

New Philadelphia Townsite Public Scoping Report

Introduction

The National Park Service (NPS) recently completed its public scoping period for the *New Philadelphia Townsite Special Resource Study* that extended from April 11, to June 11, 2016. Scoping was done to gather ideas for potential management options, help identify issues for the study to address, and assess local support for adding the New Philadelphia Townsite to the national park system. During this period, the National Park Service gathered input from the public through various means. This document describes these public involvement efforts and summarizes the input received.

Project Background

In December 2014, Congress passed a bill authorizing the National Park Service to conduct a special resource study of the New Philadelphia archeological site and surrounding lands in the state of Illinois. The purpose of the study is to evaluate the national significance of the site and the suitability and feasibility of adding it to the national park system. In addition, Congress charged the Secretary of the Interior to consider alternatives for the preservation, protection and interpretation of the New Philadelphia Townsite by federal, state or local government entities or any other interested individuals.

New Philadelphia, located near Barry, Illinois, was founded in 1836 by Frank McWhorter, an enslaved man from Kentucky who bought his own freedom and the freedom of 15 family members. New Philadelphia is the first town in the United States known to be platted and officially registered by an African American before the Civil War. The rural community situated near the Mississippi and Illinois Rivers flourished at first, but later fell into decline when the railroad bypassed the community in 1869. The community eventually dissolved in 1885. The site of New Philadelphia, an archeological site with no visible aboveground evidence, was designated a national historic landmark on January 16, 2009.

Several partner organizations and individuals have been working together for years to protect and interpret the site and conduct archeological and historical research. Most active among them are the New Philadelphia Association, Archaeological Conservancy, Philadelphia Land Trust, and faculty and students from the Universities of Illinois and Maryland. As a result of their efforts, New Philadelphia Townsite has been designated a national historic landmark and this study authorized.

Scoping Overview

NPS staff made a diligent effort to engage interested or affected agencies, organizations, and members of the public.

Notifying the Public

To ensure a high degree of transparency and involvement with the public, the National Park Service announced opportunities to participate in the planning process in many different ways. In cooperation with the New Philadelphia Association a scoping newsletter was sent in April 2016 via mail to New Philadelphia Townsite partners, adjacent landowners and neighbors, media outlets, and other interested parties. In addition, the Pike County Chamber of Commerce, the New Philadelphia Association, the Archeological Conservancy, the Herald-Whig newspaper, and the *Two Rivers Outdoors* online publication posted information about the public meeting and scoping process to

their websites and social media pages. Partner organizations also contacted local media outlets to publicize planned scoping events. For example, New Philadelphia Association members participated in a local radio program the day of the public meeting to notify the general public and invite them to attend. The mailings and outreach efforts were meant to introduce the project, announce opportunities for involvement, and invite the public and interested parties to participate. Comments were also solicited online, and comment cards were made available at the public meeting.

Site Visit to New Philadelphia Townsite

On May 11, 2016, the day of the public meeting, the New Philadelphia Association, National Park Service, descendants of Frank McWorter, researchers from the Illinois State Museum and University of Maryland, and a representative from Congressman LaHood's office toured the townsite and related areas. Students from Western High School in Barry led walking tours through the New Philadelphia Townsite, pausing at interpretive waysides and presenting an "augmented reality tour" on their iPads to interpret the layout and appearance of the townsite during the mid-19th century. Following the site visit, the tour continued to the Barry Museum and Barry Public Library. The site tour helped the National Park Service gain a more complete understanding of the site and surrounding area and also served as an another opportunity to invite people to attend the public meeting that evening.

Scoping Meeting

The National Park Service (NPS) conducted a scoping meeting on May 11, 2016, from 6-8 p.m. in Pittsfield, Illinois to gather the public's ideas and promote a high level of interaction between the public and planning team personnel. The public meeting began with a series of presentations about the study, the history of the site, and the McWorter family. Before the meeting closed, representatives of elected officials were invited to address the crowd. Representatives used this time to issue brief statements of support for the study and for the site becoming a unit of the national park system. NPS staff set up listening stations at the meeting; discussion at each listening session centered on a question designed to gather input for the study. Maps, posters, and handouts presented this material in a visual format and supported discussions. These materials are available online at the NPS Planning, Environment and Public Comment (PEPC) website specifically established for this project (https://parkplanning.nps.gov/new_philadelphia_special_resource_study). Attendance at the public meeting included members of the local Pike County community, as well as members/representatives of partner organizations and descendants of Frank McWorter that traveled from as far away as Maryland, Oklahoma, and Texas. Eighty-eight people signed in, though attendance was believed to be more than one hundred. In addition, local journalists covered the meetings resulting in articles in two regional newspapers, the [*Herald-Whig*](#) and the [*Jacksonville Journal Courier*](#). A member of the public also responded informally to the *Herald-Whig* article online.

