A New Deal at Fort Negley Park for the Community

A Proposal for the Reclamation of the Greer Property

FRIENDS of FORT NEGLEY

2016

In 1935, New Deal legislation made the restoration of Fort Negley and the development of Fort Negley Park possible. Across the country, newspapers announced, "The board of park commissioners at Nashville, Tenn., has engaged relief workers to restore Fort Negley, famous stronghold in the war between the states."

Fort Negley Ruins, Circa Early 1930s
Tennessee State Library and Archives

To accommodate the recreational portion of the park, officials chose the rolling southern slope below Fort Negley which prior to consecration of the Nashville National Cemetery, contained the remains of approximately 11,000 federal Civil War soldiers.

In 1941, due largely to the efforts of the Works Progress Administration, the National Youth Administration, and the Tennessee Emergency Relief Administration, Fort Negley Park—featuring baseball and softball diamonds, stone bleachers, a comfort station, boxing rings, a playground, and a maintenance building—opened to the public.

Aerial Photograph of Fort Negley Park, Walter Williams Collection, Circa 1940, Metro Archives

Although Fort Negley closed in 1945 due to safety concerns, the rest of the park thrived until 1976, when the Board of Parks and Recreation unanimously approved a lease proposal presented by the Nashville Baseball, Inc. for the construction of a baseball stadium on the 16 acre property.

Over the next three decades, the Nashville Baseball Club expanded and improved the Herschel L. Greer Stadium and the surrounding parking areas. Although this development altered the WPA-era landscape, the work did not completely erase the historical and cultural significance of the site. Remnants of the original stone bleachers flank the stadium. The expanded parking area carved into the northeast corner of the property revealed some of the region's most impressive marine fossils.

The Nashville Sounds' departure from Greer Stadium in April 2015, offered the long-awaited opportunity to reclaim the property by Metro Parks and the community. **This proposal, drawing heavily on recommendations presented in the *1996 Master Plan* and the *2007 Supplement to the Master Plan*, details the Friends of Fort Negley's vision for reuniting and revitalizing Fort Negley Park for the local and expanded communities.**

Since the Fort Negley Visitors Center opened in December 2007, tens of thousands of people from every state in the union and from around the world have visited the site. Tourists come to witness the largest inland stone fort built during the Civil War, to retrace the footsteps of an ancestor, or to experience the unique history of one of the South's most prominent cities. Neighbors visit the park daily to walk the trails, to eat lunch, and to find much needed respite from a fast-paced urban lifestyle. This proposal offers additional unique experiences for our neighbors and tourists alike while preserving and expanding the current uses of the site.

Imagine the Possibilities!

Imagine a bigger, more engaging Fort Negley Park featuring:

- Ample open green space
- Multi-Purpose fields
- A Fort Negley-themed educational play space mimicking the fort's design and construction
- A heritage walking trail dedicated to the African Americans who built the fort
- A network of primitive walking trails linking the park and the City Cemetery
- An expanded Fossils @ the Fort Outdoor Experience
- A picnic area with pavilions
- Plenty of convenient parking

Why Reclaim the Greer Property for Fort Negley Park?

Necessity

- Fort Negley Park, located in the heart of a rapidly developing urban area, increasingly supports numerous recreational activities such as walking, running, biking, and martial arts.
- Approximately 2,234 residential units located within a half mile radius of Fort Negley Park have been proposed or approved by the City. As this area develops, green space will become more of an imperative.
- The current parking areas at Fort Negley Park do not support special events or bus tours. For this reason, the Park often uses the parking lot at Greer Stadium.
- Partners, such as the Adventure Science Center and the Nashville City Cemetery Association, have come to depend on utilizing the parking lot at Greer Stadium for fundraisers and other special events.
- Fort Negley Park serves as an urban wildlife habitat for monarch butterflies, birds of prey, foxes, rabbits, squirrels, snakes, turtles, migratory birds, and numerous other species.

Historical Precedence

Aerial Photograph of Fort Negley Park, Walter Williams Collection, Circa 1938, Metro Archives

- The Greer Stadium portion of Fort Negley Park once contained the remains of 11,000 Federal soldiers and likely still holds forgotten burials.
- The Catholic Cemetery, formerly located on the southeast corner of the property, was relocated by the railroad company to Cavalry Cemetery during the late 19th century. It was a resting place for many in Nashville's Catholic Community including many Germans that settled in the immediate neighborhood.
- In 1928 the City purchased St. Cloud Hill from Annie S. Farguson, a descendent of John Overton. From St. Cloud Hill Fort Negley Park was created. Fort Negley Park includes three sections -historic Fort Negley, the FN visitor center and park green space; land leased to Adventure Science Center; and Greer stadium formerly leased to the Sounds.
- Staff and volunteers have catalogued hundreds of artifacts associated with the houses demolished by the WPA in the 1930s. These artifacts, as well as, early 20th century city directories have provided great insight into the people who once lived there. The surrounding neighborhood is rooted in part by the contraband camp that settled around the fort during the war.

