

PRESERVATION OPPORTUNITIES ASSESSMENT

**Prepared for the City of Paducah
Prepared by Rhodes Heritage Group
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Paducah's history is incorporated into these buildings and locations. We want to be proactive in creating a preservation plan that will guide those passionate about the future of these assets so that they become a more significant part of the ongoing cultural landscape of Paducah.

Mayor George Bray

PURPOSE OF THE ASSESSMENT

The City of Paducah (the City) has embarked upon an assessment to explore increased historic preservation activities that would not only support creative uses and restoration of the historical integrity of the City's most storied landmarks but, moreover, expand public access, interpretation, and investment of an often-overlooked African American heritage landscape. The historic assets evaluated in this assessment include the Hotel Metropolitan, Stuart Nelson Park, Oscar Cross Home, Columbia Theater, and the South Side Neighborhood. The assessment is a tool for the City's planning and engagement and promotes the importance of operational sustainability and stewardship planning. It is a reference and guide to assist the City and key stakeholders with identifying actions necessary to secure each preservation project's reuse, interpretation, and management potential and to direct the short-term investments critical for expanding Paducah's preservation economy.

THE HISTORIC PLACES

Listed below are brief historical snapshots of the priority landmarks.

A. Hotel Metropolitan

In 1908, Ms. Maggie Stead converted her private residence into short-term rentals and hotel accommodations for African American travelers. The Hotel was owned and operated by Ms. Stead and later Ms. Mamie Burbridge Guise until it closed in 1996. Currently, the two-story Hotel Metropolitan includes a detached Purple Room where guests who were famed and emerging musicians rehearsed and socialized, and the Hotel stands near performance venues along the Chitlin' Circuit. A place of safety and refuge during racial segregation, noted artists, athletes, entrepreneurs, and intellectuals such as Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, B.B. King, Ella Fitzgerald, Thurgood Marshall, the Harlem Globetrotters, and Negro Baseball League teams stayed there. In 2002, the National Park Service listed the property in the National Register of Historic Places, and it remains a repository of history that illustrates African Americans' struggles, accomplishments, and fortitude.

B. Stuart Nelson Park

In 1936, the Paducah Colored Civic League formed a committee to develop a municipal park for Paducah's African American community. In the 1930s, President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal initiatives to

combat the Great Depression resulted in a \$4.8 billion federal investment to create jobs and build public infrastructure, including parks, schools, roads, and bridges. The committee settled on a 55-acre site off Hinkleville Road, previously the area of Paducah's pest house and undesirable land by modern standards. Naming the park was a community affair, and the League asked Paducah's students to author essays. The winning essay came from Lincoln High School freshman Mattie Pate who proposed naming the park Stuart Nelson Park after Dr. William Stuart Nelson (1895 – 1977), a Paducah native and highly accomplished educator, civil rights leader, military veteran, religious scholar, and college president. The park officially opened on May 30, 1938, and an estimated 2,000 people enjoyed the festivities. In the 1860s, African American citizens in Western Kentucky started an annual celebration of the Eight of August, also known elsewhere as Juneteenth and Emancipation Day. For decades, the park hosted dayslong Eight of August events. The site was a testament to the importance of public and social infrastructure, the power of recreation and nature, and the need for ethnic and community spaces. The park's future is being reimagined as a new sports complex and must include historical interpretation to honor the landmark's African American history.

C. Oscar Cross Home

Mr. Oscar Cross (1906 – 1999) was a pioneering force in Paducah's civic life. He founded the Boys Club of Paducah in 1949 and directed it for fifty years. As a tribute to his service and leadership, the Club's Board renamed the Club in his honor. For nearly 75 years, the Club has nurtured Paducah youth through public education and mentorship programs and has offered adult recreation, sports, and civic activities. Built in 1905, Mr. Cross owned a small, single-family house near the historic Burk's Chapel AME Church, Lincoln High School, and Hotel Metropolitan. The Oscar Cross Home is where he and his wife, Dorenda, raised their family, and he would move beyond a dream and into action to establish the legacy institution called the Oscar Cross Boys & Girls Club of Paducah. The building is vacant and needs rehabilitation and management.