Public Comments

To help solicit comments from the public, the planning team posted five questions to the PEPC website for the New Philadelphia Townsite Special Resource Study:

1. Do you have any ideas about how best to preserve and interpret the resources of the New Philadelphia Townsite?
2. What kinds of experiences do you want to have at the New Philadelphia Townsite? What do you think would need to be done to facilitate these experiences?

3. What role(s) should various organizations such as New Philadelphia Association, Archaeological Conservancy, Philadelphia Land Trust, and the National Park Service play in the future of the site?
4. How should we let people know about the site?
5. Do you have other ideas or comments you would like to share with us?

These questions were presented on comment cards, in the public scoping newsletter, and online at the project website. During the scoping meeting NPS personnel facilitated listening sessions that centered on the first three of these questions. In addition, the planning team provided cards for attendees to post “other ideas or comments” at an unmanned station. In response, 30 individuals or organizations submitted 134 comments online at the project website. Additionally 14 letters or articles of support were received from organizations such as the Archaeological Conservancy, City of Pittsfield, Pike and Scott County Farm Bureaus, *Herald-Whig* Newspaper, and the Society for Historical Archaeology. Additionally Congressman LaHood and Congresswoman Bustos wrote letters of support. Attendees at the public scoping meeting offered a number of valuable comments, which NPS staff recorded on flip charts during the meetings and later incorporated into this scoping summary.

What We Heard

During the public scoping period, the National Park Service received many valuable comments that will help inform the special resource study. The summary below synthesizes comments submitted online, in hard copy, by email, and during the public scoping meeting held in May 2016. In addition to this summary, the raw notes gathered during the listening sessions at the public scoping meeting have been typed and are placed on the PEPC website.

All comments were tabulated by topic on subsequent pages of this report, in no particular order. Although most comments responded to the four questions mentioned above, some responses were more general in nature. Every effort has been made to incorporate those sentiments into the most appropriate category below.

1. Do you have any ideas about how best to preserve and interpret the resources of the New Philadelphia Townsite?

At the public meeting and online, most respondents overwhelmingly supported NPS management to preserve and interpret the resources of the New Philadelphia Townsite for the long-term. No one, online or in person, opposed NPS management or suggested another organization should preserve and/or interpret the site. Twenty-nine people responded online, of those 10 recommended the site for inclusion in the national park system. Several suggested expanding the augmented reality tour and/or building a visitor center or museum on-site, while a few suggested reconstructing the historic village. Many emphasized that “the story is what’s important” and efforts should be focused on sharing the story.

Representative Quote from PEPC:

“New Philadelphia is a great example of the presence of diverse interracial communities working during periods in our history where separation, segregation, and isolation dominate the current national discourse. This [site] highlights the fact that people have worked to produce the world they want to create, as opposed to accepting the current state of affairs. This is important to remember, since it can help inspire people to work towards positive social change and inclusive policies at all levels of government and society.”

2. What kinds of experiences do you want to have at the New Philadelphia Townsite? What do you think would need to be done to facilitate these experiences?

At the public meeting and online, respondents supported some form of development of the site. Many suggested building a visitor center or museum, providing educational programs and guided tours, displaying artifacts on-site, and using technology to create a robust online presence and expand the augmented reality tour presently in use. Commenters emphasized the site should explain “the many stories of New Philadelphia” including African American history, the story of “Free Frank” and a multicultural community, the Underground Railroad, the importance of education to the town and founder, the history of the enslaved and newly freed, etc..

Representative Quote from PEPC:

“One should have a multifaceted experience at the townsite. Interactive, audiovisual, and tactile experiences within the environs of New Philadelphia. The historical context of African Americans should provide the framework for the presentations.”

3. How should we let people know about the site?

Nine of 27 online PEPC respondents suggested NPS management as a way to let people know about the site. Many suggested advertising (i.e., online, printed media, social media, signage, etc.) Others suggested making sure that New Philadelphia is represented in educational history textbooks, partnering with local museums, creating a documentary film, and a reality TV show on the history channel.

