

BALTIMORE CITY COUNCIL



BUDGET & APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

Taxpayer's Night

26-0188

26-0189

26-0200

Public Testimony

Baltimore City Taxpayer Night

SUBMITTING TESTIMONY - Baltimore City Budget Ask For Cooperative Development

Baltimore has one of the largest and fastest growing cooperative ecosystems in the entire country and we have gotten this far with very limited help from local funders or city agencies. With dedicated funds from the city, Baltimore could be a model for the rest of the country - showing the community and individual benefits workplace democracy and the solidarity economy bring. Baltimore Roundtable for Economic Democracy (BRED) is asking for funding in the Baltimore City budget for FY 2026-2027 to go towards citywide cooperative development.

My name is Kimberly Armstrong, I'm a resident of Baltimore and I live and work in District 13 where Councilman, Antonio Glover. I have lived in Belair Edison for the past 30 years. I'm one of the co-founders of Baltimore Green Justice Workers Cooperative. Over the past 3 years I have become more familiar with cooperative development in Baltimore.

There are not many cooperatives in my community of Belair Edison however, the cooperatives that I have become more familiar with give back to the community and make living here better. I believe in a future where Baltimore workers having a say in what happens in their workplaces, and their built communities.

Baltimore could be a model for the rest of the state and country for workplace democracy, where Cooperatives are creating family-sustaining jobs and ensuring small businesses stay in Baltimore.

The real charm in Baltimore is how we continue to be resilient outside of the box to be sustainable with support of our local intuitions and government.

Thanks.

Sincerely,

Kimberly Armstrong

Co-founder of Baltimore Green Justice Workers Cooperative & Urban Clean Energy Advisors LLC.

Hello, my name is Anna Evans-Goldstein, I am a lifelong Baltimore City resident of District 4. I am commenting on behalf of Baltimore Roundtable for Economic Democracy to ask for dedicated funding for cooperative development in the Baltimore City budget for the next fiscal year. Baltimore has one of the largest and fastest growing cooperative ecosystems in the entire country - and we have gotten this far with very limited help from local funders or city agencies. With dedicated funds from the city, Baltimore could be a model for the rest of the country. Worker cooperatives are small businesses that are owned and operated by the workers. These businesses create family sustaining jobs, promote workplace democracy, and protect the small businesses that make our City special. As we approach a time where aging business owners will sell or close their storefronts, we need City funding to keep these small businesses in our City through a process we at BRED engage in regularly - facilitating the conversion of these businesses to worker ownership by supporting the workers who helped make the business successful purchase it from the retiring owner. Please consider dedicating city funding towards cooperative development, and creating a future for our City that reflects the growing and strong community who care about a solidarity economy.

Subject: Testimony in Support of Funding for Cooperative Business Development – FY2027 Budget

To the Honorable Members of the Baltimore City Board of Estimates and the City Council,

My name is Mark Wo, and I am a resident of Baltimore City and the founder of a local manufacturing startup. My business focuses on transforming agricultural and industrial waste into sustainable building materials. We chose to plant our roots here in Baltimore because I firmly believe that local production is the backbone of a resilient economy—where the "where" and "how" of manufacturing are just as vital as the product itself.

In my experience leading a small, dedicated team, I have seen firsthand that when every person has a genuine stake in the outcome, the entire dynamic of the workplace shifts. This is why I am testifying today in strong support of allocating city funds toward cooperative business development.

Cooperatives and models of workplace democracy are not just business structures; they are anchors for community stability. When workers are owners, the priorities change:

Long-term Stewardship: Worker-owners prioritize the health of their neighborhoods and the longevity of their jobs over short-term liquidations.

Economic Resilience: Cooperatives create high-quality, stable jobs that are far less likely to be outsourced or lost overnight, providing Baltimore families with the security they need to plan for the future.

Wealth Building: By allowing workers to own a piece of what they build, we address systemic wealth gaps and ensure that the value generated in Baltimore stays in Baltimore.

Our city is home to an incredible wealth of talent and industry. However, for Baltimore to lead the region in workplace democracy, the city government must provide the necessary infrastructure and investment to make these models accessible to all entrepreneurs and workers.

I urge the City of Baltimore to commit dedicated funding in the Fiscal Year 2027 budget toward cooperative development and technical assistance. Investing in cooperatives is an investment in a more equitable, rooted, and prosperous Baltimore.

