

Dr. Toni Smith
Senate Bill 192
Senate General Government and Agency Review Testimony
Proponent Testimony
October 2, 2019

Chair Schuring, Vice Chair Rulli, Ranking Member O'Brien, Senator Craig, and members of the Senate General Government & Agency Review Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak on behalf of preservationists, historians, artists, members of the African American community and others in support of this legislation.

As the current chair of the James Preston Poindexter Foundation, I've had the unique experience of participating in and witnessing the work of various groups who have an interest in the history and legacy of Rev. James Preston Poindexter and Poindexter Village and labored to preserve these important built structures. One of our champions, Reita Smith, has shared information about the legacy of Rev. Poindexter and Poindexter Village with elected officials, school children, former and current Near East Side residents, and virtually any and all who would listen to her appeal about the importance of this man and this place. If you're lucky you may have been one of those she regaled with stories about her personal experience of living in one of the first Affordable Public Housing complexes in the country, one built specifically for African Americans; built by the same architect who built the famous OSU Horseshoe stadium; where internationally recognized artist Aminah Robinson had her first art studio (under her bed in her family's Poindexter Village apartment); where FDR personally came to celebrate its opening...Reita, or I or Senator Craig, or any of our Board members or former residents, or JPPF friends could go on and on about this place called Poindexter...

1)I share this because the recognition of Poindexter Village is more than just an historic space worthy of preservation and Rev. Poindexter is more than an important historic figure worthy of remembrance. This space and this man represent a value system and treasured memories of African Americans overcoming, stretching themselves to take a little apartment and make it a home that nurtured great citizens who have participated in multiple ways to the development and enhancement of this community, the city of Columbus, the state of Ohio and even the nation.

2)Many of you may still remember the local dairy queen or the tennis courts to which you rode your bikes or the pizza parlor where you had your first date. Here in Columbus many of those spaces still exist for classmates from the integrated schools I attended as a teen. That is not so much true for African Americans in central Ohio and sadly, it is not true for many African Americans throughout the country. Poindexter Village represents the "safe space" of the black community that many of us remember but that those outside of our community don't even know ever existed. Local anchor Angela Pace spent her first 7 years in Poindexter Village. She recalled feeling safe and loved in that housing complex.

3) Public Housing historically has a negative image for many reasons including negative media coverage, poor or missing housing management, lessening of requirements for housing, and more. However, there were stellar examples of public housing that did exactly what FDR had

envisioned: offered affordable, safe, clean housing that provided its residents a leg up to move toward the American Dream of home ownership. For African Americans in a segregated community, Poindexter Village belied one's meager beginnings, honed a community's potential, and evidenced amazing accomplishments.

Historic built structures remind us of our past, act as guideposts for our future, and help us explore and sustain our commitment to "community."

Professor Georgianna Short describes the value of historic or ancient structures noting: Ancient structures enable people to appreciate where they came from, to understand themselves better, to acknowledge the perspective of others, and to place their own time within the frame of history. (Cuniffe, 1994) As such, they represent a generational link and form of human communication between past, present and future. Because extant permanent structures represent a "non-renewable record of human culture and achievement, they form one of humanity's deepest rivers of continuity. (Short, 2005)

Dr. Vesta Daniel whose student created a local Africentric park was told:

The project allowed those who developed it to "explore...the potential of African art concepts to educate, impact and reclaim the minds and hearts of our children and their families." Poindexter Village as a state historic site has the potential to do the same thing.

Designating Poindexter Village as a State Historic Site acknowledges the wisdom of our legislature; the often overlooked positive history of public housing; and the creativity, strength and resilience of the African American Community both here and throughout the country.

Special thanks to Senator Craig for his insight and thank you all for your work on behalf of the people of Ohio.