D. Columbia Theater

Built in 1927 and designed by architect John Ebersson, the Columbia Theater incorporates elaborate interior decorations to create a fantasy atmosphere. It features a Spanish-Moorish facade and a richly decorated interior with a proscenium arch and ornate plasterwork. While the theater's architecture is impressive, it also has a legacy of racial segregation before the end of the Civil Rights Movement. By law, African American patrons used the Colored Only entrance, bathroom facilities, and balcony. Still today, the Columbia Theater retains exceptional historical integrity and is evidence of the African American experience, a unique style of commercial architecture, and a diversity of local community stories. It is a vacant and vulnerable cultural space requiring substantial community support to ensure its future.

E. South Side Neighborhood

The South Side community has a rich history dating to the early 1800s. Originally known as "The Bottoms," the neighborhood was established as a working-class community where many African American families settled. Over time, it became a vibrant center for commerce and culture in the city. It

was an enclave to many private homes, churches, businesses, and community organizations that played essential roles in the civil rights movement. Despite facing challenges such as urban renewal projects and economic decline, the South Side community has continued to preserve its history. Its community serves as a reminder of the resilience and contributions of African Americans in the city and nationwide.

INITIAL PRESERVATION CONSIDERATIONS

During the contract period, the City and the Rhodes Heritage Group (the firm) convened and facilitated rounds of interviews with a diverse set of stakeholders. Our task was to understand the constraints defined by the City, property owners, and other stakeholders who have the authority to negotiate on behalf of the cultural institutions stewarding these assets and to determine how those constraints might impact opportunities for collaboration, reuse, interpretation, and management. The set of considerations presented below, which are the foundation for exploring the proposed preservation opportunities, will provide guidance and the parameters for future investments and activities. Any viable program should respond to these considerations.

Community-Oriented

The City aims to advance arts and civic engagement to create positive opportunities for all members of the Paducah community. It seeks to harness the power of African American history and culture with tourism and public education and to foster a more vibrant and thriving cultural destination and place to live. A community-oriented process can facilitate increased historic preservation and civic leadership by the African American community. It would advance the administration's goals for achieving equity-driven outcomes through historic preservation values. Any planning process should include community input on interpreting, recognizing, and commemorating the City's historic African American places and stories.

Capacity-Building

A capable development or project team has diverse skills and specialized expertise to help plan, evaluate, fund, and implement the appropriate uses and programs that align with the site's legacy and culture. The City and project stakeholders should invite and secure strategic partnerships, volunteers, and paid staff equipped and committed to advancing the critical priorities of the stewarding entities. Therefore, the City and each governing board should explore new forms of partnership such as a Memorandum of Agreement, Co-stewardship Agreement, and merger. In our experience, these collaborative models, whether short-term or long-term, can generate the financial and technical resources necessary to strengthen organizational capacity and reduce management deficiencies in operations and stewardship.

Preservation Treatments & Standards

Over time, historic building experience deterioration and decay due to environmental and structural issues, deferred maintenance, mismanagement, and insufficient funding. Any further erosion of the physical assets would diminish the historical integrity of the individual building and the architectural continuity of an entire city block and neighborhood, resulting in the increased cost of construction or demolition, and thus, should be avoided. The preservation plan should follow the highest conservation standards (*The*

Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties (36 CFR Part 68)) to retain the site's historical and architectural integrity and to define the interior and exterior treatment (preservation, restoration, or rehabilitation).

Land Use, Landscape & Setting

Physical and natural resources create the distinctive setting of a historic place. The stewarding organization should preserve the historical elements of the large front and back lawns, trees, and other unique features, such as social gatherings and recreational spaces. The plan should include a strategy to conserve and capitalize on the existing landscape attributes in this context. For land parcels within the study area, the City should assess the current zoning status of each historic site and consider zoning changes that support increased open space, passive parks, and cultural districts.

