



## MONTGOMERY PARKS

The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission  
2425 Reddie Drive | Wheaton, MD 20902  
MontgomeryParks.org

# Community Meeting for the Black Baseball & Softball Community Heritage Project: Meeting Minutes

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**Meeting Date:** February 2, 2026

**Location:** Auditorium, Parks Headquarters, 2425 Reddie Drive, Wheaton, MD 20902

## Attendees

### Montgomery Parks Staff:

- Elena Guarinello - Cultural Resources Planner/Project Manager
- Cassandra Michaud - Cultural Resources Stewardship Supervisor
- Christie Ciabotti - Division Chief, Park Planning and Stewardship
- Melissa Chotiner - Community Outreach and Engagement Manager
- Michelle Ramirez - Public Relations and Outreach Specialist
- Jeanine Ancelet - Audience Focus/consultant

**Public:** 22 participants, including former players, descendants of players, community leaders, and local league representatives.

## Meeting Summary

Parks staff hosted a public meeting on February 2, 2026, to launch a new Untold Stories project focused on the history of African American baseball and softball in Montgomery County from the 1920s to the 1970s.

The meeting introduced the project, invited community participation, shared findings from a pilot audience evaluation, outlined next steps, and connected attendees interested in the topic.

Staff shared early ideas for interpreting this history in parks, including interactive displays, signage, public programs, and community events. The project manager emphasized that community and stakeholder input will guide the project's direction. Attendees were encouraged to participate by providing feedback, sharing photos and memories, and contributing to future research and audience studies.

## Presentation Topics

- Parks' framework for history and culture interpretation
- Why this history is important to document and share, and why Parks is undertaking this effort
- Opportunities for community involvement
- Plans to better understand park ballfield users, including results from fall test interviews
- Next steps, including strategy sessions with community stakeholders; ongoing research and documentation (photo/document scanning and oral histories); and a spring audience study to assess awareness and interest

**Recording:** A recording of the presentation is available on the project webpage:

[MoCoParks.org/BlackBaseball](https://MoCoParks.org/BlackBaseball)

## Public Discussion, Questions and Answers

### Question 1: Audience Study

**Question:** During the test phase of the audience study, Parks conducted 16 interviews. Participants self-identified as Caucasian and Asian or Asian American. Attendees asked about the rationale for the sampling group, why the pilot study was so short, and whether African Americans are part of the project team.

**Parks' response:**

- The pilot phase timeline was constrained by the short fall baseball season. The primary purpose of the pilot was to test interview questions and data-collection logistics. As a result, Parks used convenience sampling, randomly sampling anyone who was present at weekend youth baseball tournaments.
- While this approach allowed Parks to test the process, staff acknowledge that the pilot sample is not representative. The full audience study planned for the spring season will use adjusted strategies to survey a representative sample of park patrons (meaning a sample that accurately mirrors the key characteristics of all park patrons, like age, gender, race/ethnicity, etc.).
- Parks also plans to seek input from community stakeholders to help strengthen the study's approach. There are no African Americans on the staff project team.

### Question 2: Location of stories

**Question:** Johnsons Local Park and Wims Meadow at Little Bennett Regional Park were identified as locations of historic Black sandlot fields. Will Parks also include sites that are near historic Black-owned or operated fields, such as East Norbeck Local Park?

**Parks' response:**

- Yes, Parks plans to engage with park patrons who use diamond fields across the entire park system. Where there is a place-based connection to a historic field, whether precisely on or proximate to

parkland, we would like to highlight that history and connection for today's park field users and visitors.

### **Question 3: Budget**

**Question:** Is there a budget for this project? How can the project move forward with no budget?

**Parks' response:**

- At this early stage, the project is supported by staff time, and no dedicated budget has been set. While funding is tight across the state right now, we are just getting started, and this is an important project for Parks.
- Parks will pursue grants and other funding sources as the project's scope develops. For example, products like signage, publications, and digital interactives all have budgets of different scales.

### **Question 4: Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission (WSSC)**

**Question:** What is Parks' relationship with WSSC? Could it be an avenue for fundraising?

**Parks' response:**

- Parks acknowledged the historical connection between WSSC and urban renewal and noted Parks staff participation on the Emory Grove Task Force that is looking at urban renewal in Emory Grove and what happened around the county.
- Parks primarily works with WSSC on stormwater and water quality projects related to stream valley land, but currently has no broader partnership.