Thank you for your time and for your commitment to our city's future.

Sincerely,

Mark Wo



Heidi Thomas, Principal
EnviroCollab
111 E. 25th Street, Ste. 1A
Baltimore, MD 21218

May 14, 2026

Taxpayer Night Hearing
Baltimore City Council

Re: Taxpayer Night Testimony in Support of BRED

To Whom It May Concern,

My name is Heidi Thomas, I've lived in the city for 25 years, and through my life and work am dedicated to seeking environmental sustainability and social justice for all Baltimoreans. I'm a Principal and Worker-Owner at EnviroCollab, a minority-owned, community-based landscape architecture and urban planning firm here in Baltimore.

As a company, EnviroCollab is committed not only to supporting the local economy and the communities we serve, but also to ensuring that our workers are paid equitably and have a voice and hand in shaping the future of our workplace. We're approaching the 2-year anniversary of becoming a cooperative, and Baltimore Roundtable for Economic Democracy (BRED) was a key force in helping us making that transition; as our technical assistance partner, they continue to provide unwavering support as we grow. We believe in the scalability of their work to the benefit of even more Baltimore small businesses, and believe they are helping to shape a collective future of hope and resilience in these trying times.

On behalf of EnviroCollab, I'd like to request that you support their continued efforts by committing funding towards cooperative development in the coming budget year.

Thank you!

Sincerely,

Heidi Thomas, Principal
EnviroCollab

My name is Kelsey Bacon and I live and work in Baltimore city.

I've been a worker-owner at Common Ground in Hampden for almost three years.

We were fired by a boss who didn't live in the city and couldn't be bothered to give us, our managers, our vendors, or our customers more than 24 hours notice.

BRED provided us the funding and support to develop a workplace that is democratically run, where we are collectively in charge of the decisions we make as a business. We are able to be a place that values its workers and can give back to the community

I am asking you to commit funding to cooperative development so more workers in Baltimore City can participate fully in their workplaces. Since working with BRED, we've been connected with cooperatives across the city and I see the meaningful impact they have on the workers and their communities.

Thank you



TAXPAYER NIGHT Testimony

Too many areas across Baltimore suffer from significant unemployment, poverty, and systemic discrimination that has resulted in extreme inequities between neighborhoods. Despite the city's efforts to affect positive change, generational poverty persists, and too many neighborhoods lack vibrant businesses, family-sustaining employment opportunities, and quality, affordable housing.

Traditional economic development approaches have attempted to address these inequities, but have been insufficient in eradicating the root causes. In 2005, The Democracy Collaborative (TDC) coined the phrase "community wealth building" (CWB) to describe a range of alternative strategies that create inclusive, sustainable economies built on locally rooted and broadly held ownership. CWB is a community-focused model of economic development that places power and resources back into the hands of the communities and their residents.

One key CWB model is the worker-owned cooperative. In addition to offering people a chance to build assets, these businesses pay higher wages, empower workers, and have higher success rates than non-worker-owned businesses. Especially noteworthy in cities like Baltimore that have a high number of returning citizens, worker-owned cooperatives have a track record of creating good jobs for those excluded from traditional labor markets. This model is especially important in this moment. In Baltimore, many small businesses are owned by baby boomers nearing retirement, and a significant number lack a clear succession plan. Without intervention, viable neighborhood businesses risk closing or being sold to outside buyers. Worker ownership offers a powerful alternative: instead of shutting down or selling to outside buyers, these businesses can transition to employee ownership, preserving jobs, maintaining neighborhood anchors, and building wealth for the very workers who helped create that value. Strategic public investment can help make these transitions possible at scale.

Another key model is community investing. Too often, residents—particularly in underinvested neighborhoods—are locked out of opportunities to invest in and benefit from local economic growth. At the same time, small businesses struggle to access flexible, affordable capital. Initiatives like the Maryland Neighborhood Exchange are helping to bridge this gap by enabling everyday Baltimoreans to invest small amounts directly into local businesses. This not only unlocks new sources of capital for entrepreneurs, but also allows community members to build wealth and have a stake in the success of their neighborhoods. Public support for these types of platforms can help democratize investment and ensure that economic development is driven by—and benefits—local residents.

By directing resources toward community wealth building strategies like worker cooperatives and community investing, Baltimore can not only address long-standing inequities, but also seize a generational opportunity to build a more inclusive, resilient local economy.