Income Generating Activities

All preservation projects should explore income generating activities that can strengthen financial projections and viability over time, which can enhance any future solicitation from the private and public sectors that could invest in cultural conservation and its community benefits. A conservative financial model with potential annual growth can inform non-profit fundraising through the variable economic cycles of the donor, grantmaking, and cultural consumer spending. In the case of a Limited Liability Company, a pragmatic and realistic pro forma and development plan can inform tactics for securing the capital stack needed to implement the selected reuse scenario. The project team should evaluate the potential use of the Kentucky Historic Tax Credit, Paducah's Transient Room Tax, and Federal Historic Tax Credit to partially fund rehabilitation costs and maximize revenue potential.

Patience

Historic preservation is rewarding but challenging work. As is true with many development projects managed by non-profits with volunteer leaders or limited paid staff, there are time, technical expertise, and money barriers. This type of work takes patience, partnership, and persistence. It can take years to bring an old building back to life, see it maintained and in productive use, and launch and grow a profitable social impact business.

TACTICS FOR PRESERVING THE HISTORIC ASSETS

The following section is an overview of the assessment findings and recommendations that can facilitate opportunities for maximizing the human and financial capital necessary to organize and distribute limited resources and enhance board effectiveness to meet the demands of building a high-performing organization.

The best part of being a local storyteller is sharing and collecting Paducah's African American stories to educate and foster goodwill. I'm constantly inspired by the strength, commitment, bravery, and love of Paducah's Uppertown community and their determination to make the way better for the youth.

I. HOTEL METROPOLITAN

The firm assessed the organizational capacity and growth potential of the Upper Town Heritage Foundation, which has been responsible for managing operations, fundraising, and maintaining the Hotel Metropolitan since 2008. The bulleted recommendations listed below focus on three key priorities: Management, Preservation, and Governance.

I. Management

The Foundation and City should shift their partnership from informal to formal contracts to enhance operations management. The partnership structure can be a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) or a legal contract known as a Co-Stewardship Agreement - a best practice for the perpetual care and preservation of nationally significant landmarks. In this context, the MOA is preferable and will allow both entities to test and pilot a new partnership structure. The term sheet should meet the expectations of both parties and inform the development of the formal agreement. The term sheet can include the following conditions.

- The City would manage and fund all preservation planning activities, the contracting process and construction projects, and ongoing cyclical maintenance of the Hotel building and the Purple Room.
- The Foundation would manage and fund all public education, interpretation, programming, and other activities critical to the visitor experience. The Foundation does work diligently to fulfill its mission and has raised \$1 million in the past fifteen years. As the organization matures, it must also maintain an effective board to lead and manage volunteers and staff, cultivate support through nonconventional and traditional means, and inspire broad public engagement.
- The City would substantially increase its annual investment to attract a qualified and talented professional and fund a full-time, paid Executive Director position with benefits. This leadership position is vital to the Foundation's growth and increased organizational development and capacity. The Executive Director is the project manager and coordinates, plans, promotes and manages the organization. As an internal work plan, the Foundation would:
 - a) Write a five-to-ten-year Strategic Plan of the organizational objectives, resource requirements, and tasks the organization needs to accomplish within a specific timeframe to ensure successful outcomes.
 - b) Update the governance documents such as bylaws and trustee job descriptions and expand board membership.
 - c) Prepare an Interpretation Plan with programming options to define in writing the storytelling framework and interpretative approach, key messaging, and site history of the landmark and neighborhood for use by staff and volunteers. The plan should include a video and oral history documentation on the current Director, Ms. Betty Dobson, and her extensive research, interpretation, collections management, and audience development work.

d) Develop a Fundraising Plan with endowment projections to set a roadmap for donor cultivation and prospecting.

- The City would assign a city agency and staff person to act as the Foundation's point of contact and project manager for the partnership, maintain sufficient insurance on the historic buildings, maintain the grounds and lawn care, and manage the project schedule for planning and restoration activities.

Note: Since admission fees cover only a portion of the operating costs, stewards of a house museum must successfully raise funds year-round. For example, the American Association of State and Local History reports that house museums earn \$8 per visitor, while it costs, on average, \$40 per person to operate the business. House museums survive by establishing partnership agreements with partner organizations and agencies to share the costs of operations and maintenance.

