
**Community Visioning Session • Johnson House Historic Site
Saturday, December 7 • 9am – 12pm**

Session Review

The evolutionary trajectory of the Johnson House Historic Site (JHHS) is in need of redirection. JHHS leadership has been stirred by the desire to revise its vision, mission and statement of purpose to incorporate expanded community engagement. JHHS leadership believes these revisions should enhance the quality of life for residents and businesses, while preserving the rich historical and cultural experiences of the site. To explore this concept, the JHHS held a Community Visioning Session with 14 participants from the surrounding communities. An intergenerational group of participants from varying socio-economic backgrounds, races, ethnicities and genders were asked to contribute their insight, knowledge and wisdom to the discussion about the future role of the JHHS and to help answer the question - *What does the Johnson House want to be?*

The JHHS Community Visioning Session began with an overview by Cornelia Swinson, executive director of the JHHS, and Onyx Finney, JHHS board member that focused on renewed community vision for a cultural heritage/historic house, and its relevance to 21st century America. Discussion questions - What is the JHHS now? What does the JHHS want to be? - were presented and briefly explained.

Following the overview and introductions of the marketing consultants from IFE designs + associates, Inc. – Ife Nii Owoo, president, and team member Yvonne Drayton, president & CEO, Riscoe & associates, Inc. - participants were assigned to breakout groups and the discussions ensued.

Group I

Dana Byard

Sadiq Garner

Jaqueline Wiggins

John Churchville

Paula Paul

Fareed Newman

(Maurice's Friend)

Group II

Phillip Seitz

Wesley Robinson

PJ Thomas

Kenneth Houston

Cheron Perry Thomas

Amma Thomas

Maurice Mander

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Group Activity Breakout Sessions

Questions and Participant Responses

What are the key assets of JHHS?

Assets: Breakout Group I (Captain: Dana Byard)

Story	<p><i>Most important asset. Develop the story for all generations to gain a better understanding. Tell entire story – Quakers, allies, slaves, freedmen</i></p> <p><i>The story is bigger than the Underground Railroad and Harriett Tubman. It must be told from a universal perspective.</i></p>
Building	Main building –preserve the beauty of the House and utilize spaces for classes, event rentals, etc.
Out Building	Repair and utilize for classes and rentals
Land	Event space and support location for classes
Organizational Development	<p><i>Utilize professionals trained in hospitality with an understanding of the site.</i></p> <p><i>--Professional and knowledgeable</i></p> <p><i>--Bring story to life</i></p> <p><i>--Give a positive lasting impression</i></p> <p><i>--Tour guides are one aspect of staff needs. Must hire staff with ambition and capability to carry out the future vision</i></p> <p><i>Programming/ Fellowship Commission/Fellowship Farm - collaborate w/JHHS Events</i></p>

Assets: Breakout Group II (Captain: Phillip Seitz)

Building:	<i>Safety, location, historical value</i>
People:	<i>Great</i>
Organizational/ Partnerships	<i>Values connections</i>



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Programs *Most haven't attended any. Ideas for possible options were not offered.*

Other *History and its ties to the present*

Community

What needs do the surrounding communities have that may be lacking?

Marketing and promotion

Patch: Online community – no presence in Germantown

Social Media Options: Nextdoor.com (free private social network for community neighborhoods, Addressgate.com, etc., and various neighborhood calendars)

Use other communities as examples such as Mt. Airy and Chestnut Hill and follow their process

What assets do the surrounding communities have, but need more of?

Self sufficiency

Respect

A village

Knowledge of their traditions

Has gentrification, revitalization, or disenfranchisement impacted your quality of life within the community where you reside?

-Disenfranchisement

More it changes the more it stays the same

Disenfranchisement is more important than gentrification

Many people feel disenfranchised – political system has failed communities, monies are not well spent, no schools – families forced to move or relocate due to poor educational option

-Gentrification

Keys to community empowerment – How do we strengthen our communities so we can control our own destiny?



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-Revitalization

Politics, economics, spirituality

-Quality of Life

Disconnect between people and politics. Community groups are the saving grace of these areas. They are the glue.

Residents must be informed so they can become engaged

Should JHHS advocate for the community in matters such as social justice and civil liberties, or other areas?

