



Department Source: City Manager
To: City Council
From: City Manager & Staff
Council Meeting Date: May 20, 2024
Re: Historic Kirklin Home Conservation

Executive Summary

The Kirklin home, located at 107 Switzler, is an important part of local African American heritage. This property was the homestead of Henry Kirklin, a famous horticulturalist in the early 20th century. Staff have been working alongside volunteers to preserve this landmark for public use. Because the property is being offered for sale, now is the time to act. A group of volunteers, professionals and staff would like the city to purchase this property to conserve it for future public use.

Discussion

Purchasing the Kirklin property would allow it to be held in public ownership for the betterment of the community. The property owner has agreed to the sale price of \$91,000. The property was appraised at \$89,000 in February 2024. A volunteer group, please see the attached letter dated 3/4/24, have asked for the property to be put into a conservatory until plans can be finalized for its future public use. Staff believe this property has a multitude of educational purposes related to its historical relevancies. Staff will work with all parties to develop a sustainable use plan. Many interested parties have donated to the effort of conservation. With the help of Columbia Center for Urban Agriculture, \$50,000 has been raised for the purchase of the property. Additionally, on 5/8/24 the Kirklin home received the designation of a notable historic property in Columbia by the Historic Preservation Commission. The sale contract stipulates the council must approve the plan to acquire it in order for the purchase to take place. Approval is needed this month to maintain the deadline in the contract.

Historical Reference:

Built for a formerly enslaved couple just a few years after the Civil War, this house was the longtime home of famed local horticulturist, Henry Kirklin, who was also born enslaved. His mother, Jane Kirklin, bought the lot in 1870, and the house appears to have been built for her and her husband Jacob Kirklin soon after, probably in early 1871.

Henry Kirklin was about 12 years old when the house was built, and he lived there for most of his life. He began working on a farm two years later, and got a job at the University of Missouri's horticulture department when he was about 20. In 1878, he inherited the house from his mother and began buying additional land around the house. By the turn of the century, he owned most of the current block, which he developed into a highly successful 3-acre commercial garden.



Kirklin started out selling produce door to door from a wheelbarrow, but soon graduated to horse and wagon and selling at the public market and to a local produce company. By the early 1900s, the house on Switzler Street was the operational center of his garden business, and most of his customers came to him. The garden featured cutting-edge technology, including a man-made pond that irrigated all parts of the garden via a piping system designed and installed by Kirklin.

Kirklin's expertise was widely recognized. In 1904 he won a medal at the St. Louis World's Fair, and in 1913 he was a delegate at the National Colored Men's Business League in Philadelphia, which he attended at the invitation of Booker T. Washington. When he worked at the University horticulture department, he instructed horticulture students but had to do that outside in the gardens, because Blacks were not allowed in university classrooms at that time. He is now recognized as the first Black instructor at the University of Missouri. This unassuming house provides a surprising and significant link to the career of one of Columbia's most successful early twentieth-century Black businessmen.

Fiscal Impact

Short-Term Impact: \$91,000 and the cost of mowing and securing the property.
Long-Term Impact: Unknown

Strategic & Comprehensive Plan Impact

[Strategic Plan Impacts:](#)

Primary Impact: Inclusive and Equitable Community, Secondary Impact: Organizational Excellence, Tertiary Impact: Not Applicable

[Comprehensive Plan Impacts:](#)

Primary Impact: Livable & Sustainable Communities, Secondary Impact: Land Use & Growth Management, Tertiary Impact: Economic Development

Legislative History

Date	Action
NA	NA

Suggested Council Action

Approval.