II. Preservation

Understanding the conditions and context in which the Hotel Metropolitan was constructed can determine historical significance and identify character-defining features of the buildings. It is essential to study the construction materials, means, and methods to determine the best fabric treatment and understand performance objectives for new uses. Systematically eliminating and managing the unknowns can benefit physical preservation and interpretation inside and on the landscape. As outlined above, the City would fund and hire qualified consulting firms to prepare the following preservation plans to inform future treatments, cost estimates, and maintenance. As an internal work plan, the City would:

- Prepare a Historic Structure Report (a comprehensive preservation plan) with paint and wallpaper analysis, conditions (structural, mechanical, material), cost estimates on complete restoration, and spatial and historical significance.
- Prepare a 10-year Cyclical Maintenance Plan following complete restoration to understand the annual cost estimates to maintain the property at the highest standards and mitigate future deferred maintenance issues.

The City would seek concurrence from the Foundation on the preservation approach and schedule and fund and manage the bidding process, contracting, and hiring of a qualified preservation architecture firm, such as Preservation Design Partnerships, LLC, and a construction contractor, such as Ray Black & Son, LLC, to restore the building, support ADA accessibility, and mitigate issues of water infiltration, mold, environmental contaminants, termites, and other concerns.

III. Governance

Years prior, citizen leaders and grassroots preservationists saved Hotel Metropolitan from demolition and neglect. Through their actions and altruism, the advocacy coalition shifted from an ad hoc group to a formally organized non-profit to govern the Foundation and manage its historic assets. As a result of the Foundation's stewardship, this present-day house museum and public space has untapped potential and

merit. Yet, based on discussions and observations, the organization stewarding the landmark could enhance site management and board capacity, operations compliance, donor stewardship and reporting, and other fiscal responsibilities. Critical to the Foundation's sustained performance and growth, the Board would advance the following recommendations.

- The Foundation's Board would assess Board talent needs and expand the number of volunteer Trustees to fill targeted gaps in technical areas of expertise. If applicable, the Board should secure philanthropic investment to hire a non-profit management and board development firm to facilitate a Board retreat, which could benefit the board's governance, fundraising, and executive leadership training.
- The Foundation's Board would conduct a national search to identify candidates, hire the organization's full-time Executive Director, and support them in developing a Strategic Plan.
- The Mayor of Paducah would appoint up to five Trustees to the Board based on the Foundation's schedule for Board appointments as defined in the bylaws and to select leaders in professions such as philanthropy, business, museums, arts, and culture that expand technical expertise.

Based on stakeholder interviews, the Foundation seeks a collaborative and formal partnership with the City to sustain the building's long-term stewardship as a community asset and as a jewel in the City's Creative Cities designation by UNESCO. The recommended partnership between the City and Foundation can advance operational capacity in staffing, physical preservation, public access, education, and governance. The collaborative development of the Stewardship Plan and partnership agreement has the potential to inform, restructure, and reposition the Hotel Metropolitan for future success.

Sidebar: Placemaking Strategy & Cultural District

Based on a diverse set of stakeholder interviews, the firm recommends that the City explore developing an Upper Town Cultural District as an innovative preservation concept that could strengthen the spatial, cultural, and physical connections between several anchoring landmarks and histories on the South Side. Across a three-block radius are four primary and extant assets, vacant land, and underutilized structures. The City should leverage its land use tools, collaborative modeling, and public and private financing strategies to encompass the land parcels of the Hotel Metropolitan (corner of South 8th Street and Oscar Cross Avenue), the Burk's Chapel AME Church, and Oscar Cross Home (corner of Clarence Gaines Street and Ohio Street), and the former Lincoln High School site (South Eight Street). At this stage, the proposed name and boundary of the cultural district are only conceptual. Further evaluation is needed to ensure alignment with the City's master planning and the African American community's vision for revitalization and placemaking.

These sites can anchor a cultural development project that protects, activates, and scales preservation opportunities for Paducah's African American sites through an integrated design, interpretation, and programmatic strategy. In alignment with the historic assets, creating a cultural district with parkland and

open space can integrate nature, culture, and beauty through landscape architecture. The following bulleted list can guide the initial steps to evaluate the cultural district's potential.