Yes! JHHS should assist in getting the right people in the right places and move forward

Become a cultural center – focus on issues of identity within the community, champion violence prevention, partner with other organizations providing community services

What is the process to move away from reactive to proactive? Look nationally to develop a process

Resources: Teaching, curriculum, leaders

Programming and Audience

How must JHHS adapt to the needs of a younger audience on a continual basis?

Many of today's youth do not have an understanding of what the JHHS is. How do we make it relevant to them?

Some want to know about their neighborhood. How do we engage them?

Storytelling

Exhibits

Photographs

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Assessment

The vision discussion was helpful as a measure of the sense of identity and hope for the community. The composition of attendees provided a variety of perspectives regarding the community and direction for JHHS. In the opinion of the consultants, the group was generally of one accord concerning the importance of the JHHS's role as a center for history and contributions to the story of the Underground Railroad. This created a conducive environment for discussing opportunity's the JHHS may afford its residents, and to explore their thoughts for future community engagement.

Not unlike many communities in transition, the feelings expressed in the session could be characterized as anxious, given the shifting demographics, dwindling resources, and lack of general amenities found in other neighborhoods such as reliable child care services, creative programs for children, and quality educational options. However, given the rich history of Germantown, there was a general pride, fondness and respect conveyed for the people, places and events that occurred over the years that denote an excitement for its preservation. Unfortunately, less positive thoughts were also expressed concerning current circumstances. Directing the groups to look at the future of the JHHS inspired reclamation of the pride, enthusiasm and respect once known.

A sense of hope was also noted when participants focused on how they want to see the JHHS regarded. While the word *complex* used to describe the emotion of the community is very telling and honest; we do find a level of optimism in the future that is essential. There is an important responsibility placed on the organization, and a word of caution, given this important role. In many ways, the hope for the future lies in the success of the organization's implementation of its revised mission to become a more community-centered organization focused on advocacy.

Changes and improvements

Attendees agreed that communication, awareness and pride, awareness of history and culture, knowledge, visibility, and funding are all items requiring improvement within the community. Other items important to participants included reputation, perception, image and marketing –fundamental elements of rebranding, which the JHHS must undertake.

How is the story told? Is it relatable, interactive, visual, artistic, inclusive, welcoming? These were some of the words used by participants, in this sequence, to describe characteristics

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essential to the storytelling process. State of the art technology to support the telling of the story and social media to disseminate and promote the story top the list of must-haves to achieve and sustain any future success.

Social media is an important aspect of developing and maintaining a younger audience. Facebook, no longer the preferred communication tool of Millennials and Generation Z legions, has given way to Instagram using pictures shot with mobile devices attached to blurbs or captions describing the moment and sent immediately to multiple social media outlets. Other options include Pinterest – a pinboard photo sharing site, Twitter, etc. JHHS must master the art of social media through volunteers, interns, or a designated *technologically savvy* staff member to attract this audience, which is integral to the organization’s longevity.

The Community Needs . . .

Stronger community leadership. It is imperative to the success of any community engagement effort. Sound strategies must be presented to community members to encourage buy-in. Necessities missing from the surrounding community should be woven into the area’s infrastructure. Attendees also want to see an increase in community pride, improved education options, jobs providing a living wage, creative activities for families with young children and opportunities to continue the dialogue of community engagement by participating in thought provoking discussions that impact residents’ well-being.

Community session attendees feel strongly that awareness of the JHHS, and its historical and cultural contributions, is severely lacking. A community newspaper, historic preservation, outreach, development opportunities, and increased and improved retail options would help to elevate the community and improve the quality of life for residents and visitors.

The Emotion of the Community is . . .

Complex. This one word is powerful. One session was not enough time to discuss all of the issues plaguing the community. Positive emotions describing the community were mentioned through the breakout sessions such as the beauty and uniqueness interspersed throughout sections of the surrounding community, but the beauty was juxtaposed with crime and violence, and anguish for an apathetic political system.

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Community and economic vitality are seen as progress linked to a strong economic foundation. The creation of a JHHS center for advocacy may result in prosperity that incorporates small business development, living wage jobs, housing, wellness, sustainable practices along with increased tourism and other economic drivers that reignite the community.

The Emotion of JHHS is . . .

Sadness and pain coupled with aspiration and hope were mentioned during the breakout session when discussing the *Emotion of the JHHS*. Though conflicting, these responses are encouraging. Continued hope for something better inspires the initial groundwork for new beginnings.