Please feel free to reach out to me if I can provide any additional information.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Geller
Community Wealth Builders, Director
443-242-4110/sgeller@communitywealthbuilders.org

From: David Yaffe <baltimorelibrarypotential@gmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, May 14, 2026 11:19 PM
To: Testimony
Subject: Budget -- Library

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I was stuck waiting outdoors for near an hour at the time of the meeting, so here's a version in writing. The \$800,000 targeted to boost the collection can be greatly appreciated -- it's a step in the right direction, but not the whole solution. Maryland's premier library (State Library Resource Center) has suffered through many budget cycles with inadequate acquisition funds. It's one of the unfortunate obvious areas for belt-tightening. If people come to the library and can't find the materials they need, they may not come back. Would you? It would be well worthwhile to look hard for funds to boost acquisitions still higher!

A number of Pratt Library branches have been closed to receive much-needed upgrades to heating and cooling. Some have reopened and others will soon. It's satisfying to check them off, but other branches still lack heaters and coolers that can be trusted. Summer heat arrives soon, and the coming fiscal year may see another frigid winter as well. You may recall the extent of the disruption before the Central Library renovation when the air conditioning often failed for considerable periods and made the building intolerable for employees and the public. All the services of certain branches might be lost in the same way.

Heat and cooling upgrades may be items in the capital budget. Branches reopened as this fiscal year ends and during FY 2027 also create operating budget needs. There must be staff added -- librarians, clerks, security, custodial. The existing personnel, already stretched thin, can't just be stretched thinner. So funds for salary and medical insurance are definite needs, and at levels that enable Pratt to attract and retain the best candidates and enable those already employed to give their best.

Thank you for your attention and your efforts.

David Yaffe, Board of Directors, Friends of Pratt Library



POWELL RECOVERY CENTER, INC.

14 South Broadway
Baltimore, MD 21231
(410) 276-1773 | www.prcinc.org

Written Testimony Submitted for the Record and Virtual Presentation
Baltimore City Council Budget & Appropriations Committee
Baltimore City Council Taxpayers' Night
Hearing Date: Thursday, May 14, 2026, 5:00 p.m.
Chair: Councilwoman Danielle McCray

My name is Kim Wireman, and I am the President and CEO of Powell Recovery Center in East Baltimore. Thank you for the opportunity to testify during Taxpayers' Night and for the City's continuing dedication to act to save lives and address the opioid epidemic. For this budget hearing, my message is simple: Baltimore should continue to invest in the kinds of treatment, care coordination, and practical data use that help people stay alive, stay engaged, and avoid preventable use of emergency services including the emergency room and hospital, as well as re-involvement criminal justice systems.

At Powell, we see every day that recovery often begins in the middle of crisis. People come to us after repeated overdoses, repeated emergency department visits, trauma, housing instability, and involvement with the criminal justice system. In our own client population, only about 10 percent report stable housing when they arrive for care. People are not starting from a level playing field; many are starting from survival.

That is why engagement and retention matter so much. We have worked to strengthen the front door of treatment through immediate access to medication, greater client choice, mental health triage, comfort-focused withdrawal support, and close review of who is staying engaged and who may be at risk of leaving too soon. We have learned from our own data that when someone completes 30 days of treatment, they have about a 70 percent chance of remaining in treatment for 90 days.

We have also learned that better data can help providers and public systems respond earlier. Powell has built a data warehouse that connects treatment information, client surveys, emergency department visits, pharmacy, lab, criminal justice involvement, and vital records data to help us understand risk sooner and improve care in near real time. We found that a small number - 30 clients - had 829 emergency department visits in one year when not in treatment. We are working to engage these clients, and all clients, in meaningful relationships with caring primary care providers and treatment teams that can help bend that curve.



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Written Testimony Submitted for the Record and Virtual Presentation
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We now have criminal justice history for our active clients and are analyzing justice involvement as one part of the larger client story, alongside homelessness, emergency department use, clinical and demographic information and treatment engagement. When we identify and see patterns earlier, we have a better chance to intervene, preserve client progress, prevent overdose, and reduce repeated, unnecessary, high-cost system involvement.

We are also piloting outreach in June for clients who are reappearing in emergency departments after leaving treatment and offer appropriate re-engagement and support. Powell has a relationship with that client – best practice research on outreach to reduce ED use identifies relationship as the key factor in successful intervention.