- The City could partner with the Oscar Cross Boys & Girls Club, which owns the Oscar Cross Home, to rehabilitate the building for rental use as affordable housing. Presently in an urgent state of deterioration, the partnership can save the building from ongoing neglect and decay, secure investment for future cyclical maintenance of the structure, and serve a worthy rental candidate who could contribute to the community's social, educational, and cultural health. The firm did discuss uses such as a tutoring and academic center as a satellite facility operated by the Club. Because the Club's strategic direction and focus over the following years is to secure a permanent headquarters, the firm is still determining if continued ownership and management of the Home by the Club is feasible. Therefore, the Club should explore long-term ownership with stakeholders such as the Paducah Historical Preservation Group, Paducah-McCracken NAACP Chapter, Paducah Alliance of Neighbors, Habitat for Humanities, and other groups. An investment between \$200,000 to \$300,000 by the City and local organizations should cover design services, construction documents, materials, and labor expenses.
- Although the historic 300-seat Burk's Chapel AME Church was not a priority project for this assessment, the firm has included it for consideration because it has exceptional architectural and historical merit. It is one of Paducah's best examples of historic religious architecture and one of the oldest African American institutions in Western Kentucky. Unfortunately, the facility has decades of deferred maintenance, structural integrity issues in the four steeples and foundations, water infiltration, and other challenges the church congregation must mitigate immediately to save the structure from collapse or demolition. To foster a preservation solution, the firm recommends exploring an expanded programmatic connection between the Hotel Metropolitan and Burk's Chapel because of their geographic proximity, the spatial constraints at the Hotel, and an opportunity to promote viable dual uses (religious and cultural) for the historic church. As an initial step, the City and local foundations could fund the Church's Preservation Plan and Condition Assessment Report and the emergency stabilization of the structural and environmental issues to prevent life and safety concerns.
- There is growing momentum to reclaim and revitalize the former Lincoln High School property, which was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1988 and subsequently demolished. Owned by the Lincoln High School Historical Foundation and in partnership with the local NAACP chapter, they have organized an advisory committee and developed initial plans for reuse as a civic and cultural center. The committee should continue its business planning to evaluate financial feasibility, assess the infrastructure requirements for implementation, and conduct community planning meetings with engagement by the residents surrounding the site and the African American cultural partners in the neighborhood. Based on stakeholder meetings, many African American community members retain deep connections to the school's legacy and history and have envisioned an appropriate commemorative and reuse strategy for the heritage site for

decades. As the project advances through planning and development, the Foundation should create a Management and Operations Plan to assess any financial deficits in rental revenues that public and private partnerships would subsidize to cover long-term staffing, programming, and operating expenses.

The restoration of Hotel Metropolitan and its Purple Room, rehabilitation of Burk's Chapel and the Oscar Cross Home, acquisition and development of vacant land parcels as open space, and connection to the future redevelopment of the former Lincoln High School site would be central to the creation of an Upper Town Cultural District. Currently, the proposed district area needs a revitalization strategy that is culturally sensitive and community centered. However, there is an opportunity to better use the vacant land as a public park in a sensitive, context-appropriate manner that would not compromise the natural setting and neighborhood context with aggressive programming while protecting the historic buildings and landscapes by restricting incompatible development within the boundary area.

II. STUART NELSON PARK

Presently, the City and McCracken County (the County) are co-developing and investing in the project through public financing and bonding to redevelop the areas of Stuart Nelson Park and former Bluegrass Downs horse racing facility into a singular, regional sports, recreation, and interpretative space. The future McCracken County Sports Tourism Sports Complex (the complex) has the potential to serve as an important landmark and a multi-generational community hub. The bulleted recommendations listed below should inform tactics for the interpretation and commemorative efforts by the City and the County. Several stakeholder interviews and public meetings informed the recommendations.

- Community advocates such as the Paducah Historical Preservation Group, the project design firms, and other stakeholders seek a comprehensive interpretation that aligns with the site's legacy and includes interpretative panels, signage, artwork, and annual events related to historical themes on the life of Dr. Stuart Nelson, the park history including its racial segregation, and robust heritage of Eight of August community celebrations. Any viable interpretation and commemoration strategy should be reviewed and approved by the Paducah Historical Preservation Group.
- The firm sees an opportunity to integrate Paducah's social history with contemporary design and architecture. The concept is to leverage the rehabilitation of the existing structures or construct new park amenities, such as picnic areas and benches, that can respond to the African American history proposed for interpretation at the site through design and architecture.
- The parties should define the public process for naming the 105-acre McCracken County Sports Tourism Athletic Complex (the sports complex) and strongly consider commemorative naming options in agreement with their goals to attract corporate sponsorship. In the firm's view, the opportunity to commemorate Western Kentucky's African American history differs from the project goals for securing financial investment by a corporate partner.

