



City of Portland
Martin Luther King Recognition Task Force
Concluding Report
May 10, 2018

On March 27, 2017, the Portland City Council established the Martin Luther King Recognition Task Force and asked it to:

Consider how the life and legacy of the Civil Rights Leader Dr. Martin Luther King may be best acknowledged and recognized, in the form of renaming a street, park or similarly situated public space by the City of Portland (Order 173-A-16/17)

The Council took this action at the request of the Sustainability and Transportation Committee following a discussion on January 10, 2017 of a proposal to change the name of Franklin Street to Martin Luther King Boulevard. Committee members wished to learn whether there were other locations in the city that might be more appropriate locations to honor Dr. King.

The task force was comprised of the following members:

Councilor Pious Ali, Chair

Regina Philips

Dawud Ummah

Merita McKenzie

Danielle Conway

Matt Suslovic

Daniel Minter

Blanca Santiago

Herb Adams

This group convened their first meeting in June 2, 2017. They met seven times between that date and the end of the calendar year before their commission expired. The City Council re-instituted the Task Force in February, 2018. The reconstituted Task Force met two more times to



complete their work. During the course of a year, they examined several locations as possible candidates for renaming in honor of Dr. King. At the conclusion of their work they voted to recommend the Bayside Trail as the most appropriate location to rename in honor of Dr. King.

Locations Considered

Amethyst Lot (Portland Landing)

The Amethyst lot is a currently underutilized area on the Eastern Waterfront that was formerly used by Bath Iron Works. In early 2017 City staff unveiled an extensive plan to redevelop this into Portland Landing -- a welcoming park designed to provide a variety of amenities including recreational space, an event space, and features designed to protect parts of the waterfront from storm surge and waves in the event of large storms. City planners also imagine that Portland Landing will provide a location for community sailing programs, public temporary berthing, and water taxi access.

Task Force members visited the location and found that it had many elements that would make it a suitable candidate for renaming in honor of Dr. King. Its location on the waterfront and proximity to Thames Street and the Eastern Prom Trail make it easily accessible to Portland residents and visitors alike. It is also located in part of the city experiencing economic revival and investment.

Committee members noted that there is a long history of African American involvement with the waterfront. The Abyssinian Church, located on Newbury Street, was built in 1827 by African American seamen who sailed out of Portland. Many church members perished in the wreck of the steamship *Portland* in 1898. It is also likely that escaping slaves arrived in Portland via ship on their journey to freedom.

To learn more about the plans for Portland Landing, the Task Force invited Waterfront Coordinator, William Needelman, to meet with them and discuss each element in detail. It was clear that plans for the the park were well developed and would be difficult to modify. Members discussed whether it would be appropriate to name a portion of the space after Dr. King but ultimately decided that the maritime nature of the park did not make this a great fit. They did feel that installing educational signage in the park describing African American contributions to the waterfront would be welcome.



Fort Sumner Park

At the suggestion of a resident, the Task Force discussed whether Fort Sumner Park would be an appropriate location to recognize Dr. King. It has an outstanding view of the City and is well loved by City residents, especially neighbors on Munjoy Hill. Despite this, members determined that its history as a military fortification and the fact that it serves mainly as a neighborhood park made it a less than ideal candidate site.

Congress Square Park

Congress Square Park has become a vibrant urban park hosting a variety of events and activities. There has been extensive community process and financial investment in a campaign to redesign this space for the past several years. These efforts have included collaboration between City staff, the private sector, and community organizations such as the Friends of Congress Square. There are two parts to this project: the redesign of the public open space known as Congress Square, and the creation of a public artwork to be integrated and located in the new Square design. The goal of the effort is to create Congress Square as a focal point for cultural activities and community programs, contribute to the economic vitality of the city, and improve the quality of life for Portland residents, workers, and visitors.

As part of their evaluation process, the The Task Force discussed these plans with members of the Portland Public Art Committee. They learned that plans for the redesign of the Congress Square are very advanced. An artist, Sarah Sze, has already been commissioned to create the artwork that will be integrated into the overall square design. She has already established themes and concept for her project.

After this discussion Task Force members agreed that it would be important to respect the extensive planning and public engagement around the redesign of Congress Square and decided not to recommend this as a location to rename in honor of Dr. King.

Recommended Location: Bayside Trail

Bayside Trail runs through the Bayside neighborhood from the end of Commercial Street under Tukey's Bridge to Elm Street. Plans are underway to connect it to Deering Oaks Park as part of improvements to Kennebec Street. There are several plazas along the trail that currently include amenities such as benches and bicycle racks. The section of the trail between Franklin Street and Elm Street closely abuts businesses such as Whole Foods Market and Trader Joe's. There is also housing near the trail including Kennedy Park and Unity Village. New housing has been added recently with the redevelopment of the Schlotterbeck and Foss building. The Bayside



neighborhood has great opportunity for development including additional housing with the recent sale of the City owned properties on Hanover Street and Portland Street. Parcels along Somerset Street also await development.

In 2008, a previous task force charged with identifying a location to honor Dr. King recommended the Bayside Trail as a suitable location. According to their report:

The Task Force members unanimously concluded that the Bayside Trail was the preferred site...The site is central, visible, and accessible... Because the Bayside Trail is new, it does not require anything to be re-named. (Martin Luther King Jr. Task Force Report & Recommendations, 2008, pp. 3 - 4)

The current Task Force determines that these conditions still exist and it remains appropriate to rename the Bayside Trail in honor of Dr. King.

In 2008 the trail was still in the planning phase and presented a great opportunity to imagine its use from the ground up. The Task Force at that time recommended that a number of amenities be built during trail construction including specially designed benches and a statue and/or educational signage to commemorate Dr. King. Several members of the current Task Force served on the Task Force of 2008. They see an opportunity to reaffirm the work of the previous group and further recommend that the re-named Bayside Trail include some of the elements imagined by the Task Force in 2008.