

Statement in Favor of The Preservation of Historic Ebony, Virginia

Brunswick County Board of Supervisors Meeting

April 19, 2023

posted on KeepEbonyCountry.org

By Dr. Florine Bell

I was willing to make the trip here tonight because of my genuine interest and ongoing research of the planters, plantations, ferries, and history of formerly enslaved folk such as Mitchel Ross, the grandfather of civil rights activist Ella Baker who drove a mule from Elams, NC, to collect mail from Ebony, Virginia.

Before I emphasize the importance of preserving the integrity of Ebony without retail commercializing of a Dollar General or similar operations, I will mention – Andy Brack’s Center for a Better South, whose blog reads: an empty, old store in Ebony, Va., as one of the favorite buildings we’ve spotted recently in our rambles around the Southern Crescent.

Ebony, a valley steeped in history, was noted by the Virginia Department of Historic Resources as eligible for nomination for the National Register of Historic Places and the Virginia Landmarks Register. This [eligibility and possible] nomination brings even more attention to Ebony as a potential historical tourist site of museums showcasing a well-preserved history and other historical activities in our Historic town of Halifax, NC.

Studies reveal the opposite: Dollar General stores are known to adversely and negatively impact communities where historical dwellings are non-existent, so what might occur if this type of commercialism infringes upon historic Ebony?

According to the Institute for Local Self-Reliance, dollar stores sometimes fill communities’ needs. However, growing evidence suggests these stores are not a product of economic distress. However, instead, it operates in small towns and urban alike, triggering the closure of grocery stores, eliminating jobs, and eroding the prospects of vulnerable communities they target, for example, the thriving historic Ebony General store and Murray’s 903 Race In, already serving the community, including Virginia and the broader Lake Gaston communities.

Dollar Generals Create fewer jobs and pays lower wages than independent grocery stores. Have poor labor practices. Extract wealth from the community and local governments. Erode community identity and creates traffic and safety problems. Development can destroy essential natural and historic resources. Although Dollar General admits to giving back to communities, it has a more self-serving approach.

Since Ebony’s history dates to the 1700s, it would make an extreme contrast between the old and the new, and rightly because it would take away from the aesthetics of preserving

the integrity of the historic buildings and the community. Therefore, the community would best be served by developmental opportunities not involving retail commercialism but rather the commercial aspect of history that promises solid economic growth to residents of Ebony and beyond.

What distinguishes communities such as rural historic Ebony is that it is preserving the best of their legacy. Furthermore, Dollar General already operates within a short driving distance of its stores in Lake Gaston, Gasburg, Bracey, and other nearby locations.

That said, I urge that we preserve the best of the past and, at the same time, attempt to attract and open the desired and favored growth geared towards tourism instead of the encroachment of commercialization that tends to shift our awareness of and dedication to maintaining and retaining the integral uniqueness of Ebony's history.





Biography Brief of Dr. Florine Bell
E-Mail: faithone@centurylink.net
Home# (252) 537.9843 Cell# 252.673.7698

Dr. Florine Bell is a native, minister, community leader, activist, and historian who lives in Roanoke Rapids, NC. She matriculated at Shaw, UV, NC State, and Duke UV and served in the following capacities since 1972. Bell has advocated for religious and humanitarian causes in Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, the Dominion Republic, Haiti, and beyond. 1992, she held community meetings to revitalize the impoverished, excluded Lincoln Heights Community of Roanoke Rapids.

Through her leadership, the following developed, the founding of Lincoln Height's Community Development Coalition, Inc., the LH Community Development Center, Inc., and the Lincoln Height's Community Crime Watch, Program. The Coalition received donations of two houses and land, which included the community center's building and a dwelling presently used for a homeless shelter. Further advocacy with residents prevented the construction of a proposed neighborhood waste transfer plant. In 2019, upon request, Bell was granted a free demolition of an abandoned dwelling in the community.

In (1999), Bell approached Halifax County officials for urgent remodeling, replacement, and demolition housing needs yielding USDA Federal Block Grants of \$750,000 and 1.2 million dollars in 2022 from the North Carolina Legislative and USDA funds. Also, she led negotiations between a property owner and the Lincoln Heights Community Center in 2022, resulting in twenty-two acres of land for a new community center and athletic field.

Dr. Bell is a noted historian, researcher, and genealogist who helped to lay the groundwork for the Roanoke Canal Museum, the Ella Baker Educational Project of North Carolina, the North Carolina Ella Baker historical marker, the Halifax County Underground Railroad, the Edward Cheek House Museum. She serves on several local history boards and Halifax County boards involving the Halifax County Child Protection Team and the Halifax County's Semi-Quincentennial Commission.