- Through inclusive public process and ongoing dialogue, the project owners, partners, and stakeholders should identify additional narratives, events, and historical figures to recognize in subsequent phases of interpretative planning. The County and City should develop a communications strategy to share updates on these activities with community stakeholders.

The first-class sports complex project is nearing the construction documents phase, and the development partners have made substantial progress in responding sensitively to community concerns regarding the site placement of interpretive elements and their requests to have substantive memorialization completed when the new park and complex open in 2025. The County and the City must include appropriate funding for interpretation and commemoration in their development budget.

III. COLUMBIA THEATER

As an architect, I have a great appreciation for our built heritage. Our historic buildings tell the story of our community. The Columbia has such a rich legacy and served as the backdrop for so many memories of people throughout the region. Our hope is that through the restoration of this magnificent building, future generations will have the same opportunity.

Jeff Canter

The firm convened stakeholders, including the non-profit owner, Columbia Art House, and the leading arts and culture organizations in Paducah's downtown district. These groups include the Market House Theatre, the Carson Center for the Performing Arts, and Maiden Alley Cinema. The goal was to understand the actions taken by the owners to save the historic venue, receive information on the reuse vision to facilitate rehabilitation of the Columbia Theater for market-driven uses, discuss the initial ideas for interpreting the African American and Jim Crow-era history that remains intact inside the landmark, and hear directly from the stakeholders on the rebirth of the theater facility. Listed below are the key takeaways.

- The facade is failing, and emergency funding for restoration is time-sensitive, which is critical before irreversible loss occurs. Based on cost estimates prepared by Ray Black & Sons, stabilization of the facade may require a total investment of \$1.6 million or more. Based on the square footage, condition, and system's needs, rehabilitation is a multi-million redevelopment project.
- Given the building's large scale and the complexity of redevelopment, the rehabilitation of Columbia Theater has proceeded in phases. The community-led and all-volunteer organization has made progress in its campaign to raise awareness, activate the site with limited programming, clean and secure the facility, and raise dollars for planning activities and targeted preservation. However, it has proven difficult for the Columbia Art House to broaden community support, establish an approved business plan for implementation, and identify a development partner with technical expertise and access to financial resources. To manage expectations, the City or a local funder

could fund the advocacy group to hire a consultant or termed staff position such as a project manager who will advance the project development process.

- In our experience, historic theaters can be challenging preservation projects to bring toward completion and sustain over time. Therefore, a successful development project of this scale demands specialized expertise in real estate and tax credit financing, a market-driven proforma and feasibility study, and a proven history of leading and managing an arts-based redevelopment project.
- The Carson Center, with engagement by the Market House, should be consulted to draw from their experience in building community support, completing a successful capital campaign, attracting citizen leaders to their board, and learning from their management of the Carson Center. Without one or both institutions supporting future phases of rehabilitation and reuse planning, the firm is concerned about the real possibility of building collapse, especially on the facade, life safety threats, demolition, and loss of a unique cultural asset within the boundaries of Paducah's award-winning arts district and Main Street. An additional risk is that without viable local partnerships, including involvement by the City and County, the firm would expect the project to continue to stall.
- The City could function as a trusted convenor and organizer alongside the Columbia Arts House board, which would be essential for exploring a collaborative partnership model through public and private partnerships. If applicable, the project partners should:
 - a. Establish a market-based rationale for the reuse of the Columbia Theater based on existing market conditions and the ability of the local market to support a new multipurpose event space with restaurant and liquor services as defined by the Columbia Arts House's preliminary planning studies.
 - b. Understand local demographics and market spending potential, estimate the local and regional market demand for the proposed reuse concept, and based on an operating model, determine what percentage of the market the proposed venture would need to capture to sustain successful business operations.
 - c. Conduct a gap analysis of comparable facilities and services in the area to inform the highest and best use for the site within the established parameters of historic significance, existing infrastructure, and community needs.

