



NEWS RELEASE - FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Partnership leads to Berkleytown Heritage Park in Ashland

Ashland, VA – Over the past year, the appreciation for the rich heritage of the African American community of Berkleytown in Ashland has grown. When Renee Robinson, Executive Director at Hanover and King William Habitat for Humanity, read the feature on Berkleytown in RTD's *Discover Richmond* publication in February 2021, she reached out to Carolyn Hemphill, Founder of the Hanover Black Heritage Society featured in the article with an idea.

Years ago, Habitat had acquired a piece of land on Northwest Henry Lane in Ashland with the hope of building a Habitat home on the property. Unfortunately, the land was not viable for Habitat's purposes and due to lack of road access, Habitat was unable to sell the land. When Robinson read the article on Berkleytown, she thought it might present a great opportunity for the land to be put to good use.

Robinson contacted Hemphill and suggested that perhaps the land could be used for something that would honor the history of Berkleytown. The .75-acre lot is located in the heart of Berkleytown off of Henry Street, north of Berkley Street and south of Archie Cannon Drive. Hemphill immediately thought of a Berkleytown Heritage Park to honor the African American historical figures who were contributors to education, business, government, and the Ashland community as a whole. Hemphill and Robinson met with Town leaders to discuss the idea and the group expressed support and interest in pursuing the project, especially since the neighboring lots were already owned by the Town. Hemphill said, "Mayor Trivett, Town Manager Farrar and Director of Planning Nora Amos helped take this from an idea into something with a real path forward for the Town."

At the November 16 Town Council meeting, both Robinson and Hemphill were in the room when Ashland's town leaders adopted a resolution for the park and accepted the deed of land donated by Habitat. As the Town resolution states, 'Through a strategic partnership with Habitat, they would like to donate this parcel to the Town ... for the development of a passive public park.' Robinson said, "We are happy to know that this piece of land will be put to good use in service of the community." The resolution also recognizes the Town's desire to 'work with leaders and stakeholders in the Berkleytown community to form a plan of action to develop this property into a park that can be enjoyed by future generations to include walking trails and small

gathering spaces where users can enjoy a natural environment' and commits that 'through signage, this park will provide the opportunity to acknowledge the history of Berkleytown and the history makers of this community'. Hemphill said, "This is a fitting tribute to the African American pioneers of the Berkleytown community."

The icing on the cake? Just a week prior, Hemphill and other members of the Black Heritage Society leadership team attended the home dedication for Habitat's latest home. The 1400 square foot home was built within Berkleytown and the homeowner will be able to walk to this park.

To learn more about Hanover and King William Habitat, visit www.HKWHabitat.org and to learn more about the Hanover Black Heritage Society, visit www.hanoverbhs.org

About Hanover and King William Habitat for Humanity

Hanover and King William Habitat for Humanity is a locally run, independent affiliate of Habitat International and is responsible for the Hanover and King William County areas. For 30 years, they built homes alongside families who pay an affordable mortgage. Habitat's repair program addresses critical repairs around the home. With our help, and the help of the community, Habitat homeowners achieve the strength, stability, and independence they need to build a better life for themselves and their families.

About Hanover Black Heritage Society

In recognition of a significant void in the history of African Americans in Hanover County, Carolyn Hemphill along with a group of classmates from John M. Gandy High School (the public high school for African Americans during segregation years) decided to dig deeper into the history of African Americans in Hanover County. The Society seeks to uncover and preserve the history of African Americans in Hanover County and to help enrich and promote stronger family and community unity through our historical findings. Our goal is to educate the public by increasing their awareness and appreciation of Hanover's legacy.

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