

VIRGINIA:

IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF THE CITY OF ALEXANDRIA

MARGARET A. CHISLEY, <u>et al.</u> ,	)	
	)	
<u>Petitioners and Plaintiffs,</u>	)	
	)	
v.	)	No. CL 09004468 (At Law)
	)	
CITY OF ALEXANDRIA,	)	
	)	
<u>Respondent and Defendant.</u>	)	

COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA	)	
CITY OF ALEXANDRIA	)	ss.:

AFFIDAVIT OF JOSEPH JENNINGS

JOSEPH JENNINGS, being first duly sworn, deposes and says:

1. My name is Joseph Jennings. I am a resident and citizen of the City of Alexandria. I make the following statement of my own knowledge, and if called could competently testify to them.

2. I am 67 years old and African-American by heritage. I moved with my parents from Savannah, Georgia to Alexandria when I was twelve years old. Since that time, other than years that I served overseas in the Navy, I have lived in Alexandria.

3. Growing up in Alexandria, my family lived at 814 1st Street in what is now known as the "Parker Gray Historic

District." I attended Parker-Gray high school, graduating in the class of 1961. After high school I joined the United States Navy, and served during the Vietnam era as a third class postal clerk. After returning home, I attended Washington Technical Institute where I earned a degree in printing and publishing, and subsequently pursued a career in the printing and publishing business. I then changed professions and spent twenty years working as an auctioneer for the Salvation Army. I am now retired and live on Holmes Run Parkway in Alexandria.

4. When my family settled in Alexandria in the 1950s, the City was segregated along racial lines. Outside of the all black neighborhoods, such as Parker-Gray, African-Americans had very few places they could go to socialize. I recall that my friends and I were not allowed at the bowling alley or the City skating rink. Nor did most of the City's restaurants and bars allow African-American patrons. Those that did, like the Hot Shoppes restaurant, typically would require us to enter through the back and order carry-out.

5. For that reason, during the years of segregation, the William Thomas Post American Legion at 224 North Fayette Street was a central gathering place for the African-American community in Alexandria. In many respects, the Legion and the nearby Elks Lodge were all that the African-American community had during the years of segregation. For example, if someone

from the neighborhood wanted to have a wedding in the 1950s and 60s, they essentially had two options - the Elk's Lodge or the Legion. I have fond memories of attending beautiful and joyous receptions at both.

6. In addition to the importance of the building itself, the members of the William Thomas Post 129 played an important role in the City's African-American community during the years of segregation. The members of the Legion were African-Americans who had returned to our segregated community after fighting for the freedom of our entire country. The members were widely regarded as a positive force in the community, and young African-Americans like myself looked up to them as role models. Indeed, it is not a coincidence that many of my classmates at the Parker-Gray high school were proud to join the military after graduation.

7. The American Legion and its members were involved in all aspects of community life. In fact, for a number of years I played on a little league baseball team that was sponsored by the American Legion. Our American Legion team consisted of all black players, and we traveled around the area playing other all black teams. The Legion members did not only sponsor our team with money, but served the team as enthusiastic fans and sometimes even as coaches.

8. In most recent years, as a veteran of the Vietnam era, I became a proud member of the William Thomas Post 129 American Legion. I will acknowledge that the significance of the Legion - and the central role that it played in the African-American community - diminished once the City integrated and African-Americans were allowed to live outside of the formerly segregated neighborhoods and frequent establishments never before accessible to black Alexandrians.

9. But I will also attest to the fact that the negative picture that has recently been painted of the Legion is completely inaccurate. I have heard people say that the Legion has for years been an abandoned building that served as a bastion of crime and violence. That is absolutely untrue. Until only a couple of years ago, I served as the financial secretary of William Thomas Post 129 and I can say that during my tenure the Legion continued to host various functions, including dance classes and member meetings. To my knowledge, the Legion was never completely abandoned until it was recently sold to a developer who now wants to demolish it. Of course, the Queen Street area has had its problems over the years with drugs and violence. Whether those problems have been exaggerated can be debated, but I can say, based on personal knowledge rather than rumor and innuendo, that the American Legion was never the source of those problems.

Preserving 224 North Fayette Street

10. Because I do not now own real estate in Parker-Gray, I could not join the appeal to save the Legion building. Nevertheless, I strongly oppose the City Council's decision to allow it to be demolished.

11. To be clear, I have not submitted this statement in an effort to save the 224 North Fayette for the members of the William Thomas Post 129. For better or worse, our members allowed the building to be sold. Thus members like me (who adamantly opposed the sale) must live with that decision. What I cannot understand is how the structure itself is not being protected from demolition, considering that my fellow Legion members and I have always understood it to be a protected historic building. I always figured that after the Legion sold 224 North Fayette, the historic structure would remain in tact and would be re-used for some other purpose -- perhaps as a small business, a restaurant or a museum. After all, it is not the design of the building, but what the structure represents to the community that is at the heart of this matter.

12. I do not pretend to know about historic preservation laws and what factors are used to determine whether a historic building can be demolished. But its hard for me to understand how any building could be protected if the demolition of 224 North Fayette is allowed. If an institutional pillar of

the Parker-Gray community - and a vivid symbol of segregation era that made the district historic - can be replaced by modern condominiums, the Parker-Gray historic designation means nothing.

*Joseph Jennings*  
JOSEPH JENNINGS

Subscribed and sworn  
to before me this  
4th day of February  
2010:

*Dorothy M. Williams*  
Notary Public

My commission expires 2/28/13.



Dorothy M. Williams  
NOTARY PUBLIC  
Commonwealth of Virginia  
Reg. #104190  
My Commission Expires  
February 28, 2013