Powell wants Baltimore to be a leader in practical, compassionate, data-informed treatment for the opioid epidemic. Powell is here as a willing partner to bring much-needed practice-based evidence to shape better treatment, intervene more effectively and save lives. Thank you.

Respectfully submitted,

Kim Wireman, LCSW-C, LCADC

President/CEO

Powell Recovery Center, Inc.

kwireman@prcinc.org

From: Cindy Baez <cindy.a.baez@gmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, May 14, 2026 4:46 PM
To: Testimony
Subject: City Council Taxpayer Night - May 14, 2026

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Good afternoon,

I would love to see funding put towards college planning for undocumented children at all our our High Schools. Undocumented high school students face an overwhelming amount of uncertainty as they navigate graduation because they are likely unable to afford college and they can not legally work. There should be a comprehensive framework of support for these students as they enter adulthood.

Best,
Cindy Baez

Testimony to Baltimore City Council Taxpayer Night - May 14, 2026

Good evening. My name is Taji Amani. I live in the 10th district. I'm here to urge the city to invest in the development of cooperative businesses. I'm here with my colleagues at BRED tonight.

My involvement in cooperative businesses began in 2017 when I spent over 5 years volunteering for a community initiative to establish a grocery store in Cherry Hill. This initiative was led by Black Yield Institute, which pursued the vision of a grocery store that would be cooperatively owned by south Baltimore residents. This meant keeping decision-making power and profits in the local community - benefits that would not be included by the more typical approach of enticing an investor-controlled grocery chain to move into the area.

I think that the economic trajectory of Baltimore requires the city to invest in cooperative businesses urgently. My father entered adulthood in Baltimore as the city began de-industrializing. If more of those steel companies and manufacturing companies were cooperatively owned by Baltimore's everyday workers and residents, then the negative effects of deindustrialization might have been mitigated in the interests of Baltimore's everyday workers and residents. Instead, Baltimore's investor-centric companies lead Baltimore the way of the Rust Belt cities.

For many of us, regular employment in Baltimore's economy has yet to position us to meet our basic needs consistently. Many households are already on track towards a net worth of \$0 within a few decades. Now, investor-centric A.I. companies and automation threaten downward pressure on employment, wages and even civil liberties while putting upward pressure on our utilities prices. We need our leaders to invest in Baltimore's cooperative businesses so that when the next major economic shock unfolds, everyday people are not just the collateral damage of an investor-dominated economy, yet again.

In summary, investing in the development of cooperative businesses means more stable employment during recessions, retaining more profits locally, keeping more companies local and increasing community control of our local economy. Thank you.



Rebuild Johnston Square Neighborhood Organization
700 E Chase Street, Baltimore, Md 21202
443 801 5772
Rebuildjsq@aol.com

Good Evening President, Members of the City Council, and Administration officials.

My name is Regina Hammond, Founder and Executive Director of Rebuild Johnston Square Neighborhood Organization in East Baltimore.

First, I want to thank the City Council for the opportunity to testify tonight regarding the City budget and the impact it has on communities like Johnston Square.

As taxpayers, residents, and community stakeholders, we all want a safer, cleaner, healthier, and more stable Baltimore. We understand the difficult budget decisions facing the City, but I want to emphasize that communities like Johnston Square cannot continue to bear the burden of rising costs without meaningful protections and investments for longtime residents.

Johnston Square has experienced significant redevelopment and revitalization over the last several years. Our residents have worked hard alongside nonprofit organizations, developers, city agencies, volunteers, and community partners to stabilize vacant properties, maintain green spaces, improve public safety, and create opportunities for families and seniors.

However, with revitalization comes growing concerns about affordability and displacement.

Many longtime residents, seniors on fixed incomes, working families, and legacy homeowners are increasingly worried about future property tax increases and whether they will be able to remain in the communities they helped sustain during difficult times.

We ask the City to seriously consider:

- Stronger protections for longtime homeowners and seniors facing rising assessments;
- Continued investment in community-led organizations that provide direct neighborhood stabilization services;
- Increased support for public safety, sanitation enforcement, greening, and youth engagement;
- Funding that reaches grassroots organizations doing the daily work on the ground;
- And policies that ensure redevelopment benefits existing residents, not just new investment.