### **Question 5: Invitation and Project Direction**

**Question:** How were people invited to this meeting, and why weren't community members engaged earlier? What is the project working toward, and how can attendees contribute?

**Parks' response:**

- Parks emphasized that the project is in its very early stages, even though the meeting setting and presentation may suggest otherwise.
- Invitations were sent to churches, community and history organizations, and individuals connected to this history, with the goal of reaching a broad audience. Parks acknowledged that there may be others not yet identified and invited attendees to share additional contacts.
- The project's outcomes are intentionally undefined at this stage, so community stakeholders can help shape both the direction and final products.

### **Question 6: Oral Histories**

**Question:** What is the role of oral histories in this project?

**Parks' response:**

- Oral histories are a key component of the project, helping bring history to life and strengthen the historical record.
- Parks can conduct and record interviews and digitize photos and documents but will partner with museums or historical organizations for long-term preservation.

## Public Comments

Below are paraphrased comments from audience members. These topics covered topics such as important players and teams, communities to include, the legacy of baseball/softball in the community, and ideas about sharing the history. Personally identifying information has been removed.

### Comment 1

Lee Jordan was a community leader. He happened to play in the Negro Leagues. I think there should be something significant about Lee Jordan. He coached, trained a lot of people; he often encouraged his players - when you went up to bat, he would say "Hit a home run, hit a home run." Everyone in the neighborhood looked up to him, loved him, and I think there should be something significant about him. Also, reach out to local high school coaches. On the park website, there should be a dedicated page to this project. Oh, also, mentioning Lee Jordan, there was a softball league that consisted of teams from around the county. It was the place to be on Sunday afternoons. Families would be out there for hours and hours on Sunday, and in talking about Lee Jordan, that should be mentioned. The softball games were in Good Hope near the rec center.

### Comment 2

I'm an ambassador for the Philadelphia Phillies, and you should get ahold of the Nationals because they build parks for the teams. I could get a hold of people who could get involved. My dad played, my uncle, my grandfather - I have a bunch of stuff here. This game is special for us. They didn't play for the money. I learned how to play the game and respect the game and that's something that I'll always be proud of.

### Comment 3

If you put together a Hall of Fame team, his dad would have been on it. The Emory Grove women's softball team beat every team that they played. They only had trouble with the Heartbreakers. They would win by an average of 20 games per year. The next season, some other teams didn't want to play in the league because of having been beaten so badly.

### Comment 4

I noticed that there are some parks on here that are no longer around - basically, people played on parks that aren't here anymore. It would be nice if they could get a little more recognition. These were man-made parks/fields. Oak Haven: It would be the place where you went on the weekend, and softball games would then lead to dances. They were happy places for playing softball on the weekends for Black families.

### **Comment 5**

There are complete communities that are not on the map that had ball fields - not only are the fields missing but communities had dance halls. Maybe we could present a historical map that could show the missing fields and the communities. If you went up to that area, the I270 was being built in our backyards. There is a lot of history that without talking to the right people you will miss. It would be good to see the people who no longer exist. My community, Metropolitan Grove, isn't there anymore.

### **Comment 6**

Prathertown is an underrepresented community in which baseball was a favorite pastime. I'm digitizing our history – talking to the people who know where rocks are, and trees are, and I would ask for inclusion of Prathertown in this project. I have recipes - potato salads - it was one of the contests, those potato salads - stack cakes, the coconut cakes [those were part of the games]. We are celebrating some of that history at Gaithersburg in February at the library. My grandfather had some artifacts and info about Satchel Paige and he talks about the route Satchel took from Baltimore down [to play in Montgomery County] and farmers' folk going down, and another thing is the Boyd's house which hosted fabulous meals after the baseball games and opened every weekend for high teas and fantastic social events. I have things that are over 100 years old and we're working with the MD archives [Digital Maryland] to have them digitized. Please remember Prathertown.

### **Comment 7**

There is a picture that shows the Heartbreakers team [referring to the photo in the presentation of the women in orange uniforms] - that is not the original Heartbreakers team. The original Heartbreakers team was originally from Metropolitan Grove. I have a roster of the original Heartbreakers team that put women's sports on the map.

