

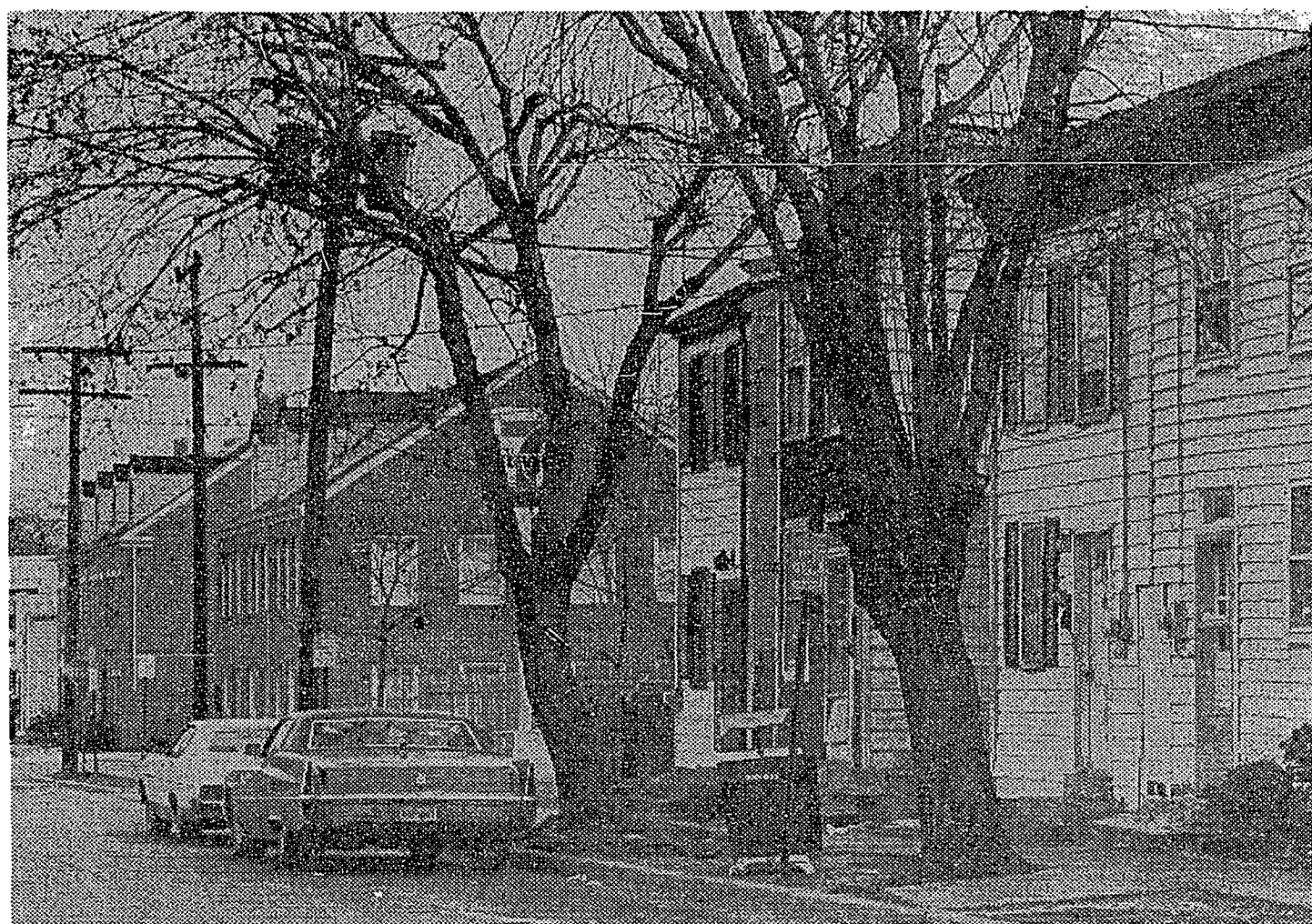
Growing Alexandria Old Town Could Uproot Black Community

