2019

Saving the Libby Hill Viewshed: Preserving and Enhancing One of Richmond’s Greatest Assets

Christopher J. McNamara
Virginia Commonwealth University

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SAVING THE LIBBY HILL VIEWSHED

Preserving and Enhancing One of Richmond’s Greatest Assets

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Client: Genni Sasnett,
Church Hill Association of RVA
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Acknowledgements

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Thank you to Dr. Meghan Gough for everything you have done from initially introducing me to this project and all of your feedback throughout this process. I could always count on you being willing to work with me to bounce ideas off and to help push my work forward.

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Finally, thank you to all my classmates. Words cannot describe how much each and every one of you have helped me in this process. We have been through a lot together and have come out with stronger projects because of one another.
Introduction
Plan Purpose.

As Richmond, VA continues to grow, the conversation has shifted to increasing population density throughout the city. Balancing growth while preserving the historic nature and charm of the city can be a difficult task, and there are many issues to consider. The East End neighborhood is an area that is poised to see increased development in the years to come, especially with the arrival of the Pulse Bus Rapid Transit in the neighborhood and the Pulse Corridor Plan, which emphasizes this neighborhood for increased building height. These taller buildings could have a great impact on the view of the James River and downtown Richmond as seen from Libby Hill Park, in Historic Church Hill. This park is a popular destination for many different people and is a popular tourist destination where people come from all over the world to see the “view that named Richmond.”

The Libby Hill Park Viewshed is important to the history of the city and the identity of Richmond. The purpose of this plan is to study the view as an asset and what that means to residents, visitors, local businesses and the city as a whole and to make policy recommendations of ways to achieve this goal to maintain and expand upon the identity of the city. This project examines the social and economic impact of the park to justify preservation of the historic view and make suggestions for how to best protect the view while also promoting development and growth for the city while preserving a natural asset that dates back to the naming of the city. I will research other cities around the country that have protected view sheds to determine what methods were used to achieve this preservation.

Client Description

The Church Hill Association of RVA serves at the primary client for this plan. This organization of neighbors cares deeply about their neighborhood and want to preserve the unique charm that comes with living in a historic district. The residents also want to be supportive of growth and increased development, but in a responsible, respectful manner. This fits with the scope of this project and matches with the mission of the association, which is to “to preserve our history and create our community’s future.”

Historic Richmond and Scenic Virginia are two nonprofit organizations who also could be potential secondary clients as they have worked on this topic in the past and are valuable sources of information, including past efforts to preserve this view and others around the region.
Plan Implementation.

The City of Richmond is currently undergoing its comprehensive master plan update. The work done in this professional plan will be a useful tool for the Church Hill Association of RVA to advocate for the protection of the viewshed from Libby Hill Park while simultaneously encouraging growth and development in the region. The plan works to identify methods for preserving the view through a wide possibility of potential methods including zoning changes, protected view shed, historic overlay zones, conservation easements and others that may be discovered during the research and community engagement aspects of this process. This plan gives the Church Hill Association of RVA facts to use to help make their argument and help to define what level of growth the civic association would support. Having this information will allow them to make a solid argument for protecting the view, while also being able to support new growth and development for the city.

Outline of Plan

This project will be broken into several different sections. The background existing knowledge looks at the existing conditions, history of the park and past efforts to preserve the viewshed and then explore other areas that have protected view sheds through a variety of methods. This will also explore examples and methods of how things like a view have an intrinsic value and how views add value to places. The plan then takes community input to gather information on how important preservation of the view is to residents and visitors. It also looks at what money is made in the park for the city (i.e. renting the park for private events, fitness classes, tourism, etc.). This allows a better understanding of who is using the park, when and why. This financial information along with the input from community members will work together to show the value of this asset to the city, both in a financial aspect and an intrinsic value that goes beyond the financial aspects to the core value of the city's identity. The final section of the plan includes implementation suggestions to for the Church Hill Association of RVA to achieve their goal of protecting the view from Libby Hill Park.
Background

Plan Context.

In 2014, a zoning request was submitted to the city of Richmond’s planning department to allow construction of a thirteen-story building to be built on Main Street, directly at the base of Libby Hill. This request from the private developer was met with great pushback from the community, specifically residents of Church Hill and those who see the value of preserving the view from Libby Hill Park as it is today. This request put back into motion grassroots efforts for protecting the viewshed. The plans were eventually withdrawn and are still in the process of being redesigned, but the battle to save the view from Libby Hill Park was born, and residents were ready to fight to preserve their historic view.

On July 24, 2017, the Richmond City Council adopted the Pulse Corridor Plan. This plan put focus on development around the new Pulse Stations and proposed new zoning for those areas. The plan calls for the development of surface parking lots and redevelopment of existing structures, allowing for building heights up to twelve stories in areas directly around the new stop. With the city currently undergoing its Comprehensive Plan update, the Church Hill Association of RVA recognizes the opportunity to advantage of this opportunity and have the view protected through the planning process.
Existing Knowledge:

Current View from Libby Hill Park:

Figure 1: Current View south from Libby Hill Park

Source: Chris McNamara Picture

Figure 2: Current View East from Libby Hill Park

Source: Chris McNamara Picture
Figure 3: Current View West from Libby Hill Park

Source: Chris McNamara Picture
The history of Libby Hill goes back to the founding of Virginia. The view of the James River as seen from the top of the hill is known as the “view that named Richmond” for its resemblance to the view from Richmond on the Thames in London. Located in the southeastern part of Church Hill, this portion of Richmond saw houses built as early as the late 1790s, the neighborhood was home to many wealthy government officials and owners of the factories in the city and tobacco warehouses. One of these homes was that of Luther Libby, located at the corner of Main Street and 29th Street, who was a wealthy shipping merchant who owned a large warehouse on the shores of the James River, which was later used as a Confederate Army prison during the Confederate War. The home, like many others in the neighborhood, had separate living quarters in the rear. With these homes built and the neighborhood growing, other amenities were needed.

