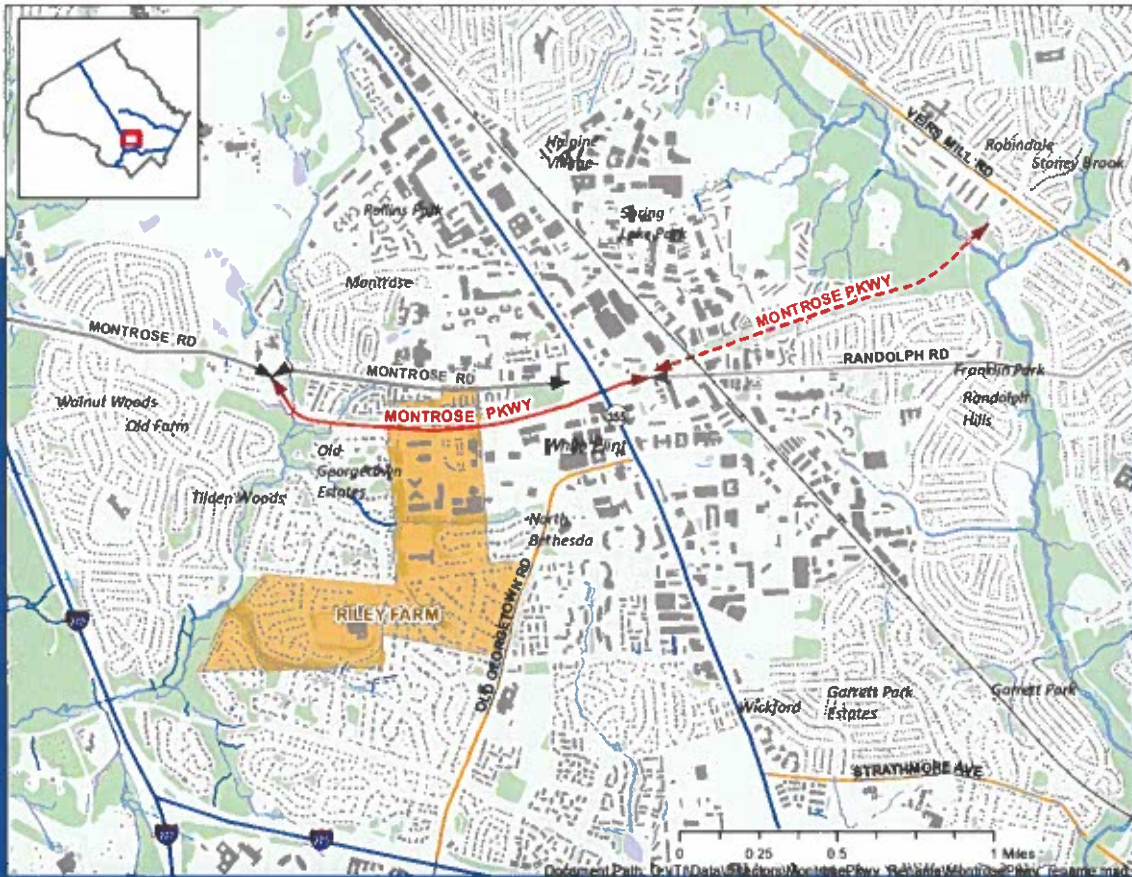


PLANNING BOARD DISCUSSION AND ACTION ON A RESOLUTION TO RENAME MONTROSE PARKWAY AS JOSIAH HENSON PARKWAY



No.
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Item No. 7
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Montgomery County
Planning Board
2425 Reedie Drive, Floor 14
Wheaton, MD 20902

Planning Staff



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RECOMMENDATION

Vote to approve Resolution #22-019, which endorses the renaming of Montrose Parkway in honor of Josiah Henson.

BACKGROUND

As the Planning Board knows very well, Josiah Henson is a locally, regionally, nationally and internationally important historic figure from Montgomery County.

The Montgomery County Department of Parks is operating the Josiah Henson Museum and Park, which is the former plantation property of Isaac Riley where Reverend Josiah Henson was enslaved. This park is a historic resource of local, state, national and international significance because of its association with Reverend Henson, whose 1849 autobiography, *The Life of Josiah Henson, Formerly a Slave, Now an Inhabitant of Canada* inspired Harriet Beecher Stowe's landmark novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

Henson escaped from his enslavement to Canada in 1830, where he helped established Dawn Settlement, a community inhabited by former American slaves, continued his work in the Methodist ministry, and became an international speaker and abolitionist. Henson led 118 people from enslavement in the United States to freedom in Canada, as a conductor on the Underground Railroad.

Many of Henson's experiences of life enslaved on the Riley plantation are vividly depicted in his autobiography and later recreated in Stowe's fictional novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The impact of Stowe's novel should not be underestimated. Published in 1852, it broke all sales records of the time and sold more than half a million copies by 1857. The book inspired and inflamed the abolitionist movement in the mid-nineteenth century, and many believe the novel helped to propel the American Civil War.

DISCUSSION

In addition to the outstanding museum currently operated by the Department of Parks, there have been a wide variety of discussions about how to further recognize and commemorate Josiah Henson.

On December 8, 2021, Montgomery County Councilmember Hans Riemer held a community meeting to discuss the idea of honoring Josiah Henson by renaming Montrose Parkway – located slightly to the north of the Josiah Henson Museum, but located on land originally part of the Riley property – as Josiah Henson Parkway.

On January 5, 2022, Councilmember Riemer made the following request of Gwen Wright, Director of the Montgomery County Planning Department (letter attached):

To properly recognize Josiah Henson, I am pleased to join community leaders such as Catherine Leggett (Chair of the Henson Museum Advisory Board), Warren Fleming (who has worked for years to bring proper recognition to Josiah Henson), and many other luminaries, in requesting that M-NCPPC rename Montrose Parkway in his honor...Although less than two miles long, Montrose Parkway today runs through the northern part of the farm property where Josiah Henson lived and labored.

The Montgomery County Planning Department conducted an analysis of Councilmember Riemer's request and determined that:

- 1) a portion of Montrose Parkway does indeed run through the northern part of the property where Josiah Henson was enslaved;
- 2) there are only two properties that currently have addresses on Montrose Parkway;
- 3) one of the owners of property on Montrose Parkway – Peerless Rockville – has submitted a letter in enthusiastic support of the renaming; and
- 4) this renaming is an appropriate way to commemorate Josiah Henson, a historic figure of local, national and international significance.

As noted in previous conversations with the Planning Board over the past year about renaming of streets that had been named for Confederate generals, it is the authority of the Montgomery County Planning Board of The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, by virtue of Sections 17-212 and 20-202 of the Land Use Article of the Annotated Code of Maryland, to rename streets. In addition, the Montgomery County Planning Board has delegated said authority to the Montgomery County Planning Director.

It is important to state that this current renaming proposal is not being done under the auspices of the County Council's 2020 direction to the Planning Board to undertake a "comprehensive review of all County owned and maintained street names and public facilities to determine all those named for Confederate soldiers or those who otherwise do not reflect Montgomery County values. Following that review, we hereby request a public process to rename these county streets and facilities..."

The current renaming proposal is not being done to correct an inequity and there is no concern about the Montrose name, but rather to commemorate an important historic figure – Josiah Henson – who stood up as a freedom fighter.

CONCLUSION

Staff wants to make the Planning Board aware of the proposal to rename Montrose Parkway as Josiah Henson Parkway and receive the Board's endorsement of this action. A resolution endorsing this action is attached and staff requests that the Board vote to approve the resolution.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A: Letters Supporting Name Change