Advertisement of an RFQ/P could help to attract a qualified developer specializing in historic theater rehabilitation. As the stakeholders and City staff discussed, a real estate company and developer would require a more significant development area to generate sufficient revenues and a reasonable return on investment. Additional development incentives may stimulate interest from out-of-town development entities.

At the stakeholder meetings, the firm heard from individuals and institutions about their desires to see the Columbia Theater fully rehabilitated with sensitive updates and the facilities to accommodate

contemporary events, a restaurant, and interpretative use. There was consensus that the project would directly bolster economic development and benefit the existing businesses in the downtown area. It would attract and diversify the range of cultural offerings available to local and regional audiences and provide a canvas upon which the operating partner can share the significance and stories of the Columbia Theater's racial segregation, civil rights, and local community history with a large public audience.

To buy time for the future preservation of the site, the firm recommends saving the facade while building community consensus and advancing the next steps in planning activities. The Carson Center, Market House, Columbia Arts House board, staff, volunteers, and the City and County should collaborate to co-create the Redevelopment Plan to benefit the entire Paducah community and region.

IV. SOUTH SIDE NEIGHBORHOOD

When I talk about an inclusive government and an informed citizenship, I am committed to collaborating with the entire community to uplift and revitalize Paducah's historic South Side. Its history is rich with a generational legacy that must be documented, revitalized, and celebrated.

Revered and City Commissioner Raynarldo Henderson

Hosted by the City, the firm moderated a town hall session with approximately fifty community advocates, residents, elected officials, city staff, and others to hear their perspectives about the priority preservation projects described above and to receive input on approaches for the preservation of the historic South Side neighborhood. Listed below are the key takeaways.

- The Paducah community cares deeply about the historic character and history of the neighborhood. They seek public investment and homeowner incentives to improve the existing housing owned by long-term residents. A facade and energy retrofit grant program would help maintain the historic neighborhood's architectural continuity and charm, modernize historic properties' systems for energy efficiency and climate resilience, and reduce decades of disinvestment visible in the extant structures. Developing a well-managed and well-promoted program and process can ensure that funds are easily accessible to the community it serves.
- Several stakeholders discussed transitioning the neighborhood from a majority rental market to a more balanced ratio between homeowners and renters. They recommended solutions such as down payment assistance and supplemental financing for home improvements. There was a strong consensus that historic preservation can support neighborhood revitalization and affordable housing. The City should aggressively fund incentives for home ownership and improvement opportunities for current and future owners and ensure that funds are easily accessible to the community members. Beyond local support, the City could evaluate state and federal resources to leverage local investments, such as the federally managed Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant program and the Residential Renewable Energy Tax Credit or, like some states and local governments programs called Property Assessed Clean Energy Financing, which allows

homeowners to finance energy-efficient upgrades through a special assessment of their property taxes.

- The relocation of the legacy institution, Oscar Cross Boys & Girls Club, from the South Side community has left an unfilled gap in youth and adult programming and public facilities, and the Club has entered into a short-term lease agreement for the use of the Armory Building on Paducah's West Side. In discussions with City staff and the Club's executive leaders, the historic West Kentucky Industrial College property located on Paducah's North Side (between H. C. Mathis Drive and North 14th Street), which the City owns, should be assessed for its potential as a permanent home and headquarters for the Oscar Cross Boys & Girls Club. The firm recommends that any future use and ownership of the College building should align with the site's legacy. A viable next step should include listing in the National Register of Historic Places to access the Federal Historic Tax Credit and Kentucky State Tax Credit for rehabilitation.
- Regarding North Side histories, attendees advocated that the City not leave the North Side out of this visioning and to support the National Register listed North Side Elementary School as a community asset worthy of historic preservation.