By Michael Martinez Washington Post Staff Writer

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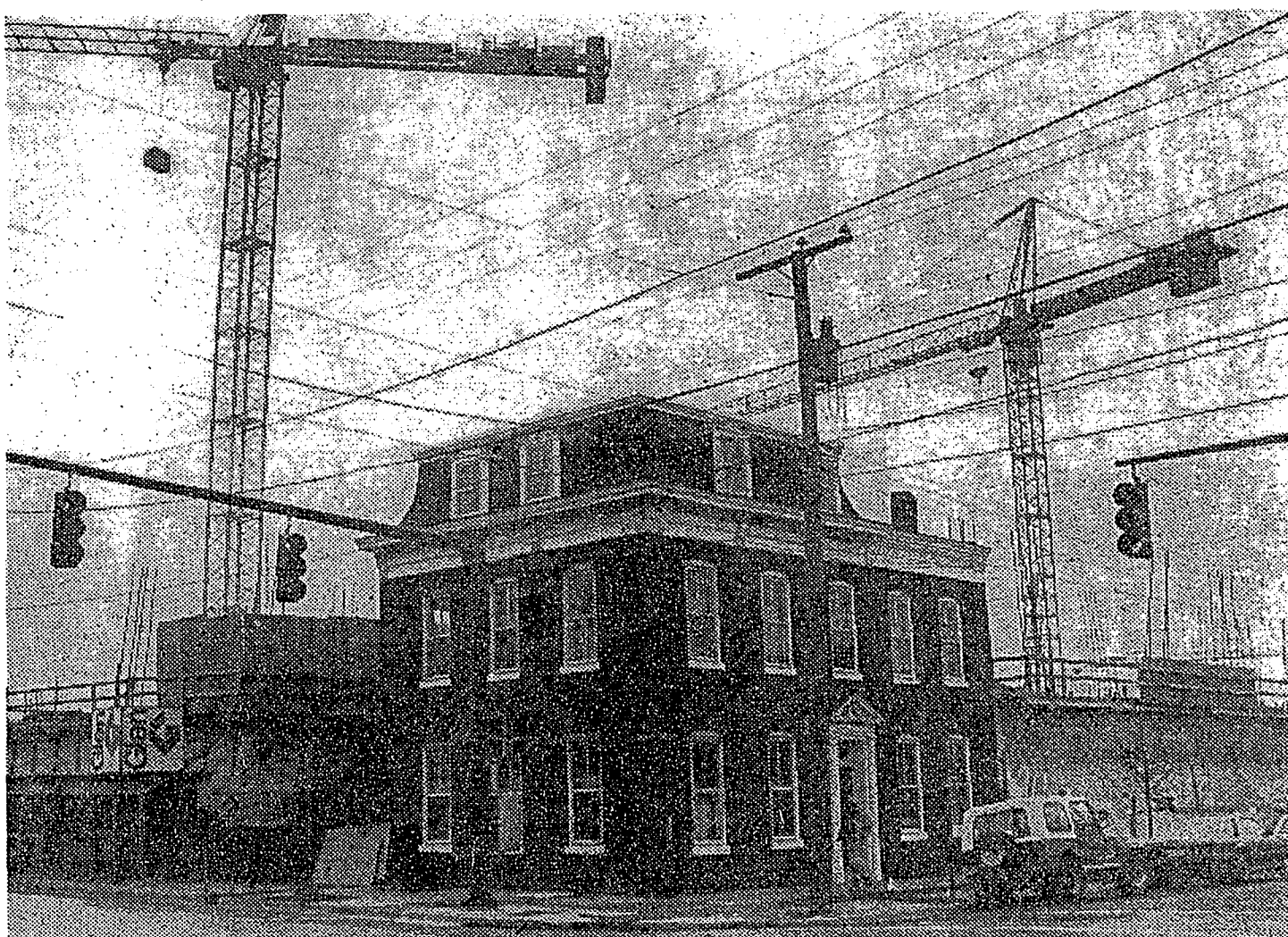
By Craig Herndon—The Washington Post

New town houses alongside old row houses on Princess Street illustrate how the neighborhood northwest of Old Town is changing.



By James A. Parcell—The Washington Post

Eudora Lyles, who has lived in this modest town house in the heart of Alexandria's black community for 42 years, feels threatened.



By Craig Herndon—The Washington Post

The corner of N. Henry and Cameron streets, where condominium-offices are being built behind an historic building, attests to change.

By Michael Martinez
Washington Post Staff Writer

Eudora Lyles is familiar with the threats of development and expansion of Alexandria's Old and Historic District into her neighborhood.

Lyles' modest two-story town house at 312 N. Fayette St., where she has lived for 42 of her 65 years, rests in the heart of a black community deeply rooted in a section northwest of fashionable Old Town.

The once-segregated community is populated partly by families in public housing and youths who talk with police weekday nights under corner street lights.

City fathers have asked the Planning and Community Development Commission to look at the question of expanding the Old and Historic District of Alexandria into the fringes of the black community.

METROPOLITAN LIFE GENTRIFICATION

The present Old and Historic District was established by city ordinance in 1946, and by law all building repairs, alterations, construction and demolition of houses built before 1846 must be approved by the city's Board of Architectural Review.

Lyles fears that extending the historic district toward her community would push property values and taxes up and force out some low-income black families whose roots date to the beginnings of the port city in the 1700s.

"Most of the oldest citizens are in this area," said Lyles, who was born and raised in the community. "I know old families by names and addresses who don't want the extension of Old Town. They don't want higher taxes. They don't want anything that makes it harder for them to live."

"The ones who do want it want the prestige of Old Town and the money in property values that goes with it," she said.

The Old and Historic District, which makes up the core of Old Town, generally runs south of Princess Street between the waterfront and the northbound lane of Rte. 1. It also includes the Washington Street corridor through town.

The planning commission is studying first whether to expand the district along King Street and then into the black community. Both areas contain 100-year-old buildings that trace patterns of Alexandria's commercial and residential growth.

On Feb. 23, the commission will hold a public hearing on what it plans to recommend to the City Council, which probably will receive the study in March.

The black community is the opposite of the Old Town that tourists know: There are no fashionable shops, quaint Gadsby lamps, red brick sidewalks and classy restaurants where waiters speak in various foreign accents.

