

WRITTEN TESTIMONY

FY27 Capital Budget and FY27-32 Capital Improvements Program

Good afternoon, Council President and Members of the Council.

My name is Krystal Holland Davis, and I serve as the Executive Director of the Potomac Community Foundation. I am here today in strong support of the proposed \$150,000 allocation for the **African American Markers Project in the FY2027 Capital Improvement Program**.

I want to thank Anita Powell, Warren Fleming, Tina Clarke, Patricia Tyson and Councilmembers George Leventhal and Tom Hucker, for their leadership in advancing this important initiative.

I am here today not only as an organizational leader, but as a descendant of one this county's historically black communities – Emory Grove. My own community has a historic marker. And I can tell you, firsthand, what that marker means. It means that when someone enters that space, they no longer see “just land.”

- They see lives.
- They see families.
- They see faith, labor, sacrifice, and resilience.
- They see history that matters.

That marker tells the truth: that our communities were never invisible. They were simply overlooked. And even when markers exist, some still tell incomplete stories. My own community's marker focuses more on the place than on the people - more on how the land was used than on who built it, sustained it, and fought to remain on it. A small group is now working to update that marker, not to erase history, but to make it more honest, more human, and more complete. Because our history deserves more than footnotes.

African American communities in Montgomery County were built by people who cleared land, built churches, established schools, farmed, organized mutual aid, and raised generations - often under conditions of segregation, exclusion, and limited opportunity. These communities did not just appear. They were created out of necessity and determination. They were formed when Black families were denied access to housing, financing, infrastructure, and political power. They were under-resourced, cut off from opportunity, and too often treated as expendable when development arrived.

- Harm was done.
- Communities were displaced.
- Histories were ignored.
- Land was taken.
- Voices were sidelined.

And yet, these communities endured.

- They built institutions.
- They built culture.
- They built stability.
- They built Montgomery County.

Just recently, a member of one of the County's historically African American communities came to me, desperately seeking support to secure a historic marker for her kinship community - because elders are passing, memories are fading, and physical evidence is disappearing. She wasn't asking for nostalgia. She was asking for dignity.

Markers are not decorative plaques.

- They are public truth-tellers.
- They are tools of preservation.
- They are tools of education.
- They are tools of repair.
- They acknowledge harm.
- They honor resilience.
- They help prevent future erasure.
- They tell our children: *You belong here. Your people mattered here. Your story counts.*

This year, as Montgomery County commemorates its 250th anniversary, we are reflecting on who we are and how we tell our story. County leaders have committed to centering diversity and inclusion in that narrative. Funding this project is one of the most tangible ways to make that commitment real. Because inclusive history is not just about celebrating milestones. It is about telling the full truth. It is about recognizing that Black communities were foundational to this county's growth, while also bearing the cost of discriminatory policies and uneven investment. This project ensures that every designated historic African American neighborhood in this county is recognized, documented, and honored. That matters. Because when communities are named, they are harder to erase.

When history is visible, it is harder to repeat harm.

When descendants see their ancestors honored, they feel seen.

This \$150,000 investment is modest in dollars but enormous in impact. It affirms that Montgomery County values the full story of its past.

- It strengthens preservation.
- It supports repair.
- It builds belonging.

As a descendant, I know what it means to walk onto land and see proof that my people mattered. As an Executive Director, I know that preservation is foundational to equity. And as a descendant of this county, I believe we owe future generations the truth.

I respectfully urge you to fully fund this allocation and continue demonstrating that Montgomery County is committed to honoring, protecting, and telling the complete history of the communities that built it.

Thank you for your leadership and for the opportunity to speak today.