

City of Piedmont
CITY COUNCIL AGENDA REPORT

DATE: April 3, 2023

TO: Mayor and Council

FROM: Sara Lillevand, City Administrator

SUBJECT: Direction to Staff Regarding Efforts to Memorialize the Sidney and Irene Dearing Family at the Triangle Park at the Intersection of Magnolia and Wildwood Avenues and Presentation of the City's History

RECOMMENDATION

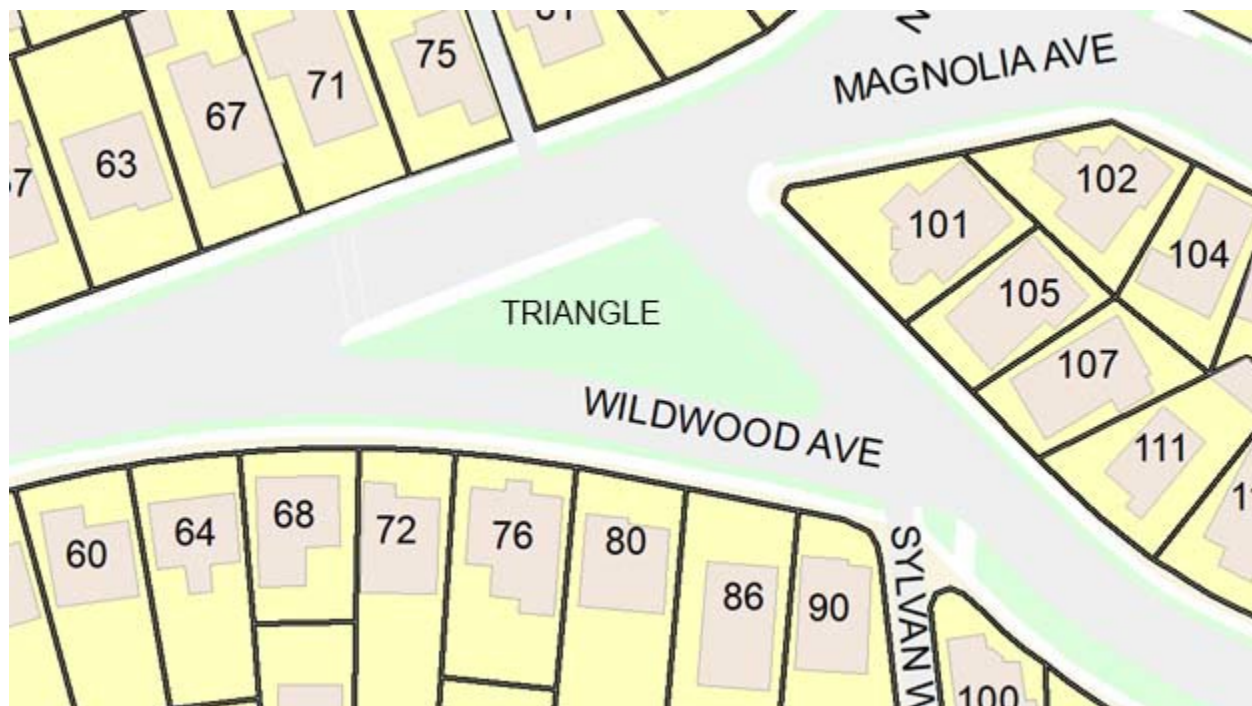
Provide direction to staff regarding efforts to memorialize the family of Sidney and Irene Dearing at the Triangle Park at Magnolia and Wildwood Avenues (Triangle Park) based on the guiding principles presented as well on presentation of the City's history in the current context.

BACKGROUND

In 1924, Piedmont's first black homeowners, Sidney and Irene Dearing, were targeted due to their race and forced to leave their home as a result of community and governmental actions. Following intense pressure from the community, Mr. Dearing sold his home to the City and moved out of Piedmont. There have been calls in the community and from members of the City Council for the abhorrent treatment of the Dearing Family to be publicly acknowledged and commemorated. One of the suggestions was to name the Triangle Park in honor of the Dearing Family. This piece of City land is located near the former Dearing home and is an appropriate place to formally recognize the reprehensible actions of this community's past and to affirm the inclusive direction we strive toward.

At its May 16, 2022 meeting, the Council directed the Park Commission to explore and make recommendations to the City Council on opportunities to memorialize the Sidney and Irene Dearing Family history at the Triangle Park.

Triangle at Wildwood and Magnolia Avenues



PARK COMMISSION SUBCOMMITTEE

Based on the Council direction provided on May 16, 2022, the Park Commission established a subcommittee to facilitate this important work. On June 1, 2022, the Park Commission voted to form a subcommittee that included three commissioners: Dave Johnson, Kimberly Moses, and Robin Wu. The subcommittee is supported by staff as well as consultant Cornelia Sylvester. Cornelia Sylvester has been working with staff on equity, inclusion, and diversity issues for the past two years. Ultimately, the subcommittee's work will result in a Park Commission report and recommendation to the City Council. This report will also capture ideas from the community on other ways this incident could be memorialized by the community which are outside the scope of the subcommittee's work. The Council will then consider the action which should be taken.

