



United States Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
Washington, DC 20240

The Honorable Joe Manchin III
Chairman, Committee on Energy
and Natural Resources
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Mr. Chairman:

I hereby transmit the enclosed *West Hunter Street Baptist Church Special Resource Study*. The study was conducted pursuant to Public Law 113-291, the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2015, which authorized the Secretary of the Interior to conduct a special resource study of the historic West Hunter Street Baptist Church, located at 775 Martin Luther King Jr. Drive, SW, Atlanta, Georgia. The study was conducted by the National Park Service (NPS).

Section 100507 of Title 54, United States Code, establishes the criteria to be considered in the study of an area for potential inclusion in the national park system. To be recommended as a new unit, a study area must possess nationally significant natural or cultural resources and represent one of the most important examples of a particular resource type in the country; be suitable and feasible for addition to the system; and appropriate for direct NPS management.

Built in 1906, West Hunter Street Baptist Church takes its name from the street on which it is located. Originally called Hunter Street, it was renamed in honor of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., in 1990. The church is closely associated with the life of internationally recognized leader of the modern civil rights movement, the Reverend Dr. Ralph David Abernathy, Sr. In addition, even prior to Rev. Dr. Abernathy's appointment as pastor in 1961, the church was the site for progressive activities such as interracial services and mass voting rights efforts involving the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. During the late 1960s to mid-1970s, Rev. Dr. Abernathy helped the Southern Christian Leadership Conference expand its focus on desegregation to include universal human rights issues such as economic justice and labor rights.

The study focused on the West Hunter Street Baptist Church, and the block on which the church is located. The NPS evaluated national significance of the study area using National Historic Landmark (NHL) criteria and found that the West Hunter Street Baptist Church meets the criterion of national significance for its close association with the Reverend Dr. Ralph David Abernathy, Sr. No other sites within the study area were found to be nationally significant.

In evaluating suitability, the NPS determined that West Hunter Street Baptist Church exemplifies an important aspect of American history not adequately represented and protected elsewhere. While other national park units and public sites throughout the South protect and interpret the civil rights movement, West Hunter Street Baptist Church expands and enhances resource protection and interpretation related to the critical role that churches played during this time and its association with the Reverend Dr. Ralph David Abernathy, Sr.

In evaluating feasibility, the NPS found that West Hunter Street Baptist Church meets all of the components for consideration of feasibility as a unit of the national park system. Among other factors, the site has high potential for public enjoyment and interpretation, and there is public support for designation. Costs associated with the acquisition, one-time facility development and rehabilitation, and long-term operations of the site appear to be feasible when taking into consideration the current deferred maintenance backlog and budgetary challenges facing the NPS.

Upon further evaluation, the NPS found that West Hunter Street Baptist Church meets the fourth criterion, the need for direct NPS management. Despite their significant efforts and role in rehabilitating the church, it is not in the purview of the Ralph David Abernathy III Foundation Inc. to provide resource management of the site or educational and interpretive opportunities for visitors. Based on the analysis of the existing management currently operating West Hunter Street Baptist Church, direct NPS management of the site is needed. No other entities have been identified to manage the site.

Therefore, the NPS developed one management alternative for resource preservation, visitor services, and interpretation. Establishment of an NPS unit was found to be the most efficient and effective way to protect the church and provide opportunities for public enjoyment. Given the proximity to Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historical Park, the NPS proposes that West Hunter Street Baptist Church fall under the umbrella of Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historical Park's management but operate as a separate unit.

As a result of these study findings, the Department of the Interior recommends that Congress consider establishing the West Hunter Street Baptist Church as a unit of the National Park System.

Thank you for your interest in the National Park Service. A similar letter is being sent to the Honorable John Barrasso, Ranking Member, Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, United States Senate; the Honorable Raúl Grijalva, Chairman, Committee on Natural Resources, U.S. House of Representatives; and the Honorable Bruce Westerman, Ranking Member, Committee on Natural Resources, U.S. House of Representatives. The affected members of the Georgia delegation will also receive a copy of the study report and this letter.

Sincerely,

Shannon A. Estenoz
Assistant Secretary
for Fish and Wildlife and Parks

Enclosure

cc: The Honorable Nikema Williams
The Honorable Jon Ossoff
The Honorable Raphael Warnock



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