Heritage and Cultural Tourism

- Fort Negley Park is located within walking distance of Adventure Science Center and the Nashville City Cemetery.
- The Park is located within 1.5 miles of Riverfront Park, Nashville Fairgrounds, Broadway, Ascend Amphitheater, the State Capitol Building, and Music City Center.
- The park is located a short distance from I-40 and I-65.
- As the largest inland stone fortification built during the Civil War, Fort Negley is uniquely positioned to become a centerpiece of Nashville's history and culture and the hub for regional Civil War tourism.
- Few American cities were occupied during the Civil War. Nashville's occupation story is one of human drama and should be marketed and promoted.
- Due to 20th century development, very little of the Nashville Battlefield remains. Although the same was true of Franklin, the city is actively reclaiming heritage sites.
- Fort Negley Park's rich diversity is rarely seen in municipal parks.
- Connection to the Nashville City Cemetery through primitive trails, printed interpretive materials, programs, and tours would not only benefit both sites, but would also reaffirm their close historical link.
- In addition to community recreational activities multipurpose fields could support vintage baseball and living history demonstrations.

Partnerships and Quality Educational Opportunities

- Each year, Fort Negley Park presents numerous educational programs and special events including living history encampments, fossil programs, milkweed programs, lectures, and field trips.
- Fort Negley Park is home to some of the region's most impressive colonial coral fossils Ft. Negley's low limestone cliffs contain coral heads that have not been moved for 475 million years since the Nashville area was covered by a shallow, Bahamas-like sea. In 2012, the Park partnered with the Earth and Environmental Sciences Department at Vanderbilt University in an effort to expand programming to include natural history and fossils. The following year, Vulcan Materials Company created the Fossils @ the Fort Outdoor Experience. Since 2012, more than 3,000 people have participated in fossil-related programs. Considering the origin and significance of these fossils by children and adults alike advances public understanding and appreciation of natural science and STEM fields.
- Several times a year, Fort Negley offers opportunities to meet Civil War interpreters and to experience life during the 1860s through living history events, tours, and lectures.
- The Monarch Milkweed Project Garden, made possible through a grant from Southwest Airlines and the National Recreation and Parks Association, highlights the importance of growing milkweed and preserving the monarch butterfly population.
- The Nashville Chew Crew is currently hard at work clearing invasive plants from the stonework. The public is welcome to stop by to observe the sheep and the guard dogs at work and enjoy scheduled programs.
- Metro Parks is currently working to link Fort Negley Park and the City Cemetery through primitive interpretive trails and other pedestrian connections.
- This summer, in partnership with the Tennessee Historical Society and the Robert Penn Warren Center for the Humanities at Vanderbilt University, the Friends of Fort Negley received a $2,500 grant from the National Humanities Alliance Foundation. The grant will finance a one-day event entitled *Fort Negley: A Symbol of the Struggle for Civil Rights* on Saturday, November 5, at Fort Negley Visitors Center. The program will include a key note address by Dr. Bobby Lovett and a panel discussion with notable historians. To compliment this project, the Robert Penn Warren Faculty Fellows will purchase an interpretive sign for up to $10,000 to mark the location of the contraband camp.
- Next spring, Fort Negley Park will partner with Vanderbilt University in an effort to provide educational opportunities for conventional students and lifelong learners.

Themed Neighborhood Play Space at Fort Negley Park

Since the mid-1990s, historic sites in Europe have incorporated themed play spaces into historic site campuses. These spaces not only offer guests a place to let go and unwind after a formal "no-touching" experience at a castle or a manner house, but also encourage a greater understanding of the site's history, culture, and nature through imaginative play. Often located near, or inspired by, the historic structure, themed play spaces assist guests with forming connections between themselves and the site's unique history, culture, traditions, ecology, etc. In the United States, the trend has largely focused on creating magical spaces inspired by childhood fantasies such as castles and dragons. Only a few American sites directly link to the site's unique history, culture, and landscape. While most American sites promote imaginative play, they do not necessarily create a sense of place.

