



Bull Run Civil War Round Table

P.O. Box 2147
Centreville, Virginia 20120

May 1, 2020

Jeanette Rishell, Mayor
City of Manassas Park
One Park Center Court
Manassas Park, Virginia 20111-2395

SUBJECT: Historic Conner House

I am writing on behalf of the Bull Run Civil War Round Table (BRCWRT), a 501(3)(c), non-profit organization and its 395 members, approximately half of whom are Prince William County residents. Our mission and purpose is to stimulate member and general public interest in, and understanding of, Civil War era military, political, economic and social history. We accomplish these objectives through education and preservation projects and activities that enhance understanding of our Nation's Civil War history and appreciation of Civil War battlefields, memorials and historic sites.

We are concerned about a potential threat, of which we recently became aware, to Manassas Park's historic Conner House. On March 31, 2020 the *Potomac Local News* published an article indicating the City of Manassas Park was considering a plan to redevelop the area around the current City Hall at 1 Park Center Court. The article described the four-phased project as replacing the current City Hall with a new multi-story City Hall, retail stores, a city square public plaza, an apartment complex and a nine-screen movie theater, with no mention or indication that the historic Conner House would be included in the project.

In the article you were quoted as indicating that the historical Conner House would not be a consideration in future commercial development plans, and that *"....the Stone House is in very bad structural condition. It will fall down eventually, and that might be sooner if a strong storm hits the area. The Governing body knows that restoration work is very expensive and could be a million dollars or more to get that house to where it needs to be. The City just cannot afford to fix all those problems. And if it actually falls down prematurely, then the City would have to use taxpayer dollars to remove the rubble...."*

Our organization and several of its members, who have been involved in the Conner House preservation and restoration efforts during the past 25 years, were quite surprised to read about this proposed development and in particular the comments attributed to you. The Conner House is structurally sound, thanks to exterior restoration efforts led by the Manassas Park Women's Club, managed by the Parks and Recreation Department and completed years ago.



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The site's history traces back to the 18th century and the Hooe family, one of the first families to settle in Prince William County. The Conner House, built c. 1810 likely by slave labor "rented" from William Weir of near-by Liberia Plantation, was originally an overseer's house and subsequently a tenant farmhouse on Mayfield Plantation. The house's history encompasses Virginia's colonial era, the 19th century and antebellum Virginia, the civil war years when the house and surrounding area were occupied and used by both Union and Confederate armies, and life in the Manassas area during the late 19th century and into the 20th century. This history, encompassing the history and stories of the families and people, including land-owners, farmers and enslaved persons, who lived and worked on this land, was formally recognized on October 6, 1981 when the Conner House was listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

In response to our inquiries concerning the development plan and the Conner House, the City of Manassas Park's Director Public Works and Community Planning replied on April 18, 2020 that:

- The city has no plans for the Conner House at this time, other than long-standing and often deferred capital investment plans for restoration, and
- The developer's proposed concept for City Center Redevelopment District submitted to the City Manager is not part of Manassas Park's Comprehensive Plan, and
- The submitted concept, depicting an apartment complex in the area of the Conner House, is not an official public or private proposal and has not been formalized through any application, and
- No review has been undertaken or initiated by the City of Manassas Park staff and no action has been taken by the governing body regarding this proposed concept.

We sincerely hope and trust that the City of Manassas Park will continue to preserve and interpret the historic Conner House, including completing restoration of the house's interior. As the City of Manassas Park's sole historic structure, the Conner House is a key element in the City's connection to the rich history of the Manassas area. It should be maintained, preserved, interpreted and promoted for the education and enjoyment of local residents and visitors alike.

Respectively,

Mark Whitenton

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President

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