The one-time slum, marked by vacant lots and boarded up houses and buildings, is being gentrified by young professionals—some black, but mostly white—who are enjoying the heavy commercial development associated with the new Metro station at nearby King Street.

The black community has a history of being threatened by development. Lyles recalled when the city seriously considered replacing Rte. 1, which runs through the neighborhood, with a toll expressway in 1972. That led her to form the Inner City Civic Association so she could help make black residents aware that they could be pushed out of their neighborhood.

In 1974, the City Council rejected a request—made by an affluent white civic association—to extend the historic district. In 1977, the black community protested the Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission placing the community on the National Register, and it won that battle. The next year, the black community successfully crushed another move to expand the district.

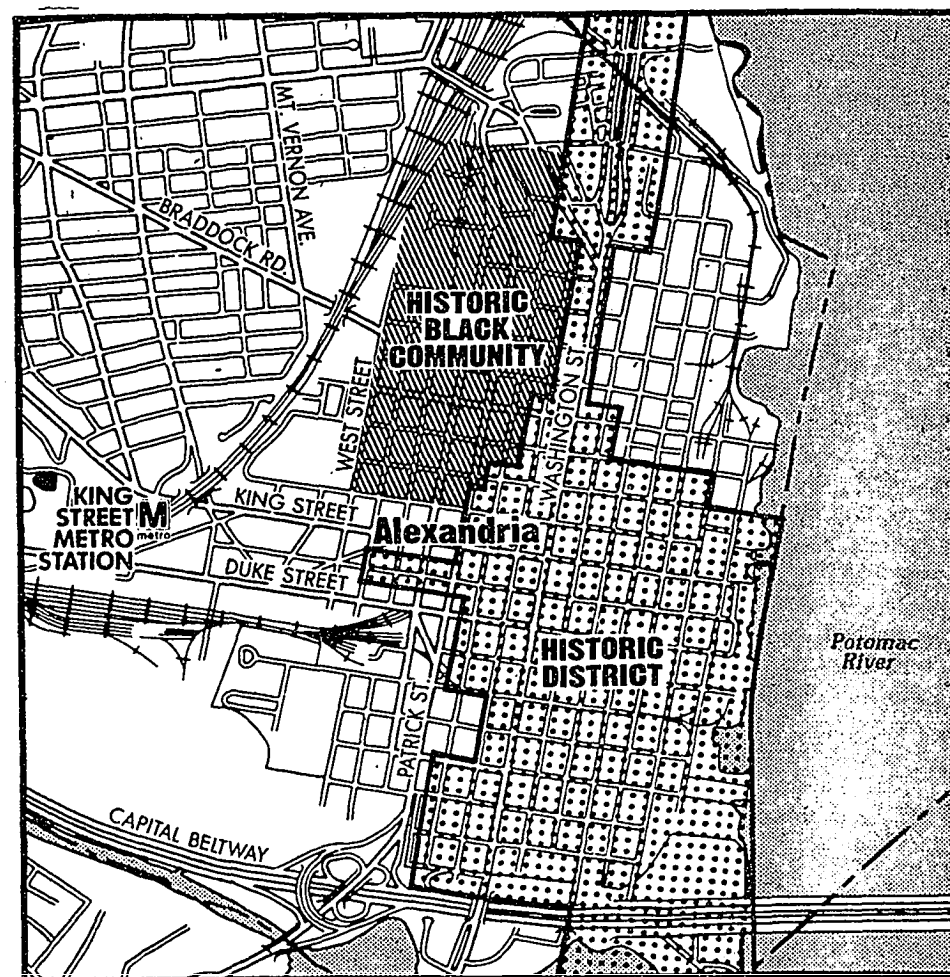
This time, feelings are different. Mayor Charles E. Beatley noted that some young, rising black professionals who live in the area favor designating the area old and historic.

"It's not open and shut black this time," Beatley said.

"I just don't see why there would be any real opposition to this," said Gayle Perkins, an editorial director at WRC-TV (Channel 4) who moved into her home at 522 N. Alfred St. three years ago.

"Our main thrust is that when people make exterior changes to their home, they do it with uniform aesthetics," said Perkins, who helped organize the Northwest Old Town Citizens Association during the summer. "It's keeping all of Old Town looking like Old Town architecturally."

"By and large, the neighborhood is made up of established residents," said Mitchell Griffin III, 44, of 419



By Richard Furno—The Washington Post

Fayette St., who works for the State Department security division.

"You have a lot of retired people and people on fixed incomes. Where are they going to go? The fears of the Old and Historic District expansion are probably unwarranted," he said.

Beatley said that restrictions placed on new development in an area designated old and historic could help keep property values down because it would limit tall and dense construction, which "could in-

flate prices more than without the Old and Historic District."

Engin Artemel, director of the city's planning commission, said an area designated historic "may be a way to preserve both the buildings and the people." Beatley said the Metro station development along the fringe of the black community has set the stage for consideration of extending the district.

"If nothing comes up this time, I foresee it coming back up in two years," Beatley said.