



# Press Release



## City of Philadelphia and Independence National Historical Park

John F. Street, Mayor, City of Philadelphia  
Dennis Reidenbach, Superintendent, Independence National Historical Park

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### **FINALIST TEAM FOR PRESIDENT'S HOUSE SELECTED**

**Philadelphia, PA** – Mayor John F. Street and Independence National Historical Park Superintendent Dennis Reidenbach announced today that the team headed by Kelly/Maiello Architects and Planners has been selected to design and build the President's House project at Independence National Historical Park. This selection is pending final approval from PennDOT, which is managing federal funds appropriated for the project.

Kelly/Maiello is an award-winning minority-owned business that has provided architecture and planning services in Philadelphia and the region for more than 30 years. Principal and co-founder Emanuel Kelly will serve as Project Director.

Upon its completion, this project will result in a new permanent outdoor installation on the doorstep of the Liberty Bell Center. The installation will commemorate the house where Presidents George Washington and John Adams lived from 1790 to 1800, and the long-observed story of at least nine enslaved Africans who lived and worked there during Washington's presidency.

Today's announcement caps a rigorous and highly competitive process that began in October 2005 with the issuance of a nationally distributed Request for Qualifications. Responses were received from 21 teams representing more than 100 firms. The process has included significant public input, and technical review from an Oversight Committee made up of representatives of the advocacy groups who fought hardest for this commemoration – historians, community activists, and others who understand the national significance of this undertaking.

Mayor Street and Superintendent Reidenbach also presented the Archeological Team that will conduct the "dig" at the President's House site to determine whether any artifacts or

information relating to the President's House era may still be in the ground. The world-class team headed by the URS Group includes Dr. Warren Perry, Director for Archeology for the African Burial Ground in New York. The dig is expected to begin within 1-2 weeks; a separate announcement will be issued shortly.

"This is a great day for Philadelphia and our nation," Mayor Street said. "We are one huge step closer to fulfilling an obligation to tell the truth – the whole, complicated truth – about this small parcel of land on the doorstep of the Liberty Bell Center. I am proud that -- at the end of a tough national competition -- the consensus winner is headed by a local, African American-owned firm – Kelly/Maiello! I am sure there will be meaningful and substantial minority participation throughout this project – both when the words are written and the bricks are laid. This is the right team to tell a piece of history that should have been told a long time ago, in a way that millions of visitors will never forget."

Superintendent Reidenbach noted that "This project is a collaboration among the City of Philadelphia, the National Park Service, and so many others. With this commemoration, Independence National Historical Park will be at the forefront of national parks that address the issues of freedom and slavery. I could not be more pleased with the opportunity this project offers to teach and remember."

The Kelly/Maiello Team will execute all phases of the project, including architectural design, content development, fabrication, and installation. The lead interpretive planner and historian is Richard Rabinowitz, curator for the highly acclaimed exhibit "Slavery in New York." Dr. Rabinowitz founded the American History Workshop, a consortium of historians, writers, designers and filmmakers specializing in public exhibits. He has led the creative work of teams resulting in more than 400 history programs, including the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute and the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center in Cincinnati.

Also on the team: Professor and renowned author James Oliver Horton, Director of the African-American Communities Project at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History; historical advisor to the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center in Cincinnati, and, most recently, co-editor of *Slavery and Public History – The Tough Stuff of American Memory*. Joining him will be Gary Nash, Professor Emeritus of History at UCLA and author of 11 books, including *Forging Freedom: the Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720-1840*; and *African American Lives: The Struggle for Freedom*.

The President's House was torn down long ago. During the construction of the Liberty Bell Center in 2002, however, it became clear that enslaved Africans in Washington's household had slept on what was to become the threshold of the new Liberty Bell Center. A public outcry ensued, with a demand that the President's House be marked and the stories of the enslaved be told.