Representative Quote from PEPC:

“The site requires diverse forms of outreach. This has been accomplished to date through the use of local and regional media. The NPS could help draw national attention to the site and its history. Dissemination could occur through online and traditional media. New Philadelphia is a great example of the presence of diverse interracial communities during periods in our history where separation, segregation, and isolation dominate the current national discourse.”

4. What role(s) should various organizations such as New Philadelphia Association, Archaeological Conservancy, New Philadelphia Land Trust, and the National Park Service play in the future of the site? Do you have other ideas or comments you would like to share with us?

Everyone that spoke during the listening session supported NPS management of the New Philadelphia Townsite. Over and over participants stated that the National Park Service was the only organization with the capacity, skill, and ability to protect, interpret, and manage the site. Several people expressed concern the New Philadelphia Association and the other organizations currently involved would not be able to provide long-term protection or high-quality interpretation. Comments recorded online were very similar. Some participants suggested joining the [Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area](#) to improve public awareness, and taking advantage of state and local programs for volunteer and financial support. They suggested the organizations currently

involved could serve as consultants and assist the National Park Service where possible. During the public meeting, one participant expressed concern their taxes would increase to pay for New Philadelphia Townsite if the site were to become a unit of the national park system. Other participants responded that additional tax revenue generated by the site would offset any increase. There was a strong public perception the site would be a significant economic driver for the area. Adjacent and nearby landowners expressed support for the New Philadelphia Townsite becoming a unit of the national park system. However, one adjacent landowner, whose property includes certain related sites, expressed concern that the federal government would take his property through eminent domain. That landowner repeatedly expressed that he had no interest in selling his land.

Representative Quote from PEPC:

“Why is this even up for debate?” . . . “We have monuments to great men, women, and achievements all over this great nation...this site deserves to be protected, examined, and yeah it should have a damn monument. With the amorality, corruption, and, indeed, murderous nature this country is displaying, we need this. “. . . only through education, honest communication, and yes, funding of organizations and peoples can we overcome hate, ignorance, and indifference. This site deserves every honor, protection, and dollar we can give it, that any organization or person can afford to give it. Please make this a National Park, give these historically significant people a voice. Let them Guide us, God willing, to a better present while learning from our past. Let this place be available as a reminder for all time, we can exist as one people, one unified nation, peaceably, together.”

List of Public Comments

All comments were tabulated by topic. The numbers represent how many times this sentiment was recorded in the flip-charts at the public meeting or in comments submitted on the PEPC site.

Do you have any ideas about how best to preserve and interpret the resources of the New Philadelphia Townsite?

Notes recorded from the public meeting on flip-charts

- Include the New Philadelphia Townsite within the national park system (10)
- Focus on the story (9)
- Expand augmented reality tour (7)
- Put artifacts on display (4)
- Interpret archeology/expose for public view excavated sites (3)
- Digitize documents, images, and artifacts and make them accessible to the public (2)
- Continue archeology
- Build a visitor center or museum
- Use story boards/waysides
- Use farming to interpret the story
- Make minimal changes to the site
- State government does not have capacity to assume preservation/interpretation duties
- Tap into Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area and Hannibal, Missouri to Springfield, Illinois corridor
- Hold annual events at the site including:
 - Underground Railroad
 - Lecture series
 - Coordinate with local events like the Barry Apple Festival

A summary of notes recorded online in PEPC (29 respondents)

- Include in the national park system (10)
- Build a visitor center or museum (6)
- Reconstruct the village (2)
- Provide guided tours at the site
- Use story boards/waysides (4)
- Use historical videos, videos of descendants, videos of archeology at the site (2)
- Build on research and work that has already been done (3)
- Expand the augmented reality tour (3)
- Hold historically linked arts events
- Continue archeology
- Eliminate ground disturbance where possible
- Tell a broad range of stories including:
 - Stories of people who lived at New Philadelphia.
 - Nation's story of slavery (2)
 - Underground Railroad
 - Slaves obtaining their freedom
 - The history New Philadelphia Townsite as it relates to the history of Illinois (3)
 - The history of Frank McWorter from South Carolina to Kentucky to Illinois (2)
 - Contemporary voices from descendants

What kinds of experiences do you want to have at the New Philadelphia Townsite? What do you think would need to be done to facilitate these experiences?

