

Montgomery Parks Response to County Executive

November 20, 2019

From: [Riley, Mike](#)
To: [Spielberg, Debbie](#)
Cc: graylan.hagler@gmail.com
Subject: RE: November 20 meeting re Moses Cemetery
Date: Monday, November 18, 2019 10:59:00 AM

Debbie,

The Department of Parks' answers to the questions in your 11/13 e-mail are as follows:

Attendees will be:

Mike Riley, Director of Parks, MNCPPC - Montgomery Parks

Jai Cole, Division Chief for Park Planning & Stewardship, MNCPPC - Montgomery Parks

We will bring large scale maps showing the Willet Branch inclusive of the cemetery parcels. We are currently working to see if it is viable to send these maps electronically in advance. The County Executive has posed a series of questions to the Parks Department about our agency's role in the memorialization of Moses Cemetery. The answers to these questions are interrelated, so we have provided our perspective below in a way that addresses the questions as a group.

1. Are you willing to convey property to another entity for memorialization?
2. If not, how does Parks envision being engaged in the memorialization? Who else is envisioned to be part of the memorialization?
3. Do you intend to use the site for other uses beyond memorialization?
4. What is your ideal outcome?

Montgomery Parks' mission is to *"To protect and interpret our valuable natural and cultural resources, balance the demand for recreation with the need for conservation; offer various enjoyable recreational activities that encourage healthy lifestyles; and provide clean, safe, and accessible places."* As the agency charged with responsibility for the stewardship of natural and cultural resources for current and future residents of Montgomery County, the Parks Department has the expertise, resources, and experience to memorialize this site in a manner consistent with the highest professional standards. We have a long and successful track record in managing 37,000 acres of land, including 43 historic sites (containing 111 historic structures) and 300 known archaeological sites. Thirteen cemeteries are known to be located on parkland and the conveyance of Parcel 177 adds another. The Parks Department employs 1 full-time historian, 2 full-time and 1 part-time archaeologist and manages more than 80 archaeological volunteers. These highly skilled professional staff and volunteers work diligently to assure that we utilize best preservation and archaeological practices, comply with

federal, state and county laws, and ensure that the history of Montgomery County is preserved and appropriately interpreted. One example of our work in the memorialization and interpretation of a cemetery on parkland can be found at Darnestown Square Heritage Park, where we demarcated the cemetery's boundaries, built seating areas for contemplation, and produced interpretative panels telling the story of the enslaved and free people buried there.

The Westbard Sector Plan envisions transforming the degraded concrete channel that is the Willett Branch stream into a vibrant urban greenway park. This project would include an Urban Recreational Park at the connection of the Greenway with the Capital Crescent Trail, the naturalization of the Willett Branch, a hard surface trail along the newly restored stream, trail connections to the Greenway, and an open area designed for contemplation, respite, social gathering, and interpretation. As the agency with a fiduciary responsibility for the management of parkland in Montgomery County and with direct accountability to the public, we are not in a position to consider conveying the property to another entity both because we believe that memorialization of the cemetery is well within our mandate and expertise as stewards of the county's historical and cultural resources and because the parcel in question is essential to the future Willett Branch Greenway project.

We are prepared to engage in a cooperative effort to plan for the memorialization of the site that includes all stakeholders, which will require continued study of the site to know what story to tell and how best to tell it as well as how to incorporate the parcel into the planned park on the edge of the Willett Branch. For the archaeological assessment, HOC has agreed to grant us a right of entry so that the future assessment would include both Parcel 175 and Parcel 177. The Parks Department will continue to work with HOC, Macedonia Baptist Church, other members of the descendant community, the NAACP, the County Council, County Executive and all stakeholders to ensure that this process is fully transparent.