Conclusion

What does the Johnson House want to be?

Service as a center for social justice and advocating on behalf of the community is a role participants want the JHHS to embrace, in partnership with the continued presentation and dissemination of African American history. The story is still its most important asset, according to participants who believe the JHHS must exhibit strong leadership and become the driving force in preserving, interpreting and presenting this information. The story must be the cornerstone of any advocacy strategies.

In addition to the story, strong reactions to issues of individual identity – self awareness, self respect, and self esteem were manifested during the group discussions and the subsequent inability to create a thriving, holistic community when these crucial components are lacking. Feelings of disenfranchisement surfaced as well. The disenfranchised skirt the edges of society, silent and invisible to most. Their voices stifled by neglect and discrimination fueled by indifference. JHHS may consider becoming an empathetic representative championing their challenges directly, or through other established entities.

Collective identity as a community and the perceptions associated with sections of Germantown, as compared to the perceptions of seemingly more well-heeled sections of Mt. Airy and Chestnut Hill are vital to understanding some of the issues facing residents and ultimately obtaining community buy-in for advocacy and outreach efforts. The divide between the standard of living of African Americans and other communities of color must be addressed.



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Race	Germantown		Index (All Races)	Germantown
African American	85.89%		Income per capita	\$17,862
	62.5% (Mt. Airy)			\$35,941 (Mt. Airy)
Caucasian	10.00%		Median household income	\$35,871
	31.7% (Mt. Airy)			\$56,815 (Mt. Airy)
Asian	0.99%		Median household income	\$48,349
			owner occupied	\$80,978 - Family (Mt. Airy)
American Indian	0.40%		Median household income	\$27,347
			renter occupied	
Native Hawaiian	0.00%		Median earnings male	\$27,580
Mixed race	2.10%		Median earnings female	\$25,787
	0.61%			
Other race	5.8% (Mt. Airy) Mixed/Other		Unemployment rate	14.2%
			Poverty level	26.0%

*Statistical data obtained from various sources: 2010 Census; AreaVibes; Wikipedi

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Retrofitting JHHS for the future role of community advocacy center requires creative partnerships, collaborations, and the continued development of relationships with residents and business owners. Facilitating, supporting and enabling various organizations with their advocacy programs and community engagement activities is also believed to be a necessary function of the JHHS, which will undoubtedly aid in the success of a new era of community engagement.



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Agenda

10 minutes

1. Brief Overview of JHHS:

Cornelia Swinson and Onyx Finney, JHHS Board Member

- Forming a renewed community vision for a cultural heritage/historic house site
- The history of the JHHS and its relevance to 21st Century America
 - What is JHHS now?
 - What does JHHS want to be?

2 minutes

2. Introduction of Consultants

Cornelia Swinson

10 minutes

3. Introduction of Project Scope and Facilitator

Ife Nii Owoo, Ife designs + associates

10 minutes

4. Introduction of Participants

Yvonne Drayton, Session Facilitator

President & CEO, Riscoe & Associates, Inc./Ife designs team member

75 minutes

(Participants can grab beverages and snacks during the group session period)

5. Group Activity (Breakouts pending number of participants)

What are the key assets of JHHS?

Assets can be:

Buildings

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People

Organizational/Institutional Partnerships and Alliances

Programming and events

Rank these assets in value – 5 being most valuable, 1 being least valuable

Please answer the following:

Community

What needs do the surrounding communities have that may be lacking?

What assets do the surrounding communities have, but need more of?

Has gentrification, revitalization, or disenfranchisement impacted your quality of life within the community where you reside?

Should JHHS advocate for the community in matters such as social justice and civil liberties, or other areas?

I would describe the emotion of my community as _____

Programming and Audience

What are the connections between the history of JHHS and your lives today?

How must JHHS adapt to the needs of a younger audience on a continual basis?

What types of events and programming are most important to you and your family?

What role should JHHS play in supporting your communities through its programming?



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I would describe the emotion of JHHS as _____

6. Parking Lot Items

30 - 40 minutes

7. Reports - Breakout Groups

Group Captains

10 – 15 minutes

8. Summarization/Next Steps

Connie Swinson, Ife designs

5 minutes

9. Closing

Cornelia Swinson and Onyx Finney