

LONG ISLAND / TOWNS

In Huntington, plan for African American museum gets boost



Conceptual rendering of the Huntington African American Museum site. Credit: Mark McAteer / The Laurel Group.

By Deborah S. Morris

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The plan for a museum dedicated to the contributions of Huntington's African American residents of the past, present and future just got a big boost.

The town board approved a 99-year license agreement with the nonprofit Huntington African American Museum to allow for a parcel of about 1.5 acres of town-owned land at the intersection of New York Avenue and Mill Dam Road in Halesite to be used for the facility.

Town documents said the license agreement is for the purpose of establishing a potential location for the museum, which would require more approvals once a plan is established.

The newly-approved measure also stipulates the museum board has five years to raise enough money to build the historic institution or the town has the option to end the agreement.

Attorney Barry Lites, chairman of the eight-member museum board, said board members are so confident they will meet the challenge that it was their idea to include the stipulation.

"If we can't raise the millions of dollars that are going to be needed to build this museum in five years it's not going to happen," Lites said. "But we're now on our way and have the momentum."

The parcel, known as the former Naval Reserve site, is near the original home of Peter Crippen, one of the town's early leaders in the African American community. The museum board will pay the town \$1,200 a year in a license fee for the site.

Lites said the board members already created fundraising, design and construction and community engagement committees to lead the way for the project and have a \$10 million fundraising goal.

"I really want to make the entire community aware and have their support both morally and financially in this journey," he said. "We are open to any and all hands."

Lites said that the town's African American Historic Designation Council deserves the credit for the idea of a museum, which council members landed on while working to preserve Crippen's house.

Town board member Joan Cergol, who sponsored the measure for the license agreement, said the work of the African American Historic Designation Council will form the foundation of the museum's exhibits.

She said over the years council members have cataloged and recorded the stories of the town's more well-known Black residents and a museum will "create an opportunity to expand on it."

Board members approved the license agreement 5-0 at an April 11 meeting.

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Deborah Morris is a native Long Islander and covers the town of Huntington.

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