In the 1850s, the city of Richmond tasked city engineer Wilfred Cutshaw with finding suitable locations in the city to build parks to compete with larger cities in the country. Libby Hill Park was
one of these first parks, chosen for its view and location in the city. Originally known as Marshall Square, the name over time was changed to Libby Hill Park due to the prominence of the Luther Libby House to the entrance to the park.\textsuperscript{x} The park was designed to connect the wealthy merchants who lives at the top of the hill to the factories and other commercial property located at the base of the hill. Winding carriage roads designed for leisurely rides down the hill with staircases added for direct walking routes to connect the top and bottom of the park. The physical nature of the park has remained relatively unchanged since its founding. In 1995, the park was re-dedicated by the City after undergoing a major renovation made possible by a large donation to the city.\textsuperscript{x} This included adding more lighting, benches and trashcans, as well as regular landscaping work that had been backlogged by the city.

In the 1890s, Richmond was going through an effort to build more statues, monuments and overall add new character throughout the city. Richmond saw the development of Monument Avenue as an opportunity to build monuments to Confederate figures and other historic men of Richmond’s history.\textsuperscript{xii} The East End did not want to miss on this opportunity and pitched Libby Hill Park as a location for a monument to Robert E. Lee, Confederate General. The group putting the pitch together argued that the location in the park gave the statue prominence, as it was visible throughout the city.\textsuperscript{xii} That monument was eventually put on Monument Ave, but residents around Libby Hill did not want to miss out on this movement. Having already reserved a spot for a monument and been granted $5,000, residents formed the “Confederate Soldiers and Sailors Association” made up mostly of men who lived in the area.\textsuperscript{xiii} The group held different events and solicited money from wealthy neighbors to balance needed to construct the $33,018 monument that stands today to honor the Confederate Soldiers and Sailors. Women played a key role in raising this money, forming their own supportive group known as the “Ladies Oakwood Memorial Association” to raise money and support for the construction of the statue.\textsuperscript{xiv} The statue was unveiled in 1894 to a crowd of over 100,000 people with a large parade.\textsuperscript{xv} The monument is of an unknown confederate soldier on top of 13 pillars, one for each of the Confederate states and was modeled after a similar pillar in Egypt.\textsuperscript{xvi} At the time of its debut, the monument was seen as “the crowning recognition of a
grateful people of the unparalleled heroism, the splendid valor, and the sublime fortitude, of the hosts, of which history has graven in ineffaceable letters.”

There are several key dates to note in the history of Libby Hill Park and the efforts to preserve the viewshed, summarized in the timeline below.

Figure 5: Libby Hill Timeline

Libby Hill Park is included in many tours of Richmond, and is names consistently among one of the top places to visit in Richmond. Being included in these lists is important as it brings tourists to the park and the neighborhood, where they potentially spend more money on restaurants, local shops and other items.

For Purposes of this study, I focused on the area directly around the park, including census tracts 205, 206, 207 and 208 to look at business trends, demographics and other important information. The park is located in census tract 208, as shown in the map below:
Figure 6: Map of Richmond and Libby Hill Park
The current zoning for the region in the viewshed allows for residential single family, two family, and row homes along with businesses and light industrial uses with a maximum height of five stories.
Figure 8: Current Zoning of Study Area

(GRTC Pulse Corridor Plan)
The park is in the St. John’s Historic District. Within the viewshed there are many historic sites including the Main Street Station, St. John’s Church, and several other churches and historic homes.

*Figure 9: Historic District Map:*

![Historic District Map](GRTC_Pulse_Corridor_Plan)
The study area has seen a large population change in recent years, due primarily to new construction and adaptive reuse of old factories being converted into lofts. This population change is reflective in Table 1 below. As population density has increased, developers are realizing the need to build up in order to handle this growth.

*Table 1: Population Change*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2015</th>
<th>% Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>205</td>
<td>3,208</td>
<td>4,067</td>
<td>26.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>206</td>
<td>1,434</td>
<td>1,528</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>207</td>
<td>1,056</td>
<td>1,258</td>
<td>19.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>208</td>
<td>1,199</td>
<td>1,590</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City of Richmond</td>
<td>201,828</td>
<td>213,735</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(US Census 2010 and Community Survey 2015)

With the addition of the Bus Rapid Transit System, the area is set to undergo further change and growth in the coming years. The proposed zoning changes in the Pulse Corridor Plan would allow for buildings up to twelve stories tall around the Main Street Station. This growth along with other, taller buildings in Shockoe Bottom and along Main Street would greatly change the region.
(Pulse Corridor Plan)

Around the country, several cities have protected viewshed for a variety of reasons including environmental protections and historic preservation. The chart below summarizes where these cities are, the reasons behind protection and contact information for resources I am trying to gather more information from about how they accomplished the goals of protecting their respective view sheds.
Table 2: Locations with Protected Viewsheds

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Viewshed</th>
<th>Policy/Plan</th>
<th>Contact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>San Antonio, TX</td>
<td>Alamo View Shed, Mission Protection Overlay Districts- Protecting view of</td>
<td>5 Protected Viewsheds in place by city code</td>
<td>City of San Antonio Office of Historic Preservation:*ix 210-207-0035</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Alamo and other important landmarks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kent, CT</td>
<td>Scenic View</td>
<td>GIS focused</td>
<td>Housatonic Valley Association, Kent, CT Planning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Intrinsic Valuation and a View’s Role in Identity**

There have been many studies regarding how a view plays a role in the intrinsic value of a location (the tangible and intangible value). This has been done internationally as well as in the United States and shows the importance of this value in developing and maintaining an identity to a neighborhood, city, or area. One study in Kuala Lumpur was done to look at how new buildings would change the skyline of the city, specifically how these new buildings would eclipse the buildings that had been known to define the existing skyline. *(Yusoff, Noor, & Ghazali, 2014)*. This research was important in the context of this plan because it looked at historic value of a view, and how the existing buildings had become part of the identity of the city. Changes to the view would change this identity.

