

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **RVArchaeology: New Group Forms to Keep Alive the Promise of Archaeology in the Bottom and Beyond**

RVArchaeology, an organization of concerned citizens, has come together to advocate for Richmond's unique archaeological resources. The group held its first meeting on May 3, 2014, at the Black History Museum and Cultural Museum of Virginia. Participants included educators, community leaders, and other citizens who agree that archaeology is an essential tool for the research and interpretation of the city's history and culture.

Dr. Kim Allen, cultural anthropologist and organizer of the group, said the formation of the group emerged from recognizing the need to engage "archeologists into the public conversation about archaeology." In late February, she began convened a symposium titled *Before It's Too Late: The History and Archaeology of Shockoe Bottom*, which was held at the Richmond Public Library on March 29, 2014. Participants discussed the history of slave-trading and industry in Richmond, archaeology at Lumpkins Jail, the Section 106 federal review process, and how to conduct public

engagement through archaeology. Two days before the event, Mayor Jones announced his archaeology plan. Dr. Allen said RVArchaeology began as a natural progression given significant interest among symposium participants.

"The Mayor's announcement was a blessing," said Dr. Allen. "It galvanized our efforts to have professional archaeologists, historians, preservationists, and scholars educate concerned citizens about what archaeology is and what it is not." She sought the support of area archaeologists and invited two of them, Dr. Terry Brock (Research Archaeologist at The Montpelier Foundation), and Ellen Chapman (a doctoral candidate at the College of William and Mary), to serve on the steering committee for RVArchaeology. Dr. Allen also emphasized the assistance of Viola Baskerville, former state delegate, whose financial support made the symposium possible.

The organization's impact has already been noticeable in conversations about planned developments in Shockoe Bottom, such as during the Richmond Times-Dispatch Public Square on Monday, May 19th, about a Richmond slavery heritage museum. Many members of the public have emphasized the importance of using archaeology as a tool to explore, identify, recover and preserve elements of the city's past that have in many cases been overlooked or forgotten. City officials have also recognized importance of seeking guidance from those with archaeological expertise, including City Council members who requested feedback on the Mayor's archaeology plan. "There is enormous potential for important archaeological research to be conducted in Richmond, both in Shockoe Bottom and elsewhere, and we hope to work with City Officials to improve the City's care of its resources," says Brock.

Chapman and Brock responded to City Council inquiries by soliciting feedback from local archaeologists regarding the feasibility and effectiveness of the city's archaeological plan for Shockoe Bottom. A summary of their responses was sent to City Council Members and the Mayor's office in April and was presented during the public comment period at the May 12<sup>th</sup> meeting of City Council. Concerns particularly addressed the specifics and logistics of community engagement, the need for independent expert review of the project, and the lack of details regarding the timeline and methods for the excavation. To date, there has been no official response or comment from City Council or the Mayor's office to these concerns. RVArchaeology will be holding a press conference at 17<sup>th</sup> and Grace Streets in Shockoe Bottom at 10:00 am on Tuesday, May 27, 2014 to discuss their concerns about the city's commitment to archaeology now that it is clear that the stadium plans were modified to avoid a Section 106 federal historical and archaeological review.

One of RVArchaeology's important objectives is to examine how archaeological excavations are conducted by other cities and to seek public input on ways to improve Richmond's protection of its archaeological resources. "We are very excited to be traveling to Alexandria, Virginia next month," said Chapman. "They have a successful model for community archaeology, and we are looking forward to hearing about some of their approaches and how a similar program might be established in Richmond."

RVArchaeology will have its next meeting at 10 a.m., Saturday, May 31, at the Black History and Cultural Museum located at 00 Clay St. in Historic Jackson Ward. The meeting is open to those who share a commitment to archaeology as a tool for identifying and preserving Richmond's historical and cultural resources. For more information about RVArchaeology, go to [www.RichmondArchaeology.webs.com](http://www.RichmondArchaeology.webs.com) or contact [RVArchaeology@gmail.com](mailto:RVArchaeology@gmail.com).

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