Organizations like Rebuild Johnston Square Neighborhood Organization stretch every dollar possible to support quality-of-life improvements, community engagement, volunteer coordination, youth opportunities, and neighborhood safety initiatives. But community organizations cannot do this work alone without sustained support and equitable investment.

We want Baltimore to grow and thrive, but growth must include the people who stayed, sacrificed, and fought for these communities long before redevelopment became attractive.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify tonight and for your continued service to the residents of Baltimore City.

Sincerely,


Regina Hammond
Founder & Executive Director
Rebuild Johnston Square Neighborhood Organization

Taxpayer Night Testimony

May 14, 2026

Hi, my name is Shelby Munson. I live and work in Baltimore City.

I'm a worker-owner at Common Ground Cafe, a cooperative coffee shop and bakery.

I've been there since before we became worker-owned, so I've seen the difference firsthand. Having a real say in your workplace changes how you show up. People take more ownership, not just of the work, but of the future of the business.

As a cooperative, we make decisions together, we share responsibility, and we stay rooted in our neighborhood. We are building something that reflects the people who work there and the community around us.

We have been able to create more stability for ourselves and keep a community space open. That has a ripple effect beyond just our workplace.

But becoming a cooperative takes support. It takes technical assistance, training, and resources. Without that, most workers never get the opportunity.

Baltimore already has a strong cooperative ecosystem. With real investment from the city, we could grow that into something even more impactful.

So I'm asking you to commit funding in the FY 2026 to 2027 budget for cooperative development.

Because more worker-owned businesses means more stable jobs and stronger communities.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Shelby Munson

My name is Taein Lee, and I live in Baltimore City.

I'm the founder of a small manufacturing startup here in Baltimore. We make sustainable building materials from agricultural and industrial waste, and we do it locally — because I believe that where things are made matters as much as what they're made of. We're a small team, and every person on it has a real stake in whether we succeed or fail.

That's exactly why I support cooperatives and workplace democracy.

When you own a piece of something, you show up differently. You make decisions differently. You think about the long term, about your neighbors, about the community you're building inside and around your workplace. I've seen that in my own team, and I've seen the opposite — what happens when workers have no voice, no stake, and no security.

Baltimore is a city full of talented, hardworking people who deserve more than jobs they can lose overnight. Cooperatives create the kind of stability that lets families plan ahead, that keeps businesses rooted in their neighborhoods, and that gives workers a real say in what happens to them. That's not just good for workers — it's good for the city.

I believe Baltimore can be a model for the rest of Maryland and the country when it comes to workplace democracy. But that only happens if the city invests in making it possible.

So I'm here to ask the City of Baltimore to commit funding toward cooperative development in the coming budget year. Help more workers own a piece of what they build. It's one of the best investments this city can make.

Thank you.

From: paige bacon <spaigebacon@live.com>
Sent: Tuesday, April 21, 2026 6:21 PM
To: Testimony
Subject: Full funding for public libraries

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As a resident of Baltimore City, I am writing today to urge the city to provide full funding for our public library system.

Public Libraries, such as our beloved Enoch Pratt system, are vital community institutions. They offer a wide range of resources and services, from educational support and youth activities to community events and speaker series. Throughout my experiences raising two children and spending time with my five grandchildren, libraries have consistently been favorite destinations for our family outings. They offer more than just books—they provide welcoming environments where individuals of all ages can gather, learn, and connect with others.

Libraries act as safe havens, nurturing curiosity, encouraging active engagement, and fostering meaningful relationships within our community. By ensuring they receive complete financial support, we can strengthen our community and empower individuals to thrive. Please prioritize full funding for libraries so they may continue to enrich our city and support those who depend on them.

Sincerely,
S. Paige Bacon Ortiz

Susan Paige Bacon Ortiz,
Volunteer, Friends of the Enoch Pratt Free Library
Resident, Baltimore City 21206

From: Toni Moore-Duggan <tjmduggan@aol.com>
Sent: Wednesday, April 22, 2026 3:52 PM
To: Testimony; Flo Valentine; PhD Tajah M. Gross; Donna Blackwell
Subject: Support of Library funding

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As an active member of the Board of EPFOL. I encourage you to be mindful of our need to fund our libraries as seats of knowledge and exploration and curiosity. Our libraries are havens of our mind trust. We must stand to keep them open, updated, inviting and viable. We can ann must do this. We have an obligation to lead and support education at all levels. Toni Moore-Duggan

[Sent from AOL on Android](#)

From: David Yaffe <baltimorelibrarypotential@gmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, April 23, 2026 1:09 AM
To: Tajah M. Gross, PhD
Cc: Testimony
Subject: Re: Testimony-Full and Sustained Funding for the Enoch Pratt Free Library System

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Thanks for sending in testimony!