Knox County, TN has also done research into the impact on changing landscape views has on property values. They compared how property values change over time, specifically with the changing economic climate. *(Chadourne, Cho, & Roberts, 2013)*. Property values would be impacted by the change of the view, specifically open land or forests. This is important to consider as changes in the view from Libby Hill Park would have an impact on the property values in the neighboring homes. Changing the environmental issues changes the value and identity related to the viewshed. In Colorado, residents took control of the land conservation to preserve the natural resources in their area during a time of high levels of development. *(Ernst & Wallace, 2008)* Residents and landowners worked together to implement conservation easements, cluster developments, and other covenants to preserve the land in their area to promote development while preserving natural resources.
Another important study including looking at sense of place and the value that people apply to views and places which can be used “as boundary concepts to:

1) Facilitate interdisciplinary research between social and natural scientists
2) Help understand the connectedness and feedbacks between people and nature
3) Promote communication between science, management, and stakeholders regarding desired conditions of landscapes in and around parks.” (Barendse et al., 2016).

This shows that a place has the ability to do more than being a physical place and can become part of a community’s identity. Changing this place changes its value and the connection between the place and the location.

Theoretical Framework.

This plan is divided into two sections. The first is the economic reasons for preserving the view from Libby Hill Park and the second is the social reasons for protecting the viewshed. I feel as though these two are overlapping and connected, however will take different theoretical approaches to conducting further research and ultimately making suggestions for preservation. For the economic reasons for protection, I feel as though the Just City theoretical framework best fits the scope of this project while a mix of the Just City and Radical Planning best fits the social reasons for preservation. These two theoretical frameworks are discussed in detail below along with why I feel they are the best fit for this project.

The Just City approach to planning attempts to correct what was seen as missteps in communicative action to go beyond equal opportunities and move towards equitable outcomes.xx The balance of power is spread out across stakeholders, giving everyone the opportunity to have a seat at the table. Fainstein argues that the purpose of all plans should be to contribute to the urban diversity, democracy and equity of the city. In her example of New York City, she argues that although the city spread resources throughout the boroughs of the city, they put resources in areas that greatly change the foundation and history of the neighborhoods. This was especially true in low income and minority areas without much focus
on how these projects would have an outcome on the people who live there and creating social equity.

This theoretical framework directly relates to the project I am working on in many ways. On the economic side, any new development along the river would have an impact on businesses in the area around Libby Hill Park. Home values will likely change for homes that lose their view of the river. Businesses that make a portion of their profits from tourists visiting the park would be impacted. Tour companies that make stops in Libby Hill Park to point out the history visible from this location and for picture opportunities would have to make changes to their itineraries, having a negative impact on other stops and businesses. Before any new development is approved, the impact on these groups needs to be studied to determine whether the outcomes would be equitable for new development and existing/established groups.

This framework also plays a role in the social aspects I will be studying in my plan. During my initial research and observations, it became clear that minorities are not using the park at the same rates as Caucasian people. When it comes time to make recommendations for implementing a protected viewshed, I will need to look at the information collected from my surveys and interviews to attempt to make suggestions that would result in equitable outcomes for all to use the park and enjoy the view. In the article “Both Process and Outcome are Essential to Planning,” the idea that the process and outcomes should be equally values and that we must identify where inequality exists to work to push plans that will have the desired outcome of closing those gaps. Without looking at the inequality of access and use of the park and enjoying the view, it would be nearly impossible to make any meaningful recommendations that would move towards making a more just city, both on the economic and social sides of this argument.

The social aspect of my plan will also utilize the radical planning theoretical framework to accomplish the goal of making meaningful recommendations. Through my research, I have discovered that very little input has been gathered from minorities who may use the park. That
was the biggest thing I noticed in my observations was that minority groups are not using the park as much as Caucasians. Having a meaningful conversation with different groups who currently have a stake in preserving the process along with those who could have a vested interested is important is necessary to affect actual change.\textsuperscript{xxii}

The use of radical planning in this process will involve working closely with community groups beyond those that have been involved in the past. Respecting that a diverse group of people benefit from the use of the park and the historic view, it is important to bring these people to the table to develop a community-based solution that will guide development. As Friedmann argued, these small “action groups emerged spontaneously from within the civil society in their concern, protest and resistance to power.”\textsuperscript{xxiii} There are groups that have emerged that may have been left out of past conversations that I am interested in talking to with the goal of getting more people involved and finding a solution to a way to preserve the view from Libby Hill Park while also promoting further development in this side of the city,

The view from Libby Hill Park, “The View that Named Richmond,” has been facing threat of obstruction for several years due to an increased demand for taller buildings along the James River and along the new Bus Rapid Transit line running along Main Street. This project, as described above, will attempt to find a balance in development based on social and economic reasons for preserving the view while also looking towards the future of the city and embracing new development. Using the Just City and Radical planning theories, I aim to find where that balance is and how the interested groups can come together to find a mutually satisfactory solution.
Methodology.

Research questions.

My research for this project involved gathering information on existing plans, proposed projects (that have been approved and those that have been denied), community input, observation from the park and talking with organizations that would be interested in this project including tourism agencies, conservation groups, and historic preservation organizations.

The research will aim to answer the following questions and methods:

1. How is the park currently used?
   a. This is answered through observations in the park, talking with groups and individuals who use the park, and through requesting permitting information from the city to see what events have taken place in the park.

2. What precedent is there in other cities around the country and internationally for protected view shed?
   a. This was achieved through extensive research of cities with protected view sheds. I reached out to cities that have been successful to find out what worked and cities that have not been successful to see what obstacles kept them from achieving their goals and what would they recommend doing differently. This involved reading through plans and proposals as well as interviewing those who led the efforts.

3. What are the social benefits of preserving the view?
   a. To answer this question, I talked with those using the park, people using other parks in the area to discuss access to the park and other items of importance to make sure the park is equally available to all residents and visitors.