According to *Case Studies in Placemaking & Play Spaces: Using Custom Design to Create a Sense of Place*, themed play spaces "can help fill a void in modern life where people are often cut off from nature, unaware of an area's history and its relationship to overall development, and often cut off from interacting with one another." The combination of providing communities with a "sense of place" and opportunities to build lasting memories promote attachment, a sense of ownership and pride, and stewardship. When planned and constructed as community projects, these spaces take on even more meaning for those involved. Themed play spaces across the United States and Europe offer many examples of historic replicas and representations incorporated into parks, historic sites, and natural areas including Squires' Court Playground, inspired by Leeds Castle and located on the historic grounds in Kent, England, and the miniature replica of Hatfield House in Hertfordshire, England.

A themed play space at Fort Negley would encourage protection of the historic fort structure by providing a safe place to explore and to make personal connections to the site, its history, and its importance to the shaping of the surrounding community. In addition, a play space that mimics the fort's construction, design, and materials would serve as visual reference for those touring the ruins. Construction of a themed play space also represents a significant cost savings and alternative to reconstructing the historic structure. A themed play space unique to Fort Negley would capitalize on the near lack of such places in the United States and also fill a void for this rapidly expanding neighborhood.

A themed play space at Fort Negley Park would incorporate elements of the site's history, natural resources, and ancient past though the incorporation of a variety of potential components:

- Wooden structures replicating the stockade, casemates, cabins, and sally port
- Realistic concrete climbing boulders with embedded fossils and layered composition mimicking the fort's stonework and natural limestone outcroppings
- Sculptured cannons for climbing
- Kid-friendly interpretive panels explaining the site's multi-layered history, the building and occupation of Fort Negley, reconstruction by the WPA, limestone formation, 19th century quarrying techniques, linkages between the ancient past and the Civil War such as soldier, naturalist, and fossil hunter John Wesley Powell, etc.
- Murals depicting Union soldiers, contrabands, ancient marine creatures, a grove of oak trees, Fort Morton and Blockhouse Casino, the railroad depot, etc.

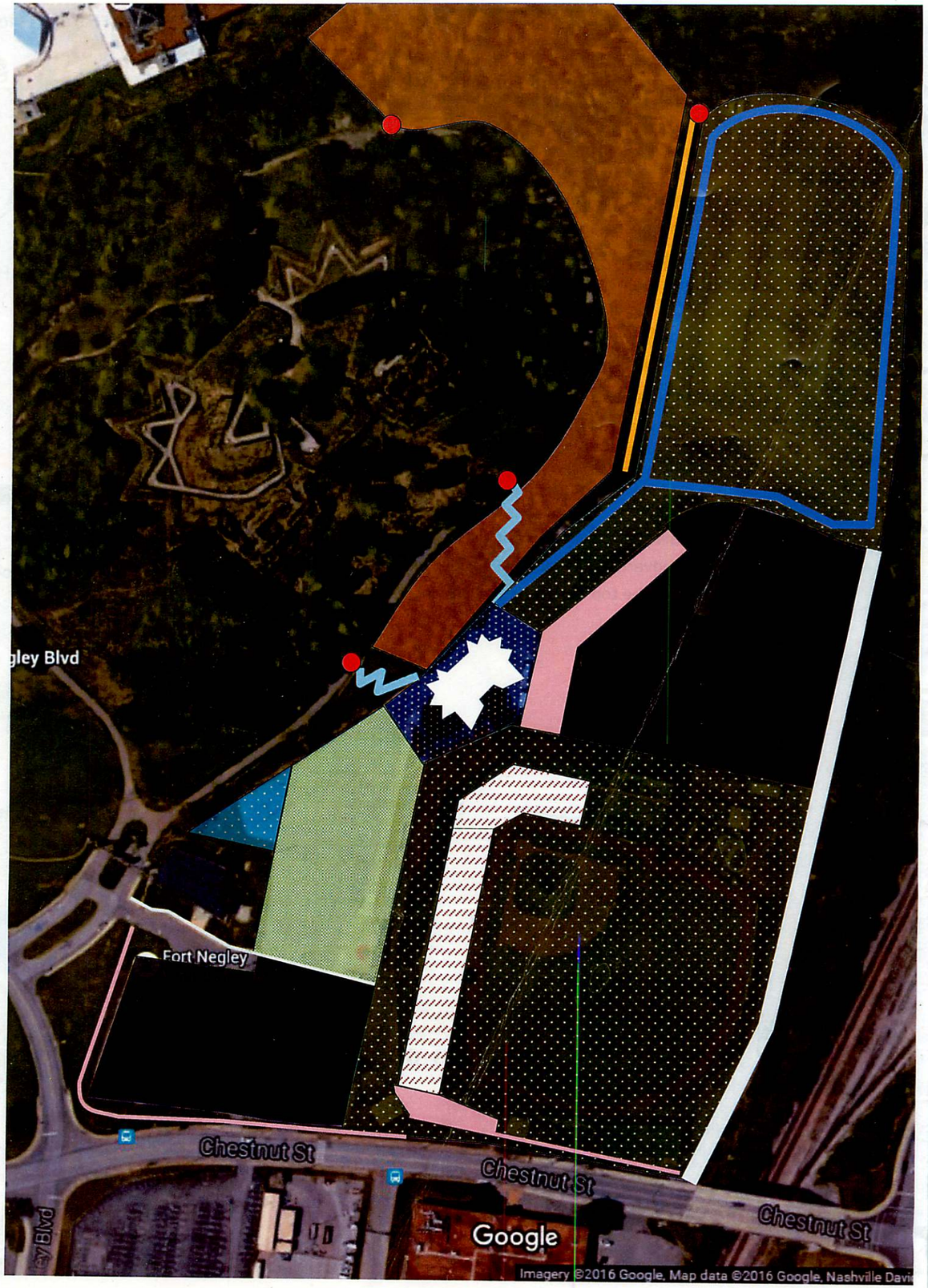
Contraband Camp Memorial Trail at Fort Negley Park

