



MONTGOMERY PARKS

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

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

Meeting Date: March 10, 2026, 7-8 pm

Location: Microsoft Teams Meeting

Purpose: Community input session on the developing Black Baseball & Softball Community Heritage initiative; Parks is also seeking feedback on questions for the general audience study

Meeting Summary:

1. Introductions

Elena opened the meeting by saying that the meeting is meant to be relatively informal and that we'd like to hear people's ideas and thoughts on the project overall, anything you've been mulling since the February meeting.

Attendees:

- Elena Guarinello – Interpretation/Untold Stories Program, Montgomery Parks
- Jamie Ferguson – Parks Historian, Montgomery Parks

Participants represented a mix of:

- The Sandy Spring Slave Museum
- Montgomery County Recreation
- Community historians and former players
- Representatives from Bethesda Big Train
- Community members with personal and family ties to Black baseball and softball in Montgomery County

2. Overview of Project Goals

Elena summarized that the project aims to:

- Document, preserve, and share the history of Black baseball and softball, including through oral histories.
- Recognize that these histories serve as a gateway into broader narratives of Black community life and historic kinship communities.

- Engage community stakeholders in shaping the form, content, and direction of the project.
 - Develop public-facing interpretive products.
 - Conduct an audience study to understand how general park users might engage with this history.
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3. Main Themes & Topics Discussed

A. Oral Histories & Documentation Needs

- Strong consensus that capturing oral histories is essential, and with some urgency due to the age of some former players and family members.
 - Desire to document both men’s baseball and women’s softball.
 - Several attendees offered names of living players and community members who hold deep knowledge. (A list of names and contact pathways was generated during the meeting. For details, [sign up](#) for the project email list.)
 - The Sandy Spring Slave Museum holds past interviews and materials, including Robert (Bob) H. Hill. The fields at Olney Manor Rec Park are named after Mr. Hill.
 - Interest in:
 - Long-form oral histories
 - “Memory-sharing days” held during existing community events; go where people are already gathered
 - Collecting photographs, newspaper clippings, programs, and memorabilia
 - Mapping historic field locations (GIS layer already being built by Parks)
 - The idea will be to eventually create a historical report based on existing and new research.
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B. Community Engagement Strategies

Participants shared many strategies for reaching community members and gathering stories:

- **Attend existing community gatherings** (Community Days, Juneteenth events, picnics, etc.)
 - Sandy Spring Community Day – June or July.
 - Johnson’s Park – a community member sponsors a big family picnic in mid-August.
 - Host low-barrier mini-interview stations - Quick 5 – 20 minutes at events where people already gather.

- **Church partnerships** - announcements at the end of services, e.g., at Sharp Street church.
- **Rec Center collaboration** - potential place to reach young people; some rec centers serve as active hubs.
- **Partner with sports organizations** - e.g., Bethesda Big Train, MC Little League, high school programs.
- **Hospitality and food** – people like to meet around food, so it’s an important part of community engagement, so we need to allocate some funds for this.
- Think of ties to Black History month and Women’s History month.
- A question was asked whether Parks is interested in having all the neighborhoods get together or just at specific community days. Elena said that we are interested in working with whoever is willing to share and help us with the effort, and that we’ll go where we have invites from partners in advance, etc. We want to build connections and relationships.

C. Themes for Audience Study (Feedback from Group)

General approval for the draft themes shown (segregation, teams & players, the ball fields, women’s sports, social life: community connections, food, fashion, entertainment, youth development) with the following notes from attendees:

- Emphasize **community connections, social life, and family gatherings** surrounding the games.
- Explore the role of baseball as one of the *few organized recreational opportunities* historically available to Black residents.
- Recognize cross-county and cross-state play (e.g., DC teams, Howard County teams, fields in Hopkins and Dayton, which is now a housing development, Hopkins church is still there).
- Highlight how baseball/softball served as the fabric of community life and how the game brought people together.
 - One participant shared that her parents met through baseball.
 - Another shared a memory of a post-game picnic in a neighbor’s yard with 50 - 60 people, including a few white people, which shows that some people were integrated socially during that time.
- At these gatherings, people always want to talk about the players, the coaches, and the teams, so that’s a good topic to focus on.
- Sharing about the fields can give people a sense that this was in the communities.

- Products eventually created for this project should be tailored to the teams/communities close to those fields where the material is installed; place-specific narratives are an important part of the project.
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D. Types of Public-Facing Activities (Feedback)

Participants reviewed proposed interpretive formats (commemorative murals or public art, signage, digital experiences on your device, augmented reality, videos, interactive maps, public programs/events, historical images/quotes, K-12 school resources, hands-on activities, printouts for kids, obstacle course).

Additional suggestions:

- Ensure materials support **multiple learning styles** (visual, auditory, kinesthetic).
 - Create **push-button audio** at ballfields (e.g., hear the voice of Bob Hill at Olney Manor Regional Park).
 - Locate interactives **near playgrounds** to attract kids whose siblings are playing during tournaments.
 - Think about catering to all ages, and grandparents/grandchildren.
 - Look at **Cooperstown models** for child-friendly baseball learning stations.
 - Consider **QR-based digital experiences** given the lack of indoor facilities at many parks.
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E. Reaching Today's Youth

Key questions raised: How do we interest Black youth in baseball today?

Ideas discussed:

- Challenges of baseball being pricey and field permits.
- Perhaps a storytelling and focus group session with youth ministries or youth at rec centers could help us understand what about this baseball history would be of interest to youth
- Baseball “beginner clinics” or T-ball introductions.
- Bethesda Big Train is talking about ways to support a youth team at Emory Grove.
- Consider social media.
- Consider potential partnerships with local major and minor league teams.
- Use the history as an inspirational tool: storytelling + hands-on exposure.
- Elena emphasized that she and Jamie work on the public history side and would look to coordination and efforts from Rec and the various leagues on the playing and clinics side of things.

4. Next Steps for Parks Team

Near-Term Actions

- Compile and circulate meeting notes.
- Begin scheduling **monthly check-ins** (evening, weekday) – second Tuesdays from 7-8 pm.
- Identify priority opportunities for community day outreach and mini-interview pop-ups.
- Continue compiling research and building a GIS map of historic field locations.
- Coordinate with Big Train on potential collaborations (Juneteenth game, youth engagement, etc.)
- Finalize survey for spring 2026 audience study using participant feedback.

Potential Medium-Term Actions

- Develop oral history schedule and contact list.
 - Coordinate with SSSM to review past interviews and other materials.
 - Plan future in-person working sessions to review field maps and archival materials.
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5. Additional Notes

- Many attendees shared personal or family connections to historic teams (e.g., Germantown Giants, Scotland Marylanders, Lincoln Park teams, Heartbreakers, Sandy Spring teams, etc.)
- Many communities had multiple teams (e.g., Poolesville Pirates, Poolesville Evening Stars). There were teams from Sandy Spring, Clarksburg, Poolesville, Germantown, Emory Grove, and Holy Grove.
- Sometimes players played on teams from other communities; for example, individuals from Metropolitan Grove played on Scotland teams.
- The Brown Bombers were a memorable women’s softball team from DC that would come up and play in Montgomery County. They were a very good team; there are newspaper clippings that mention them.
- Other softball team names – The Heartbreakers, The Hitchhikers.
- An idea was floated about establishing a MoCo Baseball Hall of Fame.
- **NB* – These meeting notes were originally created by Co-Pilot AI based on the meeting transcript. Staff then made edits, corrections, and additions. Additions from the Teams chat were also included in these notes.