4. What are the economic and intrinsic benefits of preserving this view and the historic?
   a. This was achieved through other previously discussed methods including observation, community input, talking with permitting office, and looking at records of events that could make money for the city. I also looked at property values and talked with real estate appraisers in the region to discuss the importance of the view in property values for purpose of assessed values of homes for real estate property taxes. I also looked into the local businesses in the region and see if there is a connection between the historic district and these businesses.
Stakeholder outreach methods:

This project involved input from several different organizations, government departments, and community engagement. I continue to meet with organizations like Historic Richmond and Scenic Virginia as both have completed similar projects in the past. I also talked to professionals in the private sector to learn more about real estate values and developers looking to do projects in the study area. I also created a survey for residents, visitors and others online to get input on opinions about the view and development. I also administered this survey in person to visitors to the park to get access to users who may not be involved in the groups I have identified. This survey can be found in Appendix C. Firsthand observation of the park and its uses will be an invaluable research method where I can talk first hand with people using the park and see for myself who is using it, when and how. I also talked to restaurants and businesses within a 15 minute walk of the park to get insight into impact of tourists and visitors. The survey I administered can be found in Appendix D.
The table below outlines the different groups, methods and contacts for groups identified as stakeholders in this project:

*Table 3: Stakeholders*

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Group:</th>
<th>Contact:</th>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Reasoning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Church Hill Association of RVA (Primary Client)</td>
<td><a href="mailto:president@churchhill.org">president@churchhill.org</a></td>
<td>Residents-Survey, association meetings</td>
<td>Primary Client</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shockoe Bottom Neighborhood Association</td>
<td><a href="mailto:Sbna17thst@gmail.com">Sbna17thst@gmail.com</a></td>
<td>Survey, Attend Meetings</td>
<td>Proposed development in their neighborhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church Hill Central Civic Association</td>
<td><a href="mailto:jenniferparham@yahoo.com">jenniferparham@yahoo.com</a></td>
<td>Survey, Attend Meetings</td>
<td>Neighbors of Park</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City of Richmond Planning - Historic Preservation</td>
<td>Kim Chen (past Church Hill President, current resident)</td>
<td>Meet, interview</td>
<td>Historic preservation, knowledgeable of past efforts and city plans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scenic Virginia</td>
<td><a href="mailto:leighton.powell@scenicvirginia.org">leighton.powell@scenicvirginia.org</a></td>
<td>Meet, keep informed of updates</td>
<td>Has lead past efforts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historic Richmond</td>
<td><a href="mailto:ccrump@historicrichmond.com">ccrump@historicrichmond.com</a></td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>Share knowledge of history and preservation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richmond Tourism</td>
<td><a href="mailto:jhurstwender@preservationvirginia.org">jhurstwender@preservationvirginia.org</a></td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>Impact of the park on tourism for the city of Richmond</td>
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<tr>
<td>Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation</td>
<td><a href="mailto:lynn.crump@dcr.virginia.gov">lynn.crump@dcr.virginia.gov</a></td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>Statewide efforts to preserve the viewshed</td>
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<td>Virginia Department of Historic Resources</td>
<td>(804) 482-6446</td>
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<td>Statewide efforts for historic preservation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Local real Estate Appraisers</td>
<td>Pennington Appraisal</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>Impact on development on home values</td>
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Analytical Methods:
My analytical methods included using calculations and coding to analyze information collected to answer the different research questions. Based on the information gathered, I created visual aides to depict the information gathered. The table below summarizes the analytical methods that was used to answer each research question previously listed. This is table is subject to change as information is gathered and the project continues to evolve.

Table 4: Analytical Methods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Online Survey</th>
<th>Observation/Interviews</th>
<th>Statistical Analysis</th>
<th>GIS Mapping</th>
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Summary

This professional plan will look at how and why historic preservation should be balanced with promoting development, specifically the importance of a view and open space. I will get input from a wide variety of stakeholders and gather as much background information about the park itself, its uses and the impact it has on the area. I will also spend time collecting information on other areas that have protected view sheds to use the processes they underwent to determine what could be done in Richmond to have this view protected. It is also important to note the importance of promoting equity in access to the park and that preserving the view is an important act for everyone, not just the residents of Church Hill.
Research Findings

Introduction:

Preserving the view shed from Libby Hill Park in Richmond’s Church Hill neighborhood is a very sensitive topic that residents and patrons of the park are passionate. Since completing the proposal portion of this project, I have spent time researching and collecting data that would help answer the research questions previously defined. To answer these questions, varieties of different methods were used. These included interviewing residents in person and through an online survey, observing in the park, surveying local business owners, reaching out to tourism businesses and agencies, talking with people working on the development side and researching how view sheds have been preserved elsewhere. These findings are summarized in this section of the report, organized by research method.

Community Survey/Interviews:

During the month of January, survey responses were collected in person and online from 324 respondents. These respondents represented a variety of age groups and included both residents of Church Hill and others. Figures 1 and 2 below depict the age and zip codes of the respondents respectively.
Not surprisingly, over 70% of the respondents live in the 23223 area code. This is the area code covering Church Hill. These residents have a long history of being involved with protecting the view shed from their neighborhood park and were all included in the outreach through social media and email lists of the corresponding civic associations. 70% of the respondents also are between the ages of 25-44. These groups making up the majority of responses are important to note as the age groups do not necessarily represent the city or the neighborhood, and the opinions of those who live in Church Hill could be different from those who live in different parts of the city. 97% of respondents reported that they have visited the park personally. The frequency of these visits is summarized in Figure 3. This shows that most of the people, who visit the park, do so on a regular basis.
Figure 12: Park Visits

Over half of the respondents who reported visiting the park also said that they are either highly likely or somewhat likely to visit a local restaurant or shop during their visits. This information is depicted in Figure 4. 75% of respondents also said they had attended an event that required them to pay in the park at some point.
When asked about whether development along Main Street according to the Pulse Corridor Plan adopted by City Council would influence how often they visit the park, 66% of respondents said it definitely would or probably would have an impact. Only about 20% of those surveyed said the new development would not or probably would not have any impact on how often they visit the park.