### **Comment 8**

When I was working with the Glenstone Museum, we raised money to help the Scotland church. I'm a journalist at the core, so one of the most exciting things that ever happened to me, was to call the department of agriculture because they were responsible for photographing the entire county - and they did that in high resolution. You can see where the Cabin John shopping center is, right behind there is where the ballfield was. In 1957 it was still intact, and ten years later it wasn't. You have to purchase the [aerial] images, but they have high-definition aerial images.

### **Comment 9**

I still have my dad's uniform, his cleats, and his badge. I did a book on my father's uniform, and I interviewed players from the Scotland Eagles, and it was interesting to go around and talk to them. I was a little girl then, so I didn't know what they were doing, but we knew we were going to a ballgame where our father played. But I have the uniform and wanted to put it in NMAAC, but once you donate it, you might not see it again. So I packed it back up and went home. Now I'm using it for black history at Scotland and at a senior center in Bowie. The uniform was displayed at American University.

### **Comment 10**

I'm from the Sandy Spring area and I'd like to mention something that I have an issue with is the ballfield in Norbeck. Some refer to it as Buck Bailey's Ballfield but that was bought by Page, and he married Ella Hammond, and they owned that land, and then Page bought that land and built the field. Page then died. Mr. Buck befriended Ms. Ella and he put the idea in her head, let me manage it. He built a building on that property and during the ballgames he would sell dinners and because he was managing and always being seen there, people assume that property was his and it wasn't. So when those times passed, their son Austin Page built a house in centerfield, that was in the early 60s and the grandstand was still there but was old and falling apart. That should be JAMES POP PAGE and ELLA HAMMOND PAGE built that ballfield.

### **Email addition from commenter after meeting - Correction**

James died circa 1946. This was several years after he built the Norbeck ball park. Edward "Beans" Johnson built his ball park circa 1948. Therefore, James "Pop" Page owned the 1st Black owned ball park with pole lites in Mo. Co. His grandson, Ronald Page, and I were the same age, good friends, boy scouts together, attended elementary 6th grade together, jr high, & sr high school (up to 10th grade) together. The Page family moved back to Washington circa 1965. Years ago, in a conversation with Ronald Page, he mentioned that he never knew his grandfather because he either died about 2 yrs before or 2 yrs after he was born (1948).

### **Comment 11**

I'm 8th generation from Sandy Spring. I got brought to all of the baseball fields. You can hear the emotion in the room. People are connected to this project for various reasons. Because there are so many emotions, people who grew up and are connected and know about those Black audiences and communities. That parkland used to be Black-owned land so the emotion is going to be there. You will get a lot more information that way.

### **Comment 12**

I didn't know her father played and you have in your records a memorial from 1987 and it has a lot of rosters, and it would be cool if you had a wall with the roster of all of the people who played on different teams, this parent played on a team, and this person played on a team... have a wall of all of the team names and team members - we all have some kind of connection.

### **Comment 13**

I want to bring up something. I've shared a lot about Black history - I just want - a lot of our young kids, Black kids, don't know anything about these parks, and I do think it's up to us to let them know about these parks. I'm going to use Johnson's Park - they don't know who owned that park, and they really need to know that history. These fields were man-made fields. Sometimes the adults are talking right now and we have to be ready to change the narrative - and our younger generation don't know anything. When I was growing up, they were playing baseball and softball - now you don't even have a Black softball team, and that's because kids didn't follow around. We dropped the ball on keeping that history.

### **Comment 14**

What's special is that you are bringing it back.

### **Comment 15**

I'm may be the oldest one here. I represent the Germantown Giants, established in 1957. We played baseball for about 15 years until the early 70s. I want to know how far you want to go back? Because I know when my dad played. How far back do you want to go? I do know about a few teams back in the 30s and 40s. Going back to Pint Isreal. And the oldest is 1912. We started to play softball in 1980; baseball disappeared, so we started to play softball in the Rockville league. So we ended up having a social club, and we have a double scholarship fund. And that all came from Black baseball.

### **Comment 16**

I came here in trying to find out a way to get connected. And so there won't be a one way of give and give [we should discuss other ideas], not creating another baseball team, but helping people figure out ways to get uniforms made, or have a festival to get everyone together to share. I know if I mention baseball, it'll stir up some emotion, there is going to be a lot of talk. I hope this is not the end and that people will be committed and that you will give back to our community.

### **Comment 17**

We do a camp day at Johnson's Park, and we all get together. Families and friends.

### **Comment 18**

Some of us are meeting new people tonight, perhaps you can make a listserve to keep everyone here in the conversation with each other.

## **Organization**

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