The project was jumpstarted in 2003 at the opening of the new Liberty Bell Center, when Mayor Street pledged \$1.5 million in its support. Thereafter, Congressmen Chaka Fattah

and Robert A. Brady secured a \$3.6 million federal grant to complete the funding for the project. “That support will enable us to illuminate the full history of this house – and no better place to do so than on the doorstep of the Liberty Bell, the symbol of freedom in this country,” said Mayor Street.

“Let me be clear,” the Mayor continued. “I got personally involved in this project because enslaved Africans lived in our first President’s household right here in Philadelphia – and most visitors to these symbols of liberty and justice, even now, are completely unaware of this terrible truth. That is about to change.”

The City and INHP adhered to an unusually complex public process in selecting the finalist. “The process was serious, thorough, and fair,” said Mayor Street. “We knew we had a responsibility to tell this story in a way that does justice to the people who occupied that house.”

Five semi-finalists submitted preliminary conceptual designs for the President’s House site. They also submitted three-dimensional models that were placed on public display at the National Constitution Center and African American Museum in Philadelphia. Nearly 1,000 visitors completed evaluation cards. These evaluations were reviewed by the Oversight Committee and posted on the City’s website ([www.phila.gov/presidentshouse](http://www.phila.gov/presidentshouse)).

The public, Oversight Committee, and semi-finalist teams were present at a well-attended event on June 5, 2006 that featured Howard Dodson, Chief of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, and past chair of the Federal Steering Committee for the African Burial Ground in Manhattan; and Fath Davis Ruffins, Curator of African American History and Culture at the Smithsonian’s National Museum of American History.

The Oversight Committee – charged with representing the public interest in the selection process – met with the semi-finalist teams, and then reviewed and evaluated all team submissions in great detail. Their recommendations were then submitted to the Selection Committee, headed by Mayor Street and Superintendent Reidenbach.

The members of the Oversight Committee are:

- **Romona Riscoe Benson**, President & CEO, African American Museum in Philadelphia;
- **Michael Coard, Esq.**, Founding Member, Avenging the Ancestors Coalition;
- **Tanya Hall**, Executive Director, Philadelphia Multicultural Affairs Congress, a division of the Philadelphia Convention & Visitors Bureau;
- **Edward Lawler, Jr.**, Scholar, Representing the Independence Hall Association;
- **Charlene Mires**, Associate Prof. of History, Villanova University; Editor, Pennsylvania History Studies Series, Pennsylvania Historical Association; Representing the Ad Hoc Historians;
- **Dennis Reidenbach**, Superintendent, Independence National Historical Park;

- **John Skief**, Chief Administrative Officer of the Harambee Institute of Science & Technology Charter School; Representing the Honorable Chaka Fattah, U.S. House of Representatives;
- **Karen Warrington**, Director of Communications, Office of the Honorable Robert A. Brady, U.S. House of Representatives; and
- **Joyce Wilkerson**, Chief of Staff, City of Philadelphia.

Students from the School District of Philadelphia were present at today's announcement. Their participation was the beginning of an extensive program of involvement to occur throughout the archeological dig and the design and installation of the President's House commemoration.

"The dig and the fabrication of the commemorative site present students with a rare and exciting opportunity to learn about the process, the importance of public voice, and the range of careers associated with historic projects," stated Dr. Greg Thornton, Chief Academic Officer for the School District of Philadelphia. "We are meeting with the National Park Service and the City to develop meaningful activities and materials."

"In the end," Mayor Street said, "we develop projects like this for our children and for our children's children. We want them to learn and pass on this stunning story of achievement and infamy, of the birth of a free nation and indefensible slavery existing side-by-side."

The Kelly/Maiello Team's proposal places incomplete walls -- architectural fragments -- around the original President's House footprint, in order to establish a powerful, historically accurate sense of place. Also, the area of the President's House now known as the Slave Quarters will be especially defined in a solemn manner -- a main goal of advocates who sought this commemoration. State-of-the-art audio and interactive visual technology will tell a series of compelling stories of life in the President's House.

The dedication for the site is expected to occur early in 2008.