

Warren Fleming
President, Damascus Connection Committee of Montgomery County
Funding for CIP Historic Markers
Testimony 2-06-2026

Hello, my name is Warren Fleming, President of the Damascus Connection Committee of Montgomery County. I'm here to testify for the 2026 funding of the Historic Markers.

In late December 2015, Councilmember George Leventhal requested the assistance of Tina Clarke, Anita Powell, and me to provide recommendations for a Park and Planning website that highlights African American historical sites in Montgomery County. This website features 24 locally designated historic African American sites. We were selected for our extensive knowledge of African American history in Montgomery County, as our ancestors were born here and passed down valuable historical information to us. Our unique insights and understanding of this history are recognized as a monopoly and expertise not found in conventional books, making our contributions especially valuable.

Our services included verifying the accuracy of information for each site and preparing the website for the 2016 Black History Month commemoration in Montgomery County. During our evaluation of the website, we identified multiple errors; however, these were never corrected due to insufficient funding.

On May 26, 2016, the county council approved Resolution 18-59, allocating \$50,000 to design and install markers for five of the 45 known historic sites. The resolution also included funding to hire a consultant to address the website errors. Because of the project's scale, a councilmember appointed two additional historians, Ms. Pat Tyson and Charlotte Coffield. With these additions, our group became the African American Historic Sites Committee of Montgomery County.

After dedicating many hours to research and development for the first five sites, our project encountered a setback when a council member implied that the language we used to describe our history was inappropriate. It was stated that using the terms "Colored" and "Negro" to identify African American history was unconstitutional in Montgomery County and requested that this language be removed. As Vice Chair of the African American Historic Sites Committee, I attempted to explain that these terms are historically accurate designations from the period when these sites were used exclusively by African Americans. Our mission is not to address how African Americans have been labeled in America, but to ensure that the naming conventions of these sites are accurately conveyed in their historical context.

It has been seven years since this project was halted, and we now have the opportunity to complete this important historic project before members of the African American Sites Committee are no longer able to perform the necessary tasks. Many of you on the council have heard me speak about my museum in Damascus and my Holsey Road Project. I was

awarded a grant from the UpCounty Regional Center to place a historical marker along Route 27 in Damascus in January 2026. I initially received approval from the Maryland Department of Transportation, but a director at the Maryland State Highway Administration later denied it. The director said she could not allow my sign to be placed on her road.

In closing, the battle to remove and erase authentic African American history is at an all-time high. Unless my generation preserves and protects this valuable data, it will all be lost forever. We, the members of the African American Historic Sites Committee, are standing ten toes down and firmly committed to preserving African American history. We ask that this council support our mission by approving the funding for the markers.