On Wed, Apr 22, 2026 at 4:46 PM Tajah M. Gross, PhD <tajahgrossdst1913@gmail.com> wrote:

Dear Members of the Board of Estimates,

My name is Dr. Tajah M. Gross, and I serve as Vice President of the Friends of the Library – Citywide. I write today in strong support of full and sustained funding for the Enoch Pratt Free Library system.

Across Baltimore, our libraries serve as safe spaces for students, access points for digital resources, and hubs for workforce development, literacy, and lifelong learning.

At a time when the demands on our communities continue to grow, our libraries need more funding support—not less. Libraries serve as anchors for:

- Students who rely on safe, structured environments after school
- Families navigating access to technology and essential services
- Job seekers building skills and pursuing new opportunities
- Residents seeking trusted information and community connection

To meet these needs, our libraries must be fully resourced.

As Friends of the Library – Citywide, we are actively working to expand visibility, strengthen membership, and deepen our impact across Baltimore. We are committed to partnering with city leadership, community organizations, and residents to ensure that our libraries continue to thrive as vital public institutions.

Full funding is not simply a budget decision—it is a statement of values. It affirms that Baltimore is committed to investing in its people, its neighborhoods, and its future.

I urge you to prioritize funding for our libraries so they can continue to serve as bridges to access, opportunity, and hope for every resident of this city.

Thank you for your consideration and your continued leadership.

From: Sam Garmoe <sam.garmoe@gmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, May 14, 2026 12:18 PM
To: Testimony
Cc: Parker, Mark (City Council)
Subject: City Council Testimony - Taxpayer Night 5/14/26

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Good morning,

I am writing today as a District 1 citizen to express my support for 2027 funding in the following areas:

- Strong support for immigrants (documented and undocumented) against federal cruelty
- Strong support for sustainability efforts including protected bike lanes, improved public transit, increased funding and positions for DPW, and all other efforts that aim to reduce city emissions and car-centric city planning
- oversight of BGE price gouging (unsure if that is a direct budget matter)

Additionally, I support cuts/increased oversight into the following:

- BPD no bid contracts
- Any and all planned data centers (opposed to any AI infrastructure regardless of center size)

Thank you,
Samuel Garmoe

My name is Nicola Norman and I live in Baltimore city, I work with an organization called black yield institute who operates a marketplace in Cherry Hill and South Baltimore. I support cooperatives because our society is in dire need of regenerative economic systems and I believe in a future where Baltimore workers have a say in what happens in their workplaces. Baltimore could be a model for the rest of the state and country for workplace democracy because Cooperatives are creating family-sustaining jobs and ensuring small businesses stay in Baltimore. My ask is that the city commits funding towards cooperative development in the coming budget to support critical infrastructure that will help ensure the economic future of the city.

pg. 1

Cell # 443-683-4696

Donated by:

Great Grandmother Edna Williams

member of the Waples Senior Center Auxiliary Council
Chairperson: The Archive Committee

Ref: The Storytellers Workshop & Research Lab

WAY BACK WHEN

Abolitionist rose to free city slaves until dying day

By FREDERICK N. RASMUSSEN
SUN STAFF


Several years ago, Leroy Graham, a Baltimore historian and author of *Baltimore: The 19th Century Black Capital*, wrote a monograph on a little-remembered incident that predated the *Amistad* affair of 1839. The incident succeeded in bringing from his deathbed the intercession of Elisha Tyson, the Quaker-born abolitionist.

Tyson, who was descended from influential Germantown Quakers, had long been active in the commercial life of Philadelphia. He arrived in Harford County in 1772, and with a brother purchased Bond's Water Mill, and entered the milling business.

An early Colonial millionaire, Tyson moved to Baltimore in 1781, where he became a well-known flour miller, merchant and trader. He was also a founder of the Savings Bank of Baltimore in 1818, and the Baltimore General Dispensary that provided free medical care to the poor.

However, Tyson never forgot his Quaker upbringing and the spirit of the Germantown Protest of 1688 that was the first public criticism and outcry against slavery in this country.

