Tuesday after it had been owned by the city for more than 25 years.

The transfer of the property, which includes a 1768 Colonial plantation house, is the culmination of an effort that began several years ago to make the property a prime attraction in the region through a partnership with the city and a private nonprofit group.

The Battersea Foundation says it will move forward with its mission to preserve and protect the historic property, and develop the grounds as a resource to the community for educational and cultural enrichment.

"It is our duty to do more than restore Battersea and give tours," Battersea Foundation Executive Director Tempy Barbru said in a statement. "This property has played a part in the life of this community and region for almost two hundred and fifty years. Our goal is to make Battersea an educational campus that will contribute to the revitalization of the region."

The foundation will present a check to the City of Petersburg for the purchase of the property at a public ceremony on June 14 at 5 p.m. Board President Alexander "Sandy" Graham will represent the foundation and share its future plans, which include a training program for historic preservation trades, and ongoing educational events and workshops.

The foundation is buying the property - which includes the main house or villa, several out buildings, an unoccupied house at the end of West High Street and 37 acres of land - for \$200,000. The assessed value on the properties is \$1.54 million. In February 2010, Petersburg City Council agreed to sell Battersea to the foundation for \$200,000, which is the same price the city bought the estate for in 1985. However, due to a lack of money, the city has done little to restore the house.

The property transfer wraps up the first year of the foundation's fundraising campaign, Securing Battersea.

The foundation plans to use the restoration of the villa as a teaching tool, and bring together experts in historic trades and restoration arts to offer a training program to teach proper preservation techniques. Its goal is to train and grow a workforce of masons, carpenters, plasterers and other trades who understand the challenges of working on historic structures and sites.

"Among the many things we've learned through our work at Battersea since 2007 is the practical application of professional, preservation and conservation techniques, particularly on such a significant structure as Battersea," Graham said.

"Petersburg is fortunate to have so many architecturally important structures still standing, and with proper treatment, they can be preserved for future generations. These structures were built to last centuries, and if properly renovated and maintained they will do just that. It's readaptive use and it's really recycling on a large scale," said Robert C. White, president of the Historic Petersburg Foundation.

The foundation will also continue to offer educational and cultural events through its Leisure and Learning series, including lectures and workshops in the areas of architecture, archaeology, botany and history. Bringing national and regional experts together, the Leisure and Learning events will give people a chance to learn and explore through the history of the site.

Battersea 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. Battersea has been on the National Register of Historic Places since 1968.

The public is invited to Battersea, located at 793 Appomattox St., on June 14 at 5 p.m. to celebrate the purchase of the estate from the City of Petersburg, and kick off the next phase of the foundation's work. For more information, visit Battersea's website at www.batterseafound.org.

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