



## Summary of Public Input

At the Josiah Henson Special Park meeting held on June 15, 2010, the public was asked to provide input on two questions:

**Question #1** - Vision - What would you like to see offered at the park to help advance the Josiah Henson Story and create a safe and attractive public park?

**Question #2** -Issues - What are you most concerned about?

## Vision

The public's response to the vision question for the park has been divided into 4 interpretive categories:

1. **Josiah Henson's Life**
2. **Montgomery County's History of Slavery**
3. **Architectural and Historic Landscape Interpretation**
4. **Archaeological Discovery**

### **Josiah Henson's Life**

The public vision for this incorporates many different types of interpretive programs and displays. They want to see a living museum with re-enactments in costume, exhibits that display the stages of Josiah Henson's life, readings from his autobiography, connections with the site and programs offered in Canada at Henson's Dawn Establishment for freed slaves and programs that educate visitors to the importance of the man, his values and the way he lived his life. They see his story as a way to discuss local slavery issues and worldwide slavery issues. They see the moral, spiritual and ethical issues that surround the story of slavery.

There is a lot of interest in creating a program that can be used to educate Montgomery County School children (possible incorporated into the curriculum) and for the broader student body possibly through an internet based curriculum. There is also an interest to have internships available for students.

The public sees a need for museum space/visitor center space to accommodate school classroom trips , classroom space and to have the space to accommodate museum exhibits and access to Josiah Henson's autobiography in many forms (auditory, interactive) and in multiple languages.

### **Montgomery County's History of Slavery**

There were many comments concerning the need to link the history of Josiah Henson to the history of Montgomery County and its role during the slavery period. Current programs in Montgomery County describe the African American experience at Oakley Cabin and programs along the Underground Railroad in Sandy Spring. The public sees this site as another way to make connections to life as a slave, and the desire to be free. Some see this site as a way to discuss the oppression or prejudice against one group of people by another in general.

### **Architectural and Historic Landscape Interpretation**

The public is interested in keeping the cabin and house as close to the way it was when Henson was on the plantation. They wanted to understand the relationship of the present site to its historical



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plantation landscape (possibly through a model or aerial photos over time) and which features still exist today that tells the story. There is interest in creating an historic kitchen garden (that might also become a community education garden with vegetables and flowers from that period). There is interest in understanding what types of crops were grown on the plantation.

### **Archaeological Discovery**

Most of the people who attended the meeting thought it was very important to continue the on-going archaeology on the site and see the value of having the process available for visitor education and to enable further discoveries about Josiah Henson and life on the plantation.

## **Issues of Concern**

The issues raised by the public fall into **ten categories** (prioritized by number of votes received by the public):

- 1. Community Outreach: African American History**
- 2. Safe crossings at Old Georgetown Road and Tilden Lane**
- 3. Programming Impact of Traffic and Parking**
- 4. Security of Site**
- 5. Directional and Interpretive Signage for the Park**
- 6. Need for Additional Park Amenities**
- 7. Need for an Open Public Process**
- 8. Future Acquisition Needs**
- 9. Site Drainage**
- 10. Funding**

### **Community Outreach: African American History**

By far the issue with the greatest number of votes was the need to include the African American Community in the development of the programming and history of the park.

### **Safe Crossing at Old Georgetown Road and Tilden Lane**

This one intersection near the park was the focus of a lot of the public's concerns about safety. No one felt that this intersection could be safely crossed by pedestrians or bicyclists. There was mention that it was safer to cross mid-block rather than try to walk in the crosswalk, for fear of not being seen by turning and speeding vehicles. Recent efforts by McDOT to calm traffic and reduce cut through traffic on Tilden Lane include the re-stripping of Tilden Lane to provide parking on the north side of the road, a bicycle lane and narrower vehicle travel lanes.

### **Programming Impact of Traffic and Parking**

Although interested in having the park open and available for interpretive programs, the public's fear of having too many people and cars at the site was evident by the concerns voiced over how big the program would be and how many events would be planned. Many suggested alternative sites for shared parking including the synagogue next door, the Wall Local Park parking lot (which is currently used for parking for Heritage Day events), parking at the adjacent schools during weekends, etc. The public wants a careful consideration of the traffic being proposed during regular programming and a plan that controls over crowding in the neighborhood during events. There was mention of an adjunct interpretive center off-site.



### **Security of the Site**

The comments in this category mostly related to local concerns and making sure that the park buildings and site were maintained and policed. The neighbors wanted to be sure that any lights needed for evening activities would not spill into their properties. They felt that they could help with watching over the site and informing the Department of any problems with vagrants or activities at night. They expressed concern about the vacant Rozier House.

### **Directional and Interpretive Signage for Park**

The public would like to have informative signage that leads them from many of the nearby or future transportation providers and parking sites to the park "itself". They mentioned having signage from White Flint Metro, Bethesda Trolley Trail, a future trolley bus system around White Flint, and from future parking facilities. Interpretive signage that links the site to other historic sites related to the Henson themes in the county and future walking tours were also mentioned. They wondered if the park should be more visible from Georgetown Road.

### **Need for additional Park Amenities**

The public wanted the site to have some of the typical amenities available at most public parks which included benches, walking paths and picnicking areas. There was mention of having access to the site for adjacent neighbors in addition to a main park entrance way.

### **Need for an Open Public Process**

The public would like to see more transparency in the process and having a website that has schedules and meeting notes provided.

### **Future Acquisition Needs**

The 1.5 acre parcel of the Josiah Henson Special Park is only a fraction of the original +263 acre plantation that made up the Riley Plantation where Josiah Henson lived and worked. People were concerned about the sites' small size in relation to questions about parking needs, interpretive programming possibilities and archaeology discovery.

### **Site Drainage**

Adjacent neighbors did not want improvements to the site to worsen or create drainage problems into their adjoining properties.

### **Funding**

Recognizing the lack of funding for additional programs or improvement to the property, the public mentioned the use of public private partnerships including the County Executive's Community Partnership's program.