



**MONTGOMERY COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PARKS**  
THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

MCPB Date: 11/12/2015  
Agenda Item #3

MEMORANDUM

DATE: November 10, 2015

TO: Montgomery County Planning Board

VIA: Michael F. Riley, Director of Parks *MR*  
Mitra Pedoeem, Acting Deputy Director of Parks *Mitra Pedoeem*  
John E. Hench, Ph.D, Chief, Park Planning & Stewardship Division *Jehench*

FROM: Joey Lampl, Cultural Resources Manager *Joey Lampl*  
Nancy Steen, Budget Manager, Management Services *NCS*  
Shuchi Vera, Chief, Management Services Division *S.V.*

SUBJECT: FY16 Special Appropriation, Department of Parks Operating Budget, to support the opening of the Woodlawn Barn Visitors Center

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Staff Recommendation

Approve transmittal of FY 16 special appropriation request for Woodlawn Barn Visitors Center to the County Executive and County Council.

Background

The Woodlawn Barn Visitors Center (Visitors Center) is a heritage tourism destination that will draw people regionally to Woodlawn Manor Cultural Park in Sandy Spring, one of Montgomery County's most historic areas. It has been planned since the 2002 Montgomery County Heritage Area Master Plan and the 2003 Feasibility Plan. The Visitors Center celebrates the stories of the Quakers, the passage of the enslaved people to freedom, the Underground Railroad, and agricultural buildings like the magnificent 1832 stone bank barn at Woodlawn. The Visitors Center is part of the National Park Service's Network to Freedom, a national Underground Railroad program to coordinate preservation and education efforts nationwide. School children, families, and tourists to D.C. will travel to Woodlawn to learn about farming practice in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the abolitionist view of most Quakers, slavery in a border state, and free black communities that sprang up after emancipation in Montgomery County. Visitors will be able to explore all three stories of the barn, see the manor house and its outbuildings, and hike the Underground Railroad (UGRR) Experience Trail. Tours in the barn will be for a reasonable fee and will be guided, as the experience includes both traditional exhibits and dual multimedia shows projected on the barn's interior whitewashed walls.

The Operating Budget Impact (OBI) funding for the Visitors Center was included in FY16 Proposed Budget approved by the Planning Board, but funding was not included in the final approved budget in order to meet overall budget targets. Its removal from the budget was considered a “non-recommended” cut.

The Visitors Center is now physically ready to open, subject to funding. The project is the culmination of over a decade of work to realize a heritage destination in the Olney/Sandy Spring area. The project is a state-of-the-art, innovative, multimedia educational venue set within a massive, timber-framed whitewashed stone barn from 1832. The insertion of a modern technological museum into an agrarian building of master craftsmanship offers a truly unique setting. Three floors (the lower level stable, middle level granary, upper level threshing floor and two-story-high hay ‘mows’) provide a rare backdrop for the electrifying learning experience that takes place on critical subjects including slavery, religious beliefs and abolition, and the passage to freedom. The 1898 former carriage house on site has been converted into the center’s ticket office, restrooms, and small retail operation. The project also includes new ADA-compliant paths and a bioretention facility. Photos of the renovated Visitors Center can be found in Appendix A.

The Visitors Center is a prime example of using strategic and innovative programming to activate parks.

#### The Visitors Center’s Operations

The Visitors Center is envisioned to be open five days a week, 10 am-4 pm and needs a full-time facility manager and a full-time interpretive specialist in order to operate. In addition, seasonal staff support is critical as plans are in place to bring large school groups to Woodlawn Manor Cultural Park and tour the manor house, barn, outbuildings, and the UGRR Experience Trail. In addition, Woodlawn will become part of a larger, Parks historic sites package (we envision coach buses taking tour groups out to Woodlawn, the Agricultural History Farm Park, Oakley Cabin, and Prince George’s Parks and Recreation historic sites) and also will be part of a Montgomery County heritage sites circuit that could include non-Parks sites such as the Sandy Spring Museum, the Sandy Spring Slave Museum, and the Button Farm. The request for two career positions is in line with the staffing structure at similar historic venues managed by Prince George’s County Department of Parks and Recreation. Parks considered hiring only seasonal staff to run the Visitors Centers, but this staffing structure is not suited to facilities that run partner-coordinated programs and that feature complex technological equipment such as that found at the Visitors Center.

The Department plans on charging a reasonable admittance fee to the Visitors Center experience consistent with other park historic sites, and similar to our counterparts in Prince George’s County. The Visitors Center will be a revenue generating facility and also will have a small retail operation.

#### The Budget Request

We are requesting \$84,731 or four months of FY 16 funding, in order to open the barn to the public by April 1, 2016. This request includes two full-time career positions as well as seasonal staff.

The historic sites season in Parks starts April 1, with the opening event being the wildly popular Underground Railroad Night Hike at Woodlawn. It would be an undeniable missed opportunity should the Night Hike proceed without guests being able also to tour the brand new Visitors Center. Currently, other Park-owned historic sites that open that same weekend are Oakley Cabin, Kingsley School, Josiah Henson, and the Agricultural History Farm Park. If the Visitors Center is not funded in FY16 and is deferred until the FY17 budget as OBI, Parks will miss the entire spring and summer seasons of heritage tourists, including elementary and middle school students, campers, and families.

The full year, FY17 request is currently contained within the FY17 operating budget as OBI and is proposed at \$248,543.

#### The Special Appropriation Process and Timeline

There is a specific process that must be followed in order to request of the County Executive and County Council an operational budget special appropriation. The timeline can be found in Appendix B.

#### Conclusion

In conclusion, we are requesting that the Planning Board approve an FY16 operating budget special appropriation of \$84,731. This approval is critical to being able to program this new educational facility for park patrons, families, heritage tourists, and the school children of Montgomery County and surrounding jurisdictions.

**APPENDIX A**  
**Photos of the Renovated Woodlawn Barn Visitors Center**



Source: [https://www.flickr.com/photos/mc\\_parks\\_mncppc](https://www.flickr.com/photos/mc_parks_mncppc)

**APPENDIX B**  
**Timeline for Special Appropriation Request for Woodlawn Barn Visitors Center**

November 12, 2015	Staff requests Planning Board approval of special appropriation request
November 13	Planning Board submits request for special appropriation to the County Executive and County Council President
November 17	Council introduces special appropriation
On or before Dec 1	County Executive submits a recommendation to the County Council
December 1	Council public hearing takes place/Council takes action
December 2015 – March 2016	Final preparations for grand opening including hiring and training staff
April 2016	Grand opening