The respondents were also asked what they felt the view contributed to the community. This was an open-ended question, but the majority of answers related to the historic and scenic view, historic preservation, and the need for open space in the neighborhood and the city as a whole. The park provides a location for neighbors to gather and socialize and tourists to enjoy. Many people pointed out that they bring out of town guests to the park to highlight the history of the neighborhood. Providing a view of the river and downtown is a unique factor for this park. The park as it is provides a connection between history and the future, per several respondents.
The respondents were finally asked about what activities they do in the park. The responses here were consistent with my observations made in the park. This included picnics, dog walking, fitness classes, photography, reading and socializing with neighbors. A sense of place for the community is an important aspect of the park that is unique to Church Hill.

**Business Surveys:**

To conduct this portion of the research, I emailed and visited local businesses within ¾ mile of Libby Hill Park. Using this distance, I identified twenty different businesses. From this outreach, I was able to get responses from five business owners who have all been in the neighborhood for over three years. Three of the four businesses were restaurants, one was a bakery and one was a market that also serves food and alcohol. Only one of these businesses said proximity to the park had an impact on their business, especially when large events were held in the neighborhood. This business pointed out specifically the previously mentioned UCI Bike Race as a time when business increased. 80% of the respondents said that the view is a draw for the neighborhood, but noted that their business would likely not be impacted with changes to the viewshed, but noted that tourism is always a draw to these parks so bringing traffic to the neighborhood is good for the neighborhood as a whole.

**Developer/Real Estate Interviews:**

On January 29, 2019 I met with Lory Markham who previously worked with the City of Richmond’s Planning Department and is now a consultant working with developers to help them through the permitting process. One of the bigger issues she reported was the lack of clear standards that the Church Hill Association would support for development. The other issue is that buildings that are only six stories present issues of financial feasibility for construction. The land in this area is expensive and construction cost rise due to the slope of the land and
material needed. To make a profit at that density, the buildings have to be lower quality, which would not fit with the neighborhood. (Markham, 2019).

When talking with another developer who has done work in the viewshed and has collaborated with the Church Hill Association, he noted the importance of preserving the nature of the community. In his opinion, a new form of the Transit Oriented Development should be implemented along Main Street and in Shockoe Bottom to preserve the view. Six story buildings would be feasible if built correctly and design features should be required to help maintain the historic character. Due to ongoing work, this developer has asked to remain anonymous.

On January 25, 2019, I spoke with Scott Pennington at Premier Appraisal Group in Richmond, VA. With his experience, I asked him about what impact changes to the view would have on home values that currently enjoy views similar to Libby Hill Park. Using his knowledge of appraisal and the local real estate market, he estimated that if “any external changes are made and obstructions alter views, then there could be a change in value of 5%.” (Pennington, 2019). The difference in appraised value was determined using experience in other areas of the region where views of the water have been altered and changed. Having the river view has a large impact on the resale value and appraised value used to determine local real estate taxes. This would result in a change of personal property taxes collected by the city and would influence real estate sales elsewhere in the neighborhood.

Interviews with Government Agencies

In a brief conversation with Toni Bastian with Richmond Region Tourism, she was quick to point out the impact the park had during the UCI Road World Championship bike race in the fall of 2015. She said this race brought in thousands of visitors from outside the region to watch the race from the park and visit local businesses. She said restaurants were crowded during the race and the Libby Hill Park provided a place for spectators to watch the race for an
extended time. The organizer of the race estimated the event had “more than a $161 million impact to the area and an almost $170 million impact to the Commonwealth.” (Satchell, December 2015). There was no specific information for the Church Hill area or the park, but the number of spectators in the park and surrounding neighborhood was meaningful.

On February 15, 2019, I spoke with Natasha Toliver, Project Management Analyst for the City of Richmond Parks, Recreation and Community Facilities Department. She was able to provide me information on park rental history for 2017 and 2018. During 2017, there were 35 rentals of Libby Hill Park and in 2018, which number dropped to 30 rentals. The rental fee for these events range from $80 per hour to $150 for wedding grounds fee. Of these events held in 2017 and 2018, 22 were weddings in 2017 and 18 were weddings in 2018, bringing in a total of $3,300 in 2017 and $2,700 in 2018. These events, according to the parks and recreation representative, are the most likely to be impacted by a change in the view.

**Looking Beyond Monetary Value**

Throughout my time spend in the park observing how it was used and through my community outreach, one thing became very clear. Libby Hill Park and the view has a value that you cannot put a dollar amount on. There is a value to the view and the park and a role it plays in the identity of the neighborhood, the city and the state. The following examples illustrate this value.

On one occasion, I came across a women painting in the park. She was painting the view east towards Rockett’s Landing and the bend in the James River. I tried speaking with her, but there was a language barrier. Even without talking about the view, it was clear this was important to her and meant something.

On another evening, I met an older couple sitting on a bench while their grandchildren played nearby. I asked them about the park, they have lived in the neighborhood for over thirty
years and come to the park as much as possible. They bring their grandchildren because it’s a great place to let them run around.

I spoke with a group of women who work out together at the park. One of them who had just recently joined the group said the location was key for her. Doing this in Libby Hill Park “makes me feel like I’m part of history.” Another woman said, “Looking one direction and seeing the river and the other direction and seeing my office downtown, helps me push harder.”

One of the final questions in my community outreach survey asked what respondents thought the view added to the community. Some of the responses included:

“Iconic view! It shows how beautiful our city is and when the sunset hits just right it looks phenomenal. I want to take my wedding photos there.”

“Sense of peacefulness; a way to connect with nature in an urban environment”

“Viewsheds can provide a sense of place. As long as the Libby Hill community is inviting to others in the greater Richmond community, then this viewshed is worth preserving.”

