

## **Memo from the Joint Committee to the Hyattsville City Council**

In the summer of 2020, many people participated in a powerful movement for racial justice that swept across the United States of America, the State of Maryland, Prince George's County and the City of Hyattsville. This movement highlighted community issues and concerns on many levels. On June 1, 2020, the Hyattsville City Council passed RESOLUTION 2020-05, A Resolution in Defense of Black Lives, in which they made a commitment to enact policies that unequivocally defend Black lives and to undo the impacts of systemic racism on Black residents of the City of Hyattsville.

Prior to the passage of that resolution, Mapping Racism - a collaborative project led by the Hyattsville Community Development Corporation and supported by the City - uncovered that the deed that established William Pinckney Magruder Park (Magruder Park) contained racist and segregationist language, specifically a restrictive covenant that the park be used by "Caucasian inhabitants only." On March 18, 2020, the City of Hyattsville unanimously passed a motion:

"to investigate the feasibility of and legal requirements for changing the name of Magruder Park without reverting ownership of the land back to the Magruder Family and/or Estate," and

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to "devise an action plan to address the community implications associated with the property's history and the City's relationship with the donor (and/or his Estate)." The action plan shall include measures the Council deems appropriate, as well as the supporting process, timeline, and community outreach and engagement."

In 2020, Council directed City staff to file a quit claim to remove the racially restrictive covenant from the deed for Magruder Park. Council initially anticipated that the park could be renamed in early 2021. To meaningfully engage the public in renaming the park, the City issued a challenge, soliciting handwritten and electronic proposals. The community responded by submitting more than 800 suggestions. The City Council formed a Joint Committee of members of the Race and Equity Task Force and the Health, Wellness and Recreation Advisory Committee and assigned us to review and discuss the proposed names and submit a short vetted list to the Council, along with a clear justification for each recommendation.

### **Considerations**

City staff instructed the members of the Joint Committee to take the following into consideration:

- The new name should be welcoming, relatable, and inclusive, and resonate with the diverse cultural make-up of the City's population.
- The proposed name should withstand the test of time and not become passé or controversial in the near future.

During its first meeting, members of the Joint Committee recognized that there were potential concerns associated with almost all types or categories of proposed names. For example, the Joint Committee pointed out that members of a diverse community may not share common interpretations of concepts. The cultural, historical and other lenses through which we view concepts create a wide range of personal interpretations. With this in mind, the Joint Committee carefully considered only a handful of widely relatable concepts as possible names for the park.

The Joint Committee also recognized the potential risks of naming the park after a person, given that humans are fallible and that future discoveries may call a person's character, words and actions into question. This could place the City in a similar situation to the one we find ourselves in today. With this in mind, the Joint Committee is recommending only one proposal based on a person's name.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Land Acknowledgement**

Before introducing name recommendations, the Joint Committee requests that, as part of the renaming process, the City plan for a Land Acknowledgement. We recommend both a verbal acknowledgement during the City's park renaming ceremony and a permanent written acknowledgement (e.g., You are on tribal land of the Nacotchtank people), etched into a feature such as a large quartz boulder prominently displayed in the park, similar to the *grandfather rocks* outside the National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, DC. The acknowledgment would state that, when European colonists arrived, Native people lived on the land that is now considered the park as well as on the surrounding land. The Nacotchtank tribe inhabited the area for up to 10,000 years before they were forced from their land and decimated by infectious disease.

Piscataway Elder Rico Newman, who is a resident of nearby University Park, a State Commissioner for the Maryland Commission on Indian Affairs, and Chair of the Maryland Indian Tourism Association, said the physical land acknowledgement will honor and respect Nacotchtank ancestors and living members of the tribe who are connected to this land, and create a lasting memory for park visitors to carry with them. If Council decides to pursue a verbal and written land acknowledgement as described above, Elder Newman recommends that the unveiling ceremony include an honor song and smudging.

### **Names**

The Joint Committee provides the following recommended names and a rationale for each name to the City Council for consideration as the new name for Magruder Park. In addition, the Joint Committee

recommends that the City refer to the park in English and Spanish at a minimum, and perhaps also in other languages that are spoken by residents of Hyattsville.

### Primary Names

- David C. Driskell Community Park – Two hundred thirty-five submissions, more than one quarter of the 831 responses, requested that the park be renamed in honor of David C. Driskell, a long time resident of Hyattsville. Mr. Driskell was a noted artist, scholar, curator, collector, art historian, educator, and advocate for inclusion of African American art into the national culture. He served on the faculty of several Historically Black Colleges & Universities (HBCU's) but is most widely recognized for his time from 1977 to 1998 at the University of Maryland College Park where the Center for the Study of the Visual Arts and Culture of African Americans and the African Diaspora is named in his honor. Mr. Driskell died of COVID-19 during the spring of 2020.
- Nacotchtank Community Park – We received a proposal for the name "Anaquash Park." The Nacotchtank word "anaquash" refers to the village trading center that existed along the Anacostia River. People came from as far away as the Gulf, Mississippi and Great Lakes Regions to trade goods along the Anacostia. It has been estimated that Native Americans inhabited the land along the river for more than 10,000 years. Elder Rico Newman said that if the Council chooses to memorialize the Native people who lived, raised families, prospered, and died on this land, then he suggests the name *Nacotchtank Park* rather than Anaquash Park. The word Nacotchtank might be a bit of a tongue twister at first, but Elder Newman recommended that we honor the Native people with a less anglicized version of the name. Nacotchtank refers to the place on the river where it takes a turn, i.e., where the Potomac River bends and meets the Anacostia River. The Nacotchtank area stretches from the Wilson Bridge northward past Bladensburg to Indian Creek.
- Unity Community Park - Twenty- six respondents requested the park be named Unity Park or a similar variant. Unity is defined as the state of being united or joined as a whole. It was recognized that the park serves as a place in the community where all residents can come together regardless of race, ethnicity, gender or socio-economic status and be joined together as a diverse, yet united community. This name denotes a place where all are welcome and can interact in a harmonious manner.
- Gateway Community Park - The City of Hyattsville sits on the northern edge of the Gateway Arts District and the City is an integral part of that community, acting as a gateway to the rest of the Arts District. Likewise, the park serves as a gateway to the many programs, activities and endless possibilities that await the community as they enter the park. These range from attendance at programs for youth and adults conducted in the Recreation Center; use of the athletic facilities, the playgrounds, and the walking and biking trails; or enjoyment of a moment of solitude in the woods. The park is often used as a gateway to activities outside the everyday routines of City residents.
- Inspiration Park - Twenty-six respondents requested the park be named Inspiration Park. Residents are inspired by many things that can be seen and experienced within the boundaries of the park such as taking time to experience nature on one of the trails that wind through the wooded areas; seeing children and families joyfully playing on the playgrounds or on the athletics

fields; or engaging in the various programs which take place in the park's recreation center. Visitors to the park are inspired to see the possibilities that exist in the world around them and to become an active participant in all of the opportunities that are provided.

### **Secondary Name**

The Joint Committee recommends "Community Park" as a secondary name to indicate that everyone is welcome. Nineteen respondents indicated that the park should be named Hyattsville Community Park or a similar variant. To counteract the racially restrictive covenant, it is important to indicate clearly that the park is a place where people of all backgrounds and identities come together. If selected, Inspiration Park is the only proposed name for which the Joint Committee does not recommend adding the secondary name.

### **Gratitude**

The members of the Race and Equity Task Force and the Health, Wellness and Recreation Advisory Committee are thankful for the opportunity to participate in this anti-racist community building process, and look forward to Council's decision to adopt a new name for the park.