



WILDWOOD

January 26, 2023

MEMORANDUM

To: Wildwood Historic Preservation Commission Members

From: Department of Planning and Parks

Re: Westland Acres (**Ward Two**)

Cc: The Honorable James R. Bowlin, Mayor
Steve Cross, City Administrator
John A. Young, City Attorney
Rick Brown, P.E. and P.T.O.E., Director of Public Works
Melanie Rippetoe, Assistant Director of Planning and Parks
Robyn Keefe, AICP, Planner

BACKGROUND >>> On this year's Work Program, one (1) of the items that has been identified on it is an effort to protect Westland Acres legacy. This particular community has a very unique and special history, starting from its founding to today, which spans over one hundred fifty (150) years. The Westland Acres Area is a community whose history begins at the end of the Civil War and has been inhabited for generations by family members from its original founder - William West. Since its founding in the late 1860's, the community has had a rich and long history in west St. Louis County, as one (1) of its longest-standing African American communities in the region. Over the years, descendants of Mr. West have moved, but the majority of the ownership of the land has been retained by them. This continual ownership is truly rare, considering the turnover associated with property in St. Louis County over the last one hundred fifty (150) years.

Another anchor, beyond the descendants of William West, is Union Baptist Church, which is also located in this historic community. The church, and associated cemetery, has been the center of this community for many, many years, and it still remains today. Although the original structure that housed the church and its congregation was destroyed in a fire in the 1977, it was rebuilt to its current condition.

Through many major global, state, and local triumphs and tragedies, this community has remained and continues to look forward toward the future. Although the community is divided between the Cities of Chesterfield and Wildwood, both of these jurisdictions have worked to ensure Westland Acres remains a viable part of each of them. Such was demonstrated when a group of developers proposed to rezone much of the community in 2006 for residential uses. Although the rezonings were successful, the project never moved forward, given the Great Recession began shortly after this effort.

CONTEXT >>> Over the last several years, there have been increasing inquiries to the Department of Planning about the viability of new residential uses in the Westland Acres Community. These inquiries indicated on-going interest in the area, but is also a reminder to the City to focus on the need not to delay in recording this community's history. This recording of the community needs to start with the residents and property owners of it. This process of these discussions with the community's key

stakeholders would begin with their ideas, thoughts, and directions on how best to memorialize the Westland Acres, as change continues around it and, in future, within it.

Also, from past discussions between the Historic Preservation Commission and the Department, a list of potential tasks for future consideration has been set forth. These potential tasks could include:

1. Seek grant funding for recording the history of the area, including oral interviews with community and church members, particularly as part of the State of Missouri's Certified Local Government (CLG) Program.
2. Pursue grant funding for planning purposes relating to the area's future growth and how best to recognize and preserve the key elements of this historic community, examples include interpretative signage, on-line information, etc.
3. Complete a comprehensive pictorial and video history of the current land area in the community, while researching past representations of it, specifically photographs.
4. Consider a second Historic Community Marker at Union Baptist Church.

Many other tasks surely exist, but these items noted above are intended to be a starting point for this discussion. Along with engaging the Westland Acres Community before any action is started, the Mayor and City Council should also be advised of these possible preservation efforts and seek their input into the process and steps as well.

CONTACT INFORMATION >>> If any of the Commission Members should have comments or questions in this regard, please feel free to contact the Department of Planning at (636) 458-0440. A presentation is planned on this item at tonight's Commission meeting. Thank you for your consideration of this information and comments on the same.