“I think it is an important part of how people connect to the city. The river has been and continues to be an integral part of our identity as a city. Losing that viewshed would put us on a path to becoming a dull generic city.”

“It portrays the city in a way that can’t be seen from the ground. The sounds, vehicles, and people all look different from that height. In addition, there is even more of a difference between nighttime and daytime viewing! Everything is less hectic up there, and you almost forget you live in the city. You feel outside of it.”

“It’s a tourist spot. Everyone who comes to Richmond has a photo at Libby Hill. It’s iconic.”

“It gives residents a free outdoor place to meet with others from their community. It is a place people can eat or hang with large groups without taking up too much space like a big group would in a neighboring restaurant. It’s a free space for people to come together, which we need right now.”
“The viewshed connects us to the history of our city, allowing us to share a sight people could see centuries ago. It also gives us a unique view of one our country’s important rivers.”

“It connects the wider community together. People from all over the metro Richmond area come to Libby Hill to take family photos, engagement photos, wedding photos, and to attend events. The park and its famous view should be protected.”

These responses all hint at the importance of the view as part of the identity of the city and the neighborhood. It helps develop a sense of place and the importance of view to all of these people cannot be denied. No matter how they use the park or where they live, everyone had their own reason for why the park and the view has benefit to them personally. There is no way to put a number on this, and that perhaps says more than any dollar amount could.

Recommendations

The following section takes into consideration the existing knowledge, research and findings to make specific recommendations regarding how to preserve the Libby Hill Viewshed. These recommendations incorporate feedback from the stakeholders in the study area and, if implemented, would protect the viewshed based on its importance to the City of Richmond’s identity and the people who use the park as well as promoting development to increase economic activity.
Vision Statement

“The Libby Hill Viewshed will be preserved to protect the value of this historic view to the City of Richmond. The park will provide a space for citizens and visitors to have a view into the past while also looking into the future of Richmond’s new development. Through careful development within the viewshed and surrounding neighborhoods, the park will be accessible and in close proximity new residents, businesses and other attractions, while preserving and enhancing one of Richmond’s greatest assets, the view from Libby Hill Park.”

Goals

To achieve this vision, certain goals and actions will need to be taken. These goals, like the vision, were developed through observations, research, and data analysis. The below tables summarize each goal along with specific actions to be taken to achieve these goals.

- **Goal 1:** Preserve the Libby Hill Viewshed
  - **Objective 1.1:** Define the definite Libby Hill Viewshed
    - **Why:** Through my research, I found that different stakeholders have different opinions of what the viewshed is and what should be protected. Coming to a consensus would eliminate confusion.
    - **Action 1.1.1** Collaborate with developers and city officials to come to a final agreement on what the viewshed is to protect, determining the exact coordinates of the viewshed, and where to implement changes.
    - **Who:** City of Richmond Planning Department, Scenic Virginia, Local Developers, Church Hill Association
Objective 1.2: Limit building heights within the view shed to a level consistent with existing buildings that will promote new development and maintain the viewshed and historic character of the neighborhood.

- **Why:** Adding height to buildings is a popular goal to increase density in the region, but adding too much height would hinder the view from Libby Hill Park. This can be done through a variety of zoning changes and design requirements discovered through interviews and research.

- **Action 1.2.1** Implement a new zoning, TOD-H (Transit Oriented Development-Historic) throughout the corridor to preserve the current viewshed. This zoning designation would limit new construction to six stories, which is consistent with what is currently in place and other buildings in the area. This should be put in place in the area around the Pulse Stations, consistent with the previously determined area designed for TOD zoning in the Pulse Corridor Plan.
  
  - **Who:** City of Richmond Planning Department, Richmond 300 Master Plan Team

- **Action 1.2.2** Establish and enforce design standards to maintain the historic nature of the area while also promoting new development and higher density in the neighborhood. These standards have been established in the Richmond Pulse Corridor Plan and include the following six standards that should be implemented in the new TOD-H district:
  
  - Hold the corner: Buildings and spaces at intersections have active ground floors that wrap around the corner.
  - Entrances face the street: Main entrances to businesses and residences front the street, fostering pedestrian activity.
- **Appropriate setbacks/step backs:** Commercial uses are closer to the street while residential uses are setback to foster privacy and to create a semi-public space. Step backs at upper stories create a means to honor existing form without overwhelming it.

- **Transparency:** Façade fenestration allows visibility to and from the street. This is especially important on the ground floor, where fenestration should occupy a higher percentage of the building face.

- **Façade articulation:** Long, monolithic façades should be broken up and made more human scale by varying the street wall plane, height, colors, and materials.

- **Screened parking/services:** Attractive landscaping pushed to the sidewalk help maintain a street wall and mitigate the disruption caused by surface parking lots and utilitarian services.

- **Who:** City of Richmond Planning Department, Richmond Planning Commission, Local Developers and Architects

  - **Action 1.2.3** Designate and implement a “Historic Viewshed Overlay District” for the area within the viewshed that falls outside the TOD-H Zoning, with heights limited to 4 stories, consistent with existing buildings in the area.

    - **Who** City of Richmond Planning Department, Scenic Virginia

- **Goal 2:** Increase use of the park by a diverse group of people for a wide variety of uses
  - **Objective 2.1** Use the park for educational purposes
Why: In my interviews and community outreach, respondents noted the historic value of the view while also noting that the city has other issues such as the public schools.

- **Action 2.1.1** Collaborate with local schools (Richmond City Public Schools, private schools, and surrounding county schools) to arrange field trips to the park for educational purposes.

- **Action 2.1.2** Organize events in the park with local summer camps in the region to bring young children to the park to see the history visible and learn about the nature in the park.

- **Who**: Public and Private schools in the Richmond Metro Region, Richmond YMCA and other camp providers

- **Objective 2.2** Make the park more accessible to all residents and visitors

- **Why**: In my observations and survey, majority of people either walked to the park or drove personal vehicles.