Few American cities embrace and interpret the contributions of African Americans during the Civil War. The Contraband Camp in Corinth, Mississippi, owned and operated by the National Parks Service, is the only interpreted site of its kind in the nation. The tranquil setting includes bronze sculptures, interpretive panels, and walking trails. Nashville has the unique opportunity to interpret and memorialize the African American laborers, known as *contrabands*, and the well-established camp at Fort Negley grew into one of the city's first free black neighborhoods. The proposed memorial trail, located near the original camp site, would feature interpretive panels and bronze sculptures depicting contraband laborers as they lived, worked, and suffered while constructing Nashville's defensive fortifications. In addition, the trail would link the themed play space to the historic fort ruins, the primitive trails, and the Nashville City Cemetery. It would enhance African American heritage tourism and compliment frequent family reunions and existing black history events such as Juneteenth at Fort Negley.

Potential sculptures would include laborers quarrying stone using Civil War-era techniques, placing and hauling stone, enlisting in a USCT regiment, suffering from exposure and disease, seeking protection from a slave owner, and guarding Fort Negley against Confederate attackers.

Please support the reclamation of Fort Negley Park at the public meeting scheduled on Wednesday, September 21 at 5:30 pm and on Saturday, September 24 at 8:30 am. Both meetings will be held at Adventure Science Center located at 800 Fort Negley Blvd.

For more information please contact Fort Negley Visitors Center at 615-862-8470 or at fortnegley@nashville.gov.



Two multi purpose fields can be used for Fort Negley interpretive programs such as military demonstrations, living history encampments, and other educational programs. Community use of the fields could include athletic events, vintage baseball, farmer's markets, movies on the lawn, etc.

Two parking lots with approximately 450 total spaces.

WPA Stonework

Possible remnants of WPA Stonework

Monarch Butterfly Milkweed Garden Expansion with maintenance shed

Green Space with picnic shelters and tables available to daily visitors, school groups, family reunions, special interest groups, etc. This area may also serve well to expand the Fossils at the Fort fossil collection area-one of our most popular features

Fort Negley themed play space. A tactile and interactive educational play space that allows for exploration and imaginative play without risk to the real fort structure.

Primitive trails linking Fort Negley Park to the City Cemetery expand the visitors historical experience.

Trailhead

These connectors allow visitors to start their tour of the Fort from the themed play space by linking to existing paved pathways and interpretation panels.

