

Nassau School Public Workshop

**Lewes Fire Station #2
32198 Janice Road
Lewes, DE 19958**

February 24, 2020
2:30 to 5:30 p.m.

WORKSHOP & COMMENT SUMMARY

Date: April 28, 2020

A public workshop for the Nassau School was held on February 24, 2020, at the Lewes Fire Station #2 in Lewes, DE. A total of 41 people attended the workshop. In total, 37 written comments were received (17 at the workshop and 20 during the comment period). Based on discussions with the attendees and a review of the written comments submitted, we offer the following summary:

The meeting was conducted in an informal manner; discussions were held among DelDOT representatives and the attendees as they arrived and walked among the displays. The displays provided information on the history and significance of the school and aided in discussion about potential future plans for the building. The biggest concerns from the public focused on the long-term preservation of the school and recognition of the school's significance. The school is very important to the local community and stands as a testament to African American history in Belltown and the region. Several former Nassau School students were in attendance and shared memories and stories of what it was like to attend school there. The main questions received from attendees and commenters focused on future ownership and who will be responsible for long-term maintenance of the school.

As indicated at the workshop and on the comment forms, several groups and individuals are interested in becoming involved with the preservation of the Nassau School. The Nassau School Coalition, Inc, which has formed recently with the intent to help preserve the building, and the Southern Delaware Alliance for Racial Justice are two entities that were mentioned most often. One attendee also suggested contacting the Delaware Community Foundation, Crystal Trust Foundation, and Longwood Foundation regarding potential restoration funding.

While preferences for future uses of the building varied, most commenters agreed that the focus should remain on promoting the history and significance of the Nassau School through the lens of the duPont Schools program and African American life and community in Belltown, Sussex County, and Delaware. Many suggested it should become a museum, visitor/welcome center, community center or building that provides services for locals, or some combination of these ideas. Other suggestions included a "School of Peace and Wellbeing."

Of those who stated a preference, most people preferred that the school remain in its current location or at least stay within Belltown if it must be moved. The main reasons for this include the historic/cultural significance of the school to Belltown and the potential for the building to be an asset to the Belltown

community in the future. One comment did point out that moving the building may affect its historic integrity and therefore its potential to be listed on the National Register of Historic Places, which could compromise certain grant or tax credit funding opportunities. The remaining responses were split between no opposition to moving/moving elsewhere and those with a mixed preference (see benefits to both sides). The reasons or concerns listed to support moving the building to another location include ease of access and opportunities for parking, as well as the changing landscape of Belltown and potential development threats to the building. Several comments suggested moving the building to a more central location, or an already established complex for interpretation, such as the Lewes Historical Society's Shipcarpenter Street Campus.

DelDOT is taking all comments under consideration and will continue working with the Delaware State Historic Preservation Office to evaluate a path forward for the future ownership and use of the Nassau School. DelDOT is currently working with a contractor to address the ongoing insect issues and make minor repairs to maintain the building in good condition. DelDOT is committed to the long-term preservation of the school and will continue to provide updates as information becomes available.