- **Action 2.2.1** Add crosswalks and sidewalks at both the top and bottom of Libby Hill to make it safer for pedestrians to access the park in coordination with the efforts being done with the Route 5 Corridor
  - **Who**: Richmond Department of Public Works, Richmond Parks Department

- **Action 2.2.2** Improve bus stops along Main Street and in Church Hill, adding signage pointing passengers to Libby Hill Park
  - **Who**: Greater Richmond Transit Company, Richmond Regional Tourism

- **Action 2.2.3** Promote bicycle riders to visit the park by adding signage and making it easier to access from the Capital Trail and other local
attractions and implementing a new RVA Bike Share station near the park, giving riders who do not own a personal bike to visit the park.

- **Who:** Bike Walk RVA, RVA Bike Share

- **Goal 3:** Promote Libby Hill Park and the surrounding neighborhood as a destination for residents and tourists
  
  - **Objective 3.1** Add historic value to the park making it easier to identify historic sites visible from the park
  
  - **Why:** In my interviews, research and community engagement it became clear that many people are not aware of the historic sites visible from the park
    
    - **Action 3.1.1** Add QR codes to the historic sites and monuments in and around the park to create an interactive way for visitors to learn about the park’s history.
      
      - **Example:** T Potterfield Bridge, Richmond, VA

    - **Action 3.1.2** Create and install a map in the park identifying historic sites visible from the park including Lincoln’s landing site at Rockett’s Landing and his route up Main Street, “The View that Named Richmond,” Lucky Strike Building, and others.

    - **Who:** Church Hill Civic Association, Visit Richmond (tourism office), Historic VA, and Scenic VA

  - **Objective 3.2** Encourage park visitors to visit local restaurants and retail establishments

  - **Why:** In my interviews with local businesses and park visitors, there is a potential to increase patronage to these local businesses through raising awareness

    - **Action 3.2.1** Add a bulletin board with advertisements and directions to local restaurants
■ **Action 3.2.2** Involve local restaurants with events in the park that attract visitors from around the city and beyond to sample their foods and sell products to raise awareness.

■ **Action 3.2.3** Develop wayfinding signs to encourage park visitors to visit other sites within walking and biking distance

■ **Who:** Visit Richmond, Virginia Tourism, Historic Virginia

**Implementation**

As the Church Hill Association of Richmond works with the other stakeholders identified throughout this plan, the goals, objectives and actions presented in the previous recommendation section serve to obtain the vision of the future of the park. Through the implementation of these actions, the view from Libby Hill Park can be preserved while also promoting development, increasing density and raising revenue for the City of Richmond.

For the implementation of this plan, each action will be separated into immediate, short term, and long-term actions to be completed in order to achieve the vision and purpose of this plan, with some actions being ongoing such as working with local schools, camps and businesses. The table 6 on the following page outlines this implementation schedule. This will be an ongoing process, which will involve input from various stakeholders throughout. Like any plan, changes will be made as needed throughout the process. This is being taken into account by making flexible time frames, allowing time to make decisions and take the proper steps for additional community engagement as needed. Some of the actions, including zoning and the historic overlay district will be implemented concurrently with the adoption and implementation of the Richmond 300 Master Plan in development. Other actions, like the adding of QR signs, and a nearby Bike Share station, will take time to raise funds and implement so will be done later.
The City of Richmond has the opportunity to preserve a valuable asset in the Libby Hill Viewshed permanently, allowing this valuable asset to grow in value for years to come. By setting up the TOD-H zoning and the Historic Viewshed Overlay District, the city can promote new development and enhance the view simultaneously, setting the city up for future success. The natural view from Libby Hill Park is where the city got its name, and with careful planning and cooperation, it can be the view into the city’s future as well.

Figure 14: Implementation Schedule
Endnotes:

i “Libby Hill Park | The Cultural Landscape Foundation” 2016
ii “CHA of RVA – The Church Hill Association of Richmond Virginia” 2016
iii Burt Rolett, 2014, Richmond BizSense
iv City of Richmond, Pulse Corridor Plan, 2017
v City of Richmond, 2016
vi Mary Wingfield-Scott, Old Richmond Neighborhoods, p 15-16
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xi “Richmond: A Discover Our Shared Heritage Travel Itinerary” 2017).
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xiii Thomas Hale and Jones, 1978 “Richmond Today”
xiv Grace Taliaferro, 1965, History of Soldiers and Sailors Monument
xv Author Unknown, Richmond Dispatch, 1894
xvi Daniel Bluestone, p13 Richmond’s Post-Industrial East End
xvii John James, 1945 A Spectacular Memorial Day in Richmond
xviii “THE 15 BEST Things to Do in Richmond - 2018 (with Photos) - TripAdvisor,” 2018
xix San Antonio View Shed Initiative, 2016)
xx S.S. Fainstein, 2013, Spatial Justice in Planning
xxi Clayton Christensen, 2015, Disruptive Innovation
xxii Kathryn Howell, 2016, Planning for Empowerment
xxiii John Friedman, 1987, Planning in the Public Domain
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Appendix A

COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA
GENERAL ASSEMBLY

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 658

Celebrating the panoramic view of the James River from Libby Hill Park in Richmond, Virginia.