"To those Quakers, slavery was a gross sin against God and to be abandoned; enslaved Africans were to be helped, like everyone else," observed *The Evening Sun* in 1983.



1838

Elisha Tyson: "Hearing of safe return of the group [to Africa], he stated now he was content to die."

mand of Capt. John Chase, formerly of Baltimore, had captured as a war prize on the high seas, the *Brillante Habanero*, a Spanish slaver. Of 42 slaves onboard, 28 were sold in the West Indies, the remaining were impressed into Chase's crew.

"According to both state and United States law, what Chase did was illegal, and upon discovering the true status of the fourteen, Tyson sought to gain their freedom," writes Graham in his 1998 monograph. "Simultaneously, Tyson filed petition of freedom suits for the Africans which he and like-minded abolitionist lawyers had done so many times before in Baltimore. It was Tyson's reputation of 40 years of intense involvement in the anti-slav-

**BLACK
HISTORY
MONTH**

42.773

Elisha Tyson Archive Collection

Donated by:
Great Grandmother Edna Williams

Ref: The Storytellers Workshop & Research Lab

efforts of kidnapers who roamed the streets of Baltimore catching free or runaway slaves who were then sold back into slavery. He organized vigilante groups that battled the kidnapers who were known as the "Georgia men."

In 1789, Tyson helped found the Maryland Society for the Abolition of Slavery, the state's first abolitionist society. Also interested in the education of blacks, he began taking subscriptions in 1792 for the African Academy, which opened as the first permanent school for blacks in Baltimore in 1797.

By 1800, Tyson was operating a "safe house" on what was an underground railroad, making sure that runaway slaves made it safely across the border into Pennsylvania and into the hands of like-minded Quaker friends. He also saved thousands of kidnapped slaves through court suits. He shrugged off threats to burn his house or kill him, and continued fearlessly his work rescuing slaves.

Enraged one day at seeing agents of Austin Woolfolk, perhaps Baltimore's most notorious slave dealer, dragging a black woman past his home, Tyson intervened and stopped them. Arriving at the scene, Woolfolk waved a pistol and swore to send Tyson to "hell for interfering with his property."

Calmly, Tyson unbuttoned his shirt and exposed his chest. He invited the slave dealer to pull the trigger, telling him that he "was in hell already though he [Woolfolk] didn't know it."

As a member of the directors of the Maryland State Penitentiary that opened in 1811, Tyson made certain that the institution be operated without racial discrimination. He also was in the forefront of the movement to return blacks from Liberia to their homeland.

During the summer of 1822, the privateer *Centilla*, under the com-

the quick legal cooperation of the chief judge of the Baltimore City Court to hear the Africans' appeal."

This time, the appeal was denied, and Tyson, though seriously ill, rushed to make a counter move. He enlisted the aid of Dr. Ely Ayres, an influential member of the American Colonization Society, and Robert G. Harper, a prominent politician and son-in-law of Charles Carroll of Carrollton, the sole surviving signer of the *Declaration of Independence*.

Changing his opinion, the judge ordered that the men be released, but not before Chase captured three, and the remaining 11 followed Ayres.

Baltimore had played a prominent role in encouraging the federal government to establish a site in Africa where slaves could be repatriated and returned to their homeland. But it was not until 1823 when the 11 slaves boarded the *Fidelity*, bound for Africa, its holds bulging with goods, tools, farming implements and household items purchased by Tyson.

Word reached Baltimore of the ship's happy arrival in Africa.

"The most spectacular moment came as some of the men waded ashore and by chance their parents were on the beach," wrote Graham. "Upon recognition of their children thought lost forever, the parents and children shed many tears of joy that overwhelmed all who were present."

The news reached Tyson two days before his death. "After hearing the safe return of the group, Tyson supposedly stated that now he was content to die, which he did on February 16, 1824 at 75 years of age," Graham wrote.

Tyson's funeral was one of the largest ever held in the city. Fittingly, several thousand blacks, grateful for his life's work, accompanied Tyson to his grave.