The attendees at the meeting included the City of Paducah, McCracken County, Hotel Metropolitan, NAACP, West Kentucky Community Technical College, Oscar Cross Boys & Girls Club, Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Kentucky Colonels Board, Ray Black & Sons, Paducah Historical Preservation Group, Paducah Housing Authority, Columbia Arts House, South Side Steering Committee, Northside School, Paducah Convention & Visitor Bureau, River Heritage Museum, Mount Zion Baptist Church, Macedonia Missionary Baptist Church, Burk's Chapel AME Church, Rosary Chapel Catholic Church, Lord's Sanctuary Apostolic Church, Nehemiah Christian Church, Calvary Baptist Church, New Greater Love Baptist Church, Greater Lincoln Heights, 9th Street Tabernacle Ministries, Pilgrim Baptist Church, Kings House Ministries, PFGW Architects, and individuals.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS & CONCLUSIONS

The bullets below include the recommended next steps and public and private investments for phased historic preservation activities.

- **Hotel Metropolitan:** The City should co-develop the term sheet and execute an MOA with the Upper Town Heritage Foundation for ten years. Through a transformational partnership and a multi-million investment, the project partners can fund the executive director position with benefits for a term of 10 years, complete the planning activities by qualified consultant firms, fully restore the Hotel building and rehabilitate the Purple Room with new energy-efficient systems, maintain the facilities and lawn, and hold adequate insurance on the property. Mayor Bray would also

appoint up to five trustees to the Board and assign the City agency managing these activities. The parties in the partnership agreement may define other roles and responsibilities.

- **Stuart Nelson Park:** The City and County should seek approval from the Paducah Historical Preservation Group and other stakeholders before adopting a final interpretation and commemoration plan. At a minimum, the project funders should invest five percent of the budget allocation to support the implementation of the selected interpretative and commemorative approach. Although there has been resistance to discussions around naming as a commemoration, the firm encourages the County and the City to vet options for dual naming opportunities to achieve its corporate sponsorship goal and the community's vision to increase permanent recognition for Dr. Stuart Nelson.
- **Oscar Cross Home:** The City should support the Oscar Cross Boys & Girls Club by identifying a capable, long-term owner who will steward the historic asset for use as affordable housing. The firm recommends that the City partner with the Club and another church or non-profit to prepare the Condition Assessment with cost estimates and fund rehabilitation of the house. With the City's equity, diversity, and inclusion goals in mind, the firm sees an opportunity for the selected contractor to hire young adults from the community to create construction trades training and employment.
- **Columbia Theater:** The City should convene and facilitate the Carson Center for the Performing Arts and the Market House Theatre to work with the non-profit owner, Columbia Art House, to co-create the Redevelopment Plan. While the planning activities continue, the City and local funders should fund the stabilization to retain the architectural continuity on the historic block. The non-profit should also collaborate with the Paducah Historical Preservation Group and Kentucky African American Heritage Commission to document through measured drawings and photography the extant areas of the theater retaining African American history.
- **South Side Neighborhood:** In phases, the City should explore a placemaking and revitalization strategy to protect, interpret, and revive the once-thriving community. The firm encourages the City to first direct preservation planning and phased rehabilitation at the Oscar Cross Home and Burk's Chapel AME Church. The City should also aggressively fund incentives for home improvements such as facade and energy efficiency upgrades and ownership programs for current and future owners without creating undue financial hardship on the existing property owners through increased property taxes or implementing programs that can accelerate displacement. Through a community planning process, the City and stakeholders could evaluate and define the district boundaries and co-develop a Master Plan of the concept, in alignment with the City's existing and future goals for the area.

This Preservation Opportunities Assessment is a starting point for identifying landmarks important in Paducah's civic history through the lens of African American history. During the project, the firm was pleased by the City's interest in expanding its knowledge of historic preservation. It was also proud to

witness the community's willingness to express their views for protecting a diverse set of historic resources.

The City is fortunate to have a decades-long track record in successful historic preservation program development and has made innovative investments in downtown and neighborhood revitalization. It benefits from having an established and respected network of arts and culture institutions that can contribute to the opportunities presented in this report. With increased staffing capacity and expertise, through creative public financing and partnership strategies, and through an inclusive coalition development process, the City and its growing community of stakeholders can organize together to catalyze increased economic development, equitably invest in preserving historic African American places, and center in the City's master planning and budgets the African American community's vision for the protection, interpretation, and revitalization.