Agreed to by the House of Delegates, January 30, 2007
Agreed to by the Senate, February 21, 2007

WHEREAS, William Byrd, the founder of the City of Richmond, was familiar with Richmond-upon-Thames in England and the view of the River Thames from Richmond Hill; and
WHEREAS, William Byrd witnessed the panoramic view of the James River and its remarkable similarity to the viewshed in England’s Richmond-upon-Thames; and
WHEREAS, historians believe that in 1733 William Byrd named Richmond because of this similarity of the scenic panorama along the James River to the view in Richmond-upon-Thames; and
WHEREAS, the scenic view in Richmond-upon-Thames is recognized as a great landscape icon of England and was the first and only view to be safeguarded by an Act of Parliament, the Richmond, Petersham and Ham Open Spaces Act, 1902; and
WHEREAS, a historic plaque located at Richmond-upon-Thames in England refers to the beautiful viewshed’s role in the naming of Richmond, Virginia; and
WHEREAS, the panoramic view of the James River from Libby Hill Park is recognized as a great landscape icon in both the Commonwealth and in Richmond, its capital city, and was designated by a plaque as “The View That Named the City” by the mayors of Richmond and Richmond-upon-Thames on March 18, 2006; and
WHEREAS, the panoramic view of the James River from Libby Hill Park in Richmond possesses scenic, historic, and cultural significance that extends far beyond the capital city, attracting visitors from around the world; now, therefore, be it
RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the General Assembly celebrate the panoramic view of the James River from Libby Hill Park in Richmond, Virginia, for its historic and critical association with the early development of the City of Richmond and its connection to Richmond-upon-Thames; and, be it
RESOLVED FURTHER, That this resolution shall not affect local land use approvals with respect to this view; and, be it
RESOLVED FINALLY, That the Clerk of the House of Delegates prepare a copy of this resolution for presentation to Queen Elizabeth II, who will visit the Commonwealth of Virginia in May 2007 in conjunction with the 400th anniversary of the founding of Jamestown.

House Patrons: McClellan, Armstrong, Bulova, Eisenberg, Englin, Hall, D. Jones, Lewis, Marsden, McEachin, O’Bannon, Peace, O. Ware

Senate Patron: Marsh
Appendix B:

CELEBRATING AN ICONIC RICHMOND LANDSCAPE

By Barry Starke, FASLA AICP

This year, the American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA) has set out to identify and recognize America’s most iconic landscapes. In a ceremony held on August 30 at Libby Hill Park in Richmond, representatives of the national and state ASLA presented State and City officials with a declaration celebrating the viewshed from the Libby Hill Overlook as one of America’s finest examples. ‘The View That Named Richmond,’ as it is called, was selected because of its unique historic, cultural and scenic qualities that help define the character and sense of place of the City and its region.

As part of the national program, this ceremony kicked off an independent community service planning project to be led by landscape architects to study the viewshed of the James River in Richmond and to determine how it can be protected for future generations while realizing its potential for economic development. This effort will culminate in a public planning and design charrette facilitated by ASLA members. It will build on prior plans, including the recent Richmond Riverfront Plan and Downtown Master Plan, two excellent efforts prepared by noted landscape architectural firms. The ASLA-facilitated process will further study and make recommendations specifically addressing viewsheds. It will not be about any one parcel or group of properties, but will look at the entire riverfront as seen from Libby Hill.

As the word “icon” implies, there is a spiritual basis for the strong connection between people and scenic views, especially those that include water as seen from an elevated position in the landscape. Viewing scenery is by far the most popular recreational and economically important tourism activity in America; the management of viewsheds, such as the one from Libby Hill Park, is thus vitally important.

This view has received much attention in recent times from numerous organizations, including Scenic Virginia, The Garden Club of Virginia, Partnership for Smarter Growth, Alliance to Conserve Old Richmond Neighborhoods, Church Hill Association, and Historic Richmond Foundation. Most recently, it was designated by Preservation Virginia as one of their Ten Most Endangered Historic Sites in Virginia.

Whereas landscape architects often share the goals of preservation groups, this effort will not be focused on preventing development, but rather on protecting and enhancing the views as a public resource. Members of ASLA are professional, licensed landscape architects who search for a balanced, scientific approach to responsible land use planning. They are highly trained professionals who seek to protect and enhance natural resources while maximizing the use potential of a site, bringing people and the land together in an environmentally compatible way. It’s a win-win approach.

As former national President of ASLA and a native of Richmond, I’m very pleased to see a professional organization like ASLA focusing on the importance of this and other viewsheds throughout America as a public resource, recognizing their recreational and economic value.
Because of my interest in viewsheds and their public importance, I recently joined the board of Scenic Virginia as a landscape architect with expertise in visual resource management to help undertake their important new project: To create a registry of landscapes of exceptional scenic value throughout the Commonwealth. This project, now underway, will create public awareness of scenic resources, such as the view from Libby Hill, so that their presence and value are understood by people making land use decisions. It is my hope that the ASLA’s viewshed planning project in Richmond will be a prototype for recognition of important views statewide.

Barry Starke, a landscape architect and certified planner, is President of Earth Design Associates Inc., located near Warrenton, Virginia. Barry is a Fellow and former president of the American Society of Landscape Architects and coauthor of the fourth edition of *Landscape Architecture: A Manual of Environmental Planning and Design*. He is past president of the Virginia State Board of Architects, Professional Engineers, Land Surveyor, and Landscape Architects; former chairman of the Renewable Natural Resources Foundation; and currently serves on the Board of Directors of Scenic Virginia.

Barry is a native of Richmond. His most noted works in the area include Maymont Park, The Science Museum of Virginia, The Virginia Historical Society, the Arthur Ashe Monument with sculptor Paul DiPasquale, and the 1979 Richmond Riverfront Flood Protection and Development Study with GNA Architects.

Appendix C: Resident/Park User Survey:

1) What is your age range?
2) What zip code do you live in?
3) Race?
4) Have you ever been to Libby Hill Park in Church Hill?
5) If yes, how often do you go?
6) What is the primary draw to this park for you?
7) When visiting this park, how likely are you to visit a local restaurant or shop?
8) Do you feel development along Main Street around the Pulse bus stop of buildings up to ten stories would change how often you use this park?
9) What would keep you from visiting this park?
10) When visiting this park do you normally walk, drive, bike, or take public transit?
Appendix D: Survey for businesses in the area

1) How long have you been open?
2) What is your primary business purpose?
3) Why did you choose this location?
4) Was locating in a historic district important to your business decisions?
5) Do you notice an increase in business at times during busier times for tourism in the neighborhood?
6) In regards to Libby Hill Park, do many clients/patrons mention the park during their visits?