Today Section

2/16/02 Sun P.80

More than 25 years of
Volunteer Service
Judge Wexler



Grandmother
Edna
Williams

Mrs Wexler

at the Wexler Senior Center

photo taken

(c) Grandmother Edna Williams

The Waxter Center for Healthy & Active Aging



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WHO WE ARE:

The Waxter Center for Senior Citizens is the focal point of service to Baltimore's oldest citizens and is one of the largest and most comprehensive centers in the U.S. We are a multi-purpose center providing a variety of services to senior citizens in Baltimore City. The Waxter Center offers social, recreational and educational activities, along with referral information and assistance to its members. Volunteers of all ages serve extensively throughout the center and are an integral part of the center's service to the community.

WHAT WE DO:

We offer our membership services to all people age 60 and older who are residents of Baltimore City. A moderate contribution of \$5.00 is required for new membership. The membership fee will be \$25.00 in January. Many activities are open to the general public, including exhibits, lecturers, health fairs, entertainment and trips.

WEEKLY COURSES/SCHEDULE:

Social, recreational and educational activities are the heart of Waxter's daily operation. Over 25 classes, programs and activities take place every week at the center. Some courses include, Ceramics, Low Impact Aerobics, Quilting, Wellness Class, Line Dancing, Storytelling, Music, Computer Lab, Gospel Dance, Art Class, Jewelry Making, Sewing Textiles, Thai Chi, Dance N BMORE, Bible Study, Crochet, Bingo etc. Classes are held Mon. - Thurs. from 9am - 3pm. The center participates in a federal nutrition program for seniors, providing a hot noontime meal for a modest contribution. Lunch will be provided at 11:30am.

CONTACT US:

1000 Cathedral St. Baltimore, MD 21201

(410)396-1324 Mon. - Fri. (9am - 3pm)



BACKGROUND

The concept for the Waxter Center was developed by the late Dr. Mason F. Lord, of Baltimore City Hospitals, who felt that as an alternative to institutionalizing older people, emphasis should be on prevention of illness, on socialization, and on maintaining independence. This became the philosophy of the future center.

In the early 1960's a group of citizens established the Metropolitan Senior Citizens Center, which pretested the concepts and programs to be used in the new center. Ten years later, with the pilot center as the base, political action was taken to include a \$3,800,000 bond issue on the ballot for the 1967 Baltimore City election. In an unprecedented display of a community's concern for its older citizens, Baltimoreans overwhelmingly voted to build, equip, and establish the Waxter Center as a City agency.

Named for the late Thomas J.S. Waxter, Sr., a social welfare leader and humanitarian, the center was dedicated on Mother's Day, May 12, 1974.

The design of the strikingly different building was the product of architects, designers, planners, and senior citizens themselves. The 3-story, 55,000 square foot building is spacious, barrier-free and handicapped accessible.

Included in the facility is a ballroom, an art gallery, a large dining room, music room and game room. There are additional meeting areas, classrooms, offices and counseling areas. The center houses a creative skills room, swimming pool, locker rooms and showers as well as a physical fitness area.



GENERAL INFORMATION

The Waxter Center for Senior Citizens is the focal point of service to Baltimore's older citizens and is one of the largest and most comprehensive centers in the U.S. We are a multi-purpose center providing a variety of services to senior citizens in Baltimore City. The Waxter Center offers social, recreational, and educational activities, along with referral information and assistance to its members. As special needs arise, Waxter develops programs to service those needs. Volunteers of all ages serve extensively throughout the center and are an integral part of the center's service to the community. The Waxter Center also has partnerships with local elementary schools, high schools, colleges, universities, and hospitals.

Centrally located in the heart of the Mount Vernon community of downtown Baltimore, and served by many bus lines, Waxter is bound by Cathedral and Eager Streets and Park Avenue. The address is 1000 Cathedral Street, Baltimore, Maryland 21201. The main telephone number is 410-396-1324. The center is open Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m. until 4:30 p.m., and for special programming and community outreach 4:30 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. The center participates in the federal nutrition program for seniors, providing a hot noontime meal for a modest contribution.

PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

Membership is open to all people age 55 and older who are residents of Baltimore City. A moderate contribution of \$25.00 per year is requested for membership. Many activities are open to the general public, including exhibits, lecturers, health fairs, entertainment, and trips.

Social, recreational, and educational activities are the heart of Waxter's daily operation. Over 50 classes, programs, and activities take place every week at the center. Included in these activities are computer classes, music, body tune-up, low impact aerobics, water exercise, foreign languages, adult education, sewing, line dancing, ceramics, painting, clay throwing, drawing, needle point, Wii games, and much more. In the near future, Baby Boomer classes will be held Monday through Friday 6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.