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Land Trust Saves Historic Missouri Avenue Site From Proposed Town House Development

A non-profit land preservation group has saved a sliver of land significant in African American and Civil War history from a controversial, proposed town house project.

The less-than-one acre wooded site, located on Missouri Avenue near 13th Street was purchased by the National Park Trust (NPT) from its owner, the Washington Hebrew Congregation. The Congregation had a contract to sell the land to a townhouse developer. Residents and community leaders of the nearby Brightwood and Takoma neighborhoods opposed the project during recent hearings before the D.C. Board of Zoning Adjustment.

"The National Park Trust has given all of us an extraordinary opportunity to protect an area with enormous potential for historical and cultural research, education, tourism, and community outreach," said Charles Powell, President of the Military Road School Alumni Association.

The Military Road School Alumni Association is working to preserve and purchase the landmark Military Road School, located only about 100-feet from the NPT land. The school sits on land donated for the specific purpose of educating African-American students from 1864-1954. It is now owned by the D.C. Board of Education and is in deteriorated condition.

Powell noted that the newly purchased site is part of a little-known, historically rich and unusual "complex" of properties in the Brightwood community. Dating to 1820 when it was known as "Vinegar Hill," it was the oldest settlement for freed Negro slaves within the District of Columbia.

The Military Road Alumni Association worked with NPT to help bring about the purchase, an interim step before its acquisition by the National Park Service. The NPT purchase was also endorsed by D.C. Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton, Ward 4 City Council Member Adrian Fenty, Advisory Neighborhood Commission 4A, and Historic Takoma, Inc.

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