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Courtesy photo

The original main entrance to Garnet High School, the former black school in the heart of the city's old, mostly gone, African-American neighborhood.

By **Jim Balow**

Advertiser

CHARLESTON, W.Va. -- It took more than a year to get Charleston's historically black neighborhood named the city's first local historic district. Now Anthony Kinzer needs some money to help tell the story. About a month ago, the Charleston Historic Landmarks Commission made it official, approving Kinzer's application to create The Block History District, centered on the heart of the neighborhood along Shrewsbury Street that folks simply called "the block."

"We feel honored that we're the first, pioneers," Kinzer said Wednesday. "It gives credibility to the history that occurred in that 25 acres between Sentz Street and Capitol Street, and from Washington to Smith Street." The reason The Block is a local district, not a National Historic District, can be traced to the fact that most of its historic fabric has been ripped to shreds, thanks to Interstate construction, urban renewal and just plain neglect by city fathers. Empty lots and parking spaces fill the gaps between the handful of remaining buildings. Yet among those still standing are five structures already listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

"Our plans are to enhance the area to create a destination for individuals who want to learn about the history of our neighborhood," said Kinzer, who also serves as director of the West Virginia Center for African-American Art & Culture. "We want to create signage, banners and markers to identify the history there. "And for safety reasons, we want to create crosswalks and curb cuts for wheelchairs, create better accessibility for people with disabilities. "We hope eventually to get vintage lighting, streetscape like on Capitol Street. But that's long-term, because we'd have to relocate utility lines."