



Loudoun County, Virginia

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NEWS RELEASE

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Loudoun Freedom Center to Serve as Resident Curator for Union Street School Property

The Loudoun County Board of Supervisors has approved a lease agreement with the Loudoun Freedom Center for the historic Union Street School property. The Union Street School property, located at 20 Union St. NW in Leesburg, becomes the first county property included in the county's Resident Curator Program. This significant partnership between the county and the Loudoun Freedom Center aims to preserve African American history & culture and make accessible the full understanding of the rich heritage of Loudoun County and the significant contributions of the African American community. Under the terms of the Resident Curator Program and the lease agreement, the Loudoun Freedom Center will serve as the curator for the property, taking responsibility for the day-to-day operation, maintenance and security of the facility.

“Preserving the invaluable parts of Loudoun's history, such as the Union Street School, was a driving force behind my motion to create the curator program,” said Board of Supervisors Chair Phyllis J. Randall. “This collaboration is a win-win for the community, providing both historical preservation and ongoing education for Loudoun residents at this historically significant school.”

The property is being leased to the Loudoun Freedom Center in a “phased lease” agreement, in which the single-story brick building will be available to the center in 2023, with the historic two-story schoolhouse, parking areas and grounds becoming available after the county has completed planned rehabilitations to the structure and site.

The Loudoun Freedom Center, in collaboration with members of the Douglass Alumni Association and Loudoun Branch of the NAACP, intends to transform the Union Street School into a living museum, cultural resource center and civic hub to honor the African American “Journey To Freedom” in Loudoun County.

Pastor Michelle C. Thomas, founder and president of the Loudoun Freedom Center and president of the NAACP Loudoun Branch, expressed their vision for the school, stating, “We aim to honor the legacy of heritage, healing and hope, exemplified by our ancestors who fought and died for the equality of civil rights and educational freedoms that we all enjoy in Loudoun today. In addition to becoming the home of the first African American History Museum in Loudoun County and our plans to hold in-person classes of the Northern Virginia Data Center Academy, the Loudoun Freedom Center intends to utilize the historic Union Street School Campus as an history educational hub and workforce development center that fosters sound futures for underrepresented and marginalized youth and families, through innovative industry training & certifications programs. Our partners that are committed to helping us bring this historic dream to present day reality include, but is not limited to Loudoun County Government, Loudoun County Public Schools, Northern Virginia Community College, Southside Virginia Community College, Southern Virginia Higher Education Center, Carnegie Mellon University, Loudoun County civic organizations and our

Loudoun County business partners Microsoft Corporation and Vantage Data Centers. We look forward to reclaiming our history and reimagining our future together.”

The Loudoun Freedom Center's plans for the site encompass a range of history, community educational & professional development programs, research & development, STEM preschool, STEM learning and vocational training. Additionally, the museum space will serve as a venue for exhibits, history programs, lectures, community discussions, collaboration among small minority business owners, agribusiness, and horticulture programs.

History of the Union Street School

Since its establishment in 1884 as the Leesburg Training Center, the Union Street School has played a vital role in educating Black students from elementary through high school. It ceased operations in 1958 following the opening of Douglass High School, the county's first high school for Black students, and the opening of a consolidated elementary school in Leesburg serving Black students. Recognized for its historical significance, the Union Street School is listed under the Virginia Department of Historic Resources, the Virginia Landmarks Register, the Historic African American Sites in Virginia Register, and the National Park Services Register for Historic Places.

Loudoun County Acquires Property

For 60 years, the Union Street School building served as a storage facility for Loudoun County Public Schools (LCPS) before it was declared surplus. LCPS transferred the property to the county government in 2019. In 2021, the Board of Supervisors created a project in the county's Capital Improvement Program to rehabilitate the building and site for museum functions. The county is currently working through the design phase of the project. The construction phase, which will include the rehabilitation of the structure to include public access, infrastructure improvements, and accessibility upgrades, is currently scheduled to be complete some time in fiscal year 2025.

Resident Curator Program

The county's Resident Curator Program ensures preservation of underutilized, historic county-owned properties, while also making them accessible to the public. The lease was awarded to the Loudoun Freedom Center through an open and competitive process based on several criteria, including a commitment to the management and maintenance of the historic property, a use that is compatible with the nature of the property, and the resources, skills and financial capabilities necessary to carry out the proposed curatorship.

The Resident Curator Program is designed to reduce the public costs associated with the care and preservation of properties that have been deemed historically significant and either meet the county's established criteria of eligibility for curation and/or also may meet the National Historic Register criteria.

More information about the program is online at loudoun.gov/residentcuratorprogram.

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