

## Petersburg considers selling historic Battersea plantation

BY F.M. WIGGINS (STAFF WRITER)

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PETERSBURG - City Council last night voted to authorize the City Manager to begin the process of selling one of its most historic buildings, Battersea.

That process includes a public hearing that Council will hold at its next meeting, Feb. 16.

Sandy Graham, a lawyer speaking on behalf of the Battersea Foundation, requested that council consider the sale of the entire historic property - just over 37 acres - to the nonprofit. He said that the foundation envisions raising money to first buy the property from the city for about what the city paid for it 25 years ago and then to restore the property to its look from the 1820s.

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.

During the Revolutionary War, British troops occupied the house on more than one occasion.

Since the city purchased the estate for \$200,000 in 1985, little has been done to restore it. Due to a lack of funds, the city's objective had always been to keep the house from deteriorating. Battersea Inc., which was later renamed Battersea Foundation, was founded in 2006 as a nonprofit organization to raise funds for restoration.

The vision for Battersea is to become a historic home for the entire community. Those involved don't want it be a typical plantation museum, but more of a historic home that people can actually use for recreational and educational purposes.

Graham said that the Battersea Foundation has already been hard at work stabilizing the property.

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," Graham said.

The total estimated to restore the entire property, including outbuildings and villa, to their former grandeur is estimated at just over \$5 million. Graham said that the effort would likely take between five and seven years.

"But the foundation is prepared to take it on," Graham said.

To do it, Graham said that the foundation would want to finalize a purchase on the property by the end of the calendar year. He said the foundation would be willing to pay close to what the city paid for the property in 1985. "In essence we would be giving the city its money back," Graham said. To pay for the property, Graham said the foundation plans to kick off focused fundraising efforts at the beginning of next month. The purchase agreement would also include a right of reversion.

"Should the foundation cease to exist," Graham said, the property would be returned to the city.

Mayor Annie M. Mickens agreed that the house is a treasure. It currently is already recognized as such by many organizations. Councilman Kenneth Pritchett said he believed it would be in the best interest of the city to sell the property to the foundation.

Council unanimously passed a motion authorizing the City Manager B. David Canada to advertise the property as for sale with a public hearing set for Feb. 16 regular City Council meeting.

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