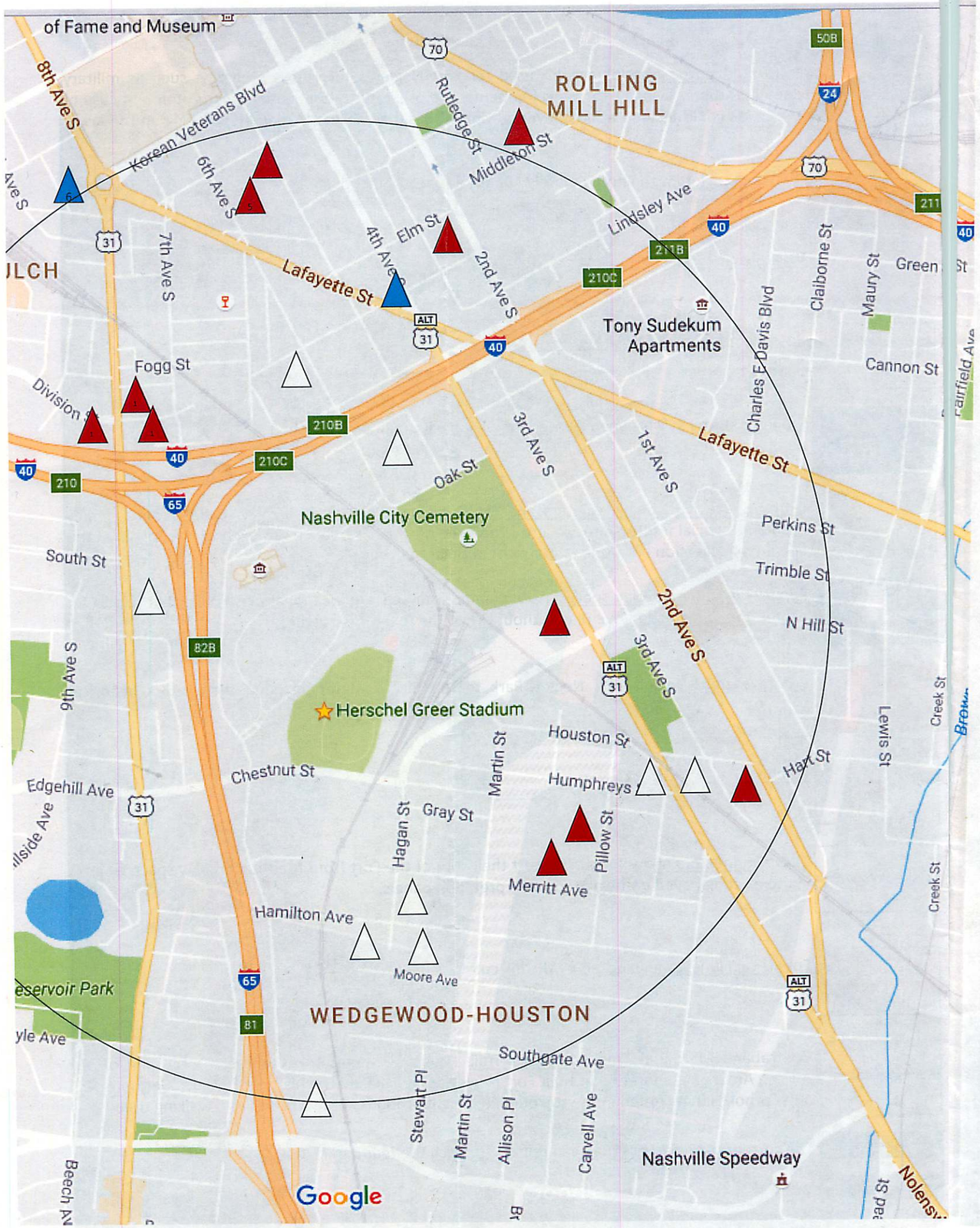
Fossils-rich limestone exposed by the hill cut

Contraband Memorial Trail / Heritage Trail This trail serves to expand interpretation of African American laborers that built Fort Negley as well as add the history of Blacks, Germans and Catholics that settled in the surrounding neighborhoods. It also serves as a walking trail.

The current paved access road can remain to reach the rear parking lot.

Development around Fort Negley Park as of September 1, 2016

▲ In the 1/2 mile radius around Fort Negley Park there are 11 residential buildings either being built or are proposed and working through the approval process. These buildings range from 4 to 23 stories Current proposals total 1903 residential units. Most of these buildings are multi use and include retail or office space.

▲ In the 1/2 mile radius around Fort Negley Park there are two proposed hotels that range from 12 to 27 stories with 117 to 454 rooms.

△ In the 1/2 mile radius around Fort Negley Park there are 9 parcels of land for sale totaling 17.37 acres advertised as suitable for dense multi unit residential buildings. One site only 1500 feet from the top of Fort Negley previously had a plan to develop 500 residential units.