The Parks Department believes it has a role to play in leading the process of memorializing the Moses Cemetery due to our mission, our intensive public input process in the design of our parks and spaces, our funding mechanisms, our staff expertise, and our role in providing public access to these types of resources for the benefit of all County residents. The Parks Department has won many awards – including the National Recreation and Parks Association's gold medal for excellence – in recognition of our expertise in merging recreation, contemplation, conservation, and historical interpretation into park designs. For this reason, we see our plans for the Willett Branch Greenway and the memorializing of the Moses Cemetery as entirely complementary. Our Mission: "To protect and interpret our valuable natural and cultural resources" is the cornerstone of our agency's purpose and is at the forefront of everything that we do.

Mike

Michael F. Riley, Director

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From: Spielberg, Debbie <Debbie.Spielberg@montgomerycountymd.gov>
Sent: Wednesday, November 13, 2019 12:06 AM
To: Riley, Mike <Mike.Riley@montgomeryparks.org>
Cc: graylan.hagler@gmail.com
Subject: November 20 meeting re Moses Cemetery

Dear Mike,

Thank you for agreeing to attend the meeting regarding the Moses cemetery.

The meeting will be November 20 at 11:30 am in the Executive Office Building, 2nd floor. Could you let me know who will be attending from Parks Department? Also, do you have large maps of the entire area – Parcels 175 and 177 as well as the other parcels that you could bring with you? And could you send them electronically?

As I mentioned in an earlier email, Reverend Graylan Hagler (cc'd above) has agreed to facilitate the meeting. As preparation for the first meeting, I am sending questions to each of the parties, which includes:

- the Bethesda African Cemetery Coalition (BACC)/Macedonia Baptist Church,
- HOC,
- Parks Department, and
- Regency Centers.

Could you please send the answers by Friday, 11-15?

Once we have the answers, I will send them out to all the parties in advance of the November 20 meeting.

Below are the questions we have for Parks:

1. Are you willing to convey property to another entity for memorialization?
2. If not, how does Parks envision being engaged in the memorialization? Who else is envisioned to be part of the memorialization?
3. Do you intend to use the site for other uses beyond memorialization?
4. What is your ideal outcome?

Thank you,
Debbie

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Housing Opportunities Commission of Montgomery County Answers to County Executive

November 20, 2019



10400 Detrick Avenue
Kensington, MD 20895-2484
(240) 627-9400



Questions for HOC
Wednesday, November 20, 2019

1. What are your plans for lot 175, which is owned by HOC?

HOC has no plans to build anything at this time. Parcel 175 is a critical piece of the Westwood Tower community as it provides the sole means of ingress and egress to all three levels of the below-grade parking garage that serves the 212 households at the property, without which, the building is inoperable. As we have stated previously, the agency supports conducting a joint historical/archeological evaluation of parcel 175, owned by HOC, and parcel 177, now owned by Parks.

2. Is HOC willing to turn over Parcel 175 for memorialization?

No, it is inconsistent with our fiduciary responsibility as housing agency to this County to steward all our assets toward the mission of providing affordable housing to the citizens of Montgomery County. However, as we have stated in previous discussions with Macedonia Baptist Church and members of the Bethesda African Cemetery Coalition, as well as with the public, we believe there are more appropriate ways to approach memorialization, such as on-site dedication, that do not include conveyance of the parcel. In any effort to memorialize, we think it is critical to have Parks provide some leadership in this area as they are the County Government entity responsible for memorialization. Furthermore, the Westbard Sector Plan required that a study be done and included plans for memorialization.

3. Do you see HOC having a role for memorialization?

HOC, as the owner of parcel 175, is ready and willing to participate in discussions and efforts toward memorialization. We believe that this is a history that belongs to all of Montgomery County and are eager to do our part, within what is reasonable, to ensure that the history of the River Road community is honored and shared.

4. What is your ideal outcome?

HOC's ideal outcome is for the County Executive to convene all stakeholders and create a constructive working group that will make progress toward an on-site memorial to the history of the River Road community that includes parcels 175 and 177 without compromising the capacity of the property to serve HOC's affordable housing mission.