Since May 2022, there have been five facilitated stakeholder meetings to help create a plan for a memorial site. The overall goal of each meeting is for the Park Commission subcommittee to gather information and feedback from the community to inform eventual recommendations to the Piedmont City Council.

The Park Commission subcommittee met initially with relatives of Sidney and Irene Dearing and then began a series of community stakeholder meetings including the Piedmont Anti-Racism and Diversity Committee (PADC); the Piedmont Racial Equity Campaign (PREC); community members in the "Sidney Dearing Working Group"; Piedmont Beautification Foundation (PBF); and immediate neighbors of the Triangle Park. Members of the Dearing Family have been present at all stakeholder meetings, which was a goal from the beginning of the project. Most meetings were conducted via Zoom. However, several subcommittee meetings have taken place

on site at the Triangle Park.

On February 10, 2023, Dearing Family members joined the subcommittee members, Staff and Cornelia Sylvester for a tour of the Triangle Park as well as Piedmont Park. Informally, ideas for commemorative signage, a seating area for small gatherings and opportunities for historical and educational information were discussed.

On March 29, 2023, an in-person neighborhood meeting was held at the Triangle Park in order to solicit initial feedback from immediate neighbors.

A timeline of the meetings and the guiding principles developed with the family members of Sidney and Irene Dearing are as follows:

- May 16, 2022:** City Council passed a resolution directing the Park Commission to explore and make recommendations to the City Council on opportunities to memorialize the Sidney Dearing Family history at the Triangle Park
- June 1, 2022:** Park Commission forms a subcommittee of Dave Johnson, Kimberly Moses and Robin Wu
- July 10, 2022:** Subcommittee and staff met with Cornelia Sylvester at Triangle Park
- Aug. 25, 2022:** Meeting with staff and Dearing Family members
- Sept. 7, 2022:** Update to the Park Commission by Cornelia Sylvester
- Sept. 29, 2022:** Subcommittee meeting including staff, Cornelia Sylvester, subcommittee and family members. The site description, ideas for memorials, and process were discussed at this meeting
- Oct. 5, 2022:** Update to the Park Commission by Cornelia Sylvester
- Oct. 24, 2022:** Subcommittee meeting with Family members, PADC and PREC
- Nov. 2, 2022:** Update to the Park Commission by Cornelia Sylvester
- Dec. 1, 2022:** Stakeholder meeting with Family members and the Piedmont Beautification Foundation
- Dec. 7, 2022:** Update to Park Commission
- Jan. 13, 2023:** Discussion between Cornelia Sylvester and Dearing Family members to establish “proposed guiding principles”
- Feb. 10, 2023:** Park Tours with Dearing Family members (Triangle Park and Piedmont Park)
- Mar. 29, 2023:** Neighborhood meeting at the Triangle Park

Proposed Guiding Principles for the Dearing Family Memorial at the Triangle Park

1. Honor both Sidney and Irene Dearing.
2. Be visible from the street, not just from inside the park.
3. Teach something about Sidney and Irene Dearing’s lives and accomplishments, not only about the tragedy; fully acknowledge the history.
4. The Dearing Family is open (and not opposed) to the idea of bronze sculptures or the like.
5. If there is to be physical art, employ local Black designers for its creation.

FISCAL CONSIDERATIONS

Proposed improvements to memorialize the Dearing Family have not been determined and the exact design and construction costs remain undefined at this time. However, depending on direction received from Council, staff propose to hire a landscape architect and/or local art designer to develop design concepts for the Triangle Park. A balance of \$70,000 remains under the Diversity/Equity/Inclusion line item of the approved Administration budget in fiscal year 2022-23.

NEXT STEPS

Should the Council provide direction to proceed, staff proposes development of high-level conceptual designs to present to the broader community at an in-person hands-on workshop.

PRESENTATION OF PIEDMONT'S HISTORY

The discussion of how to memorialize the Sidney and Irene Dearing Family brings to the forefront another question which has come up in several forms over the past few years, "How and where should the City of Piedmont present its history in the current context?" A discussion of this topic could include how Piedmont's history is presented on the city web site, in job postings and other publications, as well as in other physical markers throughout the city such as the Piedmont Park History Trail. These important history related questions fall within the scope of broader Equity, Inclusion and Belonging commitments made in 2020 that have yet to be operationalized and prioritized. In order to guide future city efforts, Staff recommends that the City Council schedule a work session to discuss perspectives and priorities aimed at leading a city which is a safe, welcoming, and equitable place for all people.