Notes recorded from the public meeting on flip-charts

- Build visitor center or museum (include gift shop) (3)
- Provide youth programs (3)
- Provide orientation film (2)
- Living history interpreters (2)
- Provide guided and self-guided tours
- Use technology to tell the story
- Display artifacts at site
- Recreate town layout (plat map)
- Build ghost structures
- Reconstruct townsite
- Use diorama (instead of reconstructions)
- Use Townsite imagery – LiDAR, aerials
- Create multigenerational volunteer program
- Build on research and work that has already been done
- Use the following to tell the story:
 - Agriculture (2)
 - Archeology
 - Culinary
 - Heritage Crafts
- Site should explain:
 - African American history especially as it relates to Illinois (3)
 - Story of Free Frank and multicultural community (2)

- Struggles/history of early New Philadelphia settlers (2)
- New Philadelphia history/connection to nearby communities
- Underground Railroad
- Lincoln ideals to Washington/the nation

Notes recorded online in PEPC (29 respondents)

- Build a visitor center/museum (5)
- Provide educational programs/ guided tours (5)
- Reconstruct the town (2)
- Display artifacts on site
- Display a life size statue of the founder
- Create interactive and outdoor facilities (2)
- Create online presence
- Reveal areas of excavation (cover with Plexiglas so visitors can see past archeology)
- Do not reconstruct buildings (use virtual reality, outline buildings on the ground, and/or create ghost structures) (2)
- Continue archeological excavations
- Provide orientation films (3)
- Build on research and work that has already been done
- Site should explain:
 - History of the enslaved/newly freed
 - Why uncovering social history of disenfranchised people is so challenging
 - Timeline of Frank McWorter's life
 - Focus on the importance of the story
 - Importance of education to founder/town/community
 - Tell the story of black history
 - Slavery
 - Underground Railroad sites and Lincoln sites in the New Philadelphia area
 - Make story relevant today— link to contemporary life

How should we let people know about the site?

Notes recorded online in PEPC (27 respondents)

- List as a national park service site (9)
- Provide online interpretative and information center (3)
- Advertise (online, printed media, road signs, and social media, etc.) (9)
- Host field trips/provide education opportunities (6)
- Partner with museums to promote the site (2)
- Add it to the history books; increase the use of the NPS Teaching with Historic Places teaching plan on the internet (2)
- Conduct podcast interviews with key people (descendants, researchers, managers, race and history thinkers, etc.)
- Create a documentary film for public broadcast
- Use NPS media outlets (3)
- Use state tourism bureau (4)
- Tie the story to the Civil War, Underground Railroad, Lincoln, and other related sites (2)
- Create a reality show on the history channel
- Conduct outreach to the local community

What role(s) should various organizations such as New Philadelphia Association, Archaeological Conservancy, Philadelphia Land Trust, and the National Park Service play in the future of the site? Do you have other ideas or comments you would like to share with us?

Notes recorded from the public meeting on flip-charts

- Only the National Park Service has the capacity/skill/ability to manage (10)
- Join Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area to improve public awareness and tap into tourism corridor from Springfield Illinois to Hannibal Missouri (2)
- Explore state supported programs for staff and financial support (2)
- Organizations currently involved should serve as consultants
- Organize youth
- Continue additional archeology via partnerships with universities
- State does not have capacity to assume the site
- Create a culture of volunteerism to provide staff support
- Partner with outside groups (African American, historical society, business community)
- Continue to seek sponsorships to raise revenue
- Concern was raised that taxes would be increased to pay for improvements at New Philadelphia Townsite.
 - Participants responded additional tax revenue generated by the site would offset any increase.
 - There was a strong public perception the site would be a significant economic driver for the area.
- The owners of one property adjacent to the New Philadelphia Townsite were supportive of the townsite becoming a national park unit but expressed concern that the federal government might take their property through eminent domain. They expressed several times that they had no interest in selling their land.

Notes recorded online in PEPC (50 respondents)

- Include in the national park system (25)
- Involve stakeholders in future research designs and goals, interpretation, developing visitor materials, as well as fundraising (12)
- The National Park Service should build upon research already done (3)
- Incorporate descendants' voices into interpretation of the site (3)
- Create online presence for those that do not visit (3)
- Conduct living history events (2)
- Include many perspectives in developing and telling the story of New Philadelphia
- Make New Philadelphia part of education curricula; partner with schools and museums; provide tours of the site
- Use volunteers to maintain the site and participate in various programs
- NPS ownership and stewardship is key to preserving the site; work with universities to provide ongoing educational and research programs