

MATTHEW HENSON COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

A 501(C)(3) NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION

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From the Office of:
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April 29, 2025

Dear Honorable Members of the Housing and Economic Development Committee,

MHCDC is submitting the following written testimony regarding City Council Bill 25-0038 Naming the Playground Located at Senator Troy Brailey Easterwood Park to be the Margaret L. Powell Playground.

The recent playground replacement utilized funding previously designated for a skatepark in Easterwood Park. If Ms. Powell knew that the funding was to be used to the detriment of the skatepark she would not have supported naming the playground in her honor.

Margaret L. Powell was a dear friend, resident of the Matthew Henson community and longtime secretary of the Matthew Henson Community Association, of which I am President. She was a dedicated advocate for the improvement of the community and participated in the development of the [Matthew Henson Easterwood Vision Plan](#), which was adopted by the Department of Planning in 2020. That plan included the desire to build a skatepark in Easterwood Park as evidenced on page 32 of the document.

Ms. Powell was very familiar with the efforts to build a skatepark, which have been underway for over 6 years, and throughout the process of developing the project, we have worked in partnership with BCRP to ensure that plans reflected community needs and desires. The Easterwood skatepark is a community-driven and previously funded project that would make a significant difference in the lives of young people within the community whom Ms. Powell cared about so deeply.

Approximately \$24,500 has already been spent on site-specific project designs and construction documents related to the skatepark's development and the project was ready to be bid out for construction in the first quarter of 2022. Unfortunately, BCRP decided to reallocate the remainder of the funding that was specifically earmarked to develop a small skatepark, totaling \$1,150,000 (\$300,000 in FY20 and \$850,000 in FY22 CIP funding) for the creation of a new playground and picnic areas and to address other deferred maintenance issues. Those funds have been expended and park upgrades, including a new playground, for which this Bill intends to name, were completed in 2024.

The community has yet to see a full site plan for Easterwood park and BCRP has failed to include any funding in its CIP requests for Easterwood Park for the past 3 years (FY 23, FY 24 & FY 25) or, utilize ARPA funds to replace the playground or other walkway elements, as they have done in other communities. The \$1,400,000 currently requested in BCRP's FY26 CIP request, once again, DOES NOT include funding for the long-awaited skatepark.

In honor of Ms. Powell and her commitment to residents of all ages, we respectfully request that BCRP follow through on its [promise to the community](#) and stand by its commitment to build a professionally-designed skatepark in Easterwood Park.



Neighborhoodsby Eem Shen11:27 amOct 21, 202243

After a state senator shoots down a West Baltimore skatepark, supporters push back

Is the funding needed for other priorities, as Antonio Hayes says? Or are grudges and gamesmanship derailing a political maverick's worthy plan? Above: Senator Antonio Hayes rejects Stephanie Murdock's outstretched hand on his way into Matthew Honson Elementary School. At right, Doc Cheatham with petitions showing support for a skatepark that Hayes opposes. (Fern Shen)

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**Matthew A. Henson Community Developme
Corporation (MHCD)**
Dr. Marvin L. Cheatham Sr., President

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MATTHEW HENSON/ EASTERWOOD VISION
2020 Septe



2020-09-30 Matthew Henson Easterwood Vision

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hosted by 40th legislative district Senator Barbara Robinson and attended by federal, city and state elected officials as well as officers and members of various neighboring community associations. Prioritized needs identified were as follows:

- Food Market
- Other neighborhood retail such as:
 - Laundromat
 - Bank or Credit Union
 - Pharmacy
- Community Action Center/ Outreach Village
- Community and Mental Health Services Facilities
- Senior Center and Services
- Job Training and Rehabilitation Services Center
- Outdoor Athletics Complex
- State-of-the-Art Recreation Center
- Stateboard Park
- Improved mobility with better bus access and alternative mobility options

The strength of the neighborhood is in its legacy residents, some of whom are among the first African Americans to move into the area following the diaspora of the historic Jewish community that once resided there. These life-long residents recall a safe neighborhood with supportive amenities, populated by families with strong relationship investments in the neighborhood. The holdouts to this former era have longed to reestablish the neighborhood to what they believe it can be.

The vision for the Matthew Henson Easterwood neighborhood is to transform it to be a safe and quiet neighborhood where there is a variety of housing options that accommodate a diverse community. The desire is to make the neighborhood livable with quality amenities and services such as a food market, recreation center and community services.

To achieve this, the vision plan builds upon the strengths and unique characteristics of the neighborhood while also targeting its specific challenges.

ultimately, the vision for the neighborhood is to create an amenity and services rich environment that meets people's needs and promotes investment and ownership.

At the same time, the plan considers how the neighborhood can be rebranded, with new gateway conditions marking entrances into the neighborhood. Also, the plan promotes the improvement of open spaces such as the Easterwood Park and school grounds to better serve the local community.

These improvements are done within a framework of enforcing Matthew Henson/ Easterwood as an enclave in West Baltimore. By building upon existing assets, the neighborhood is to be improved to be livable and beautiful as a place that is set apart. To do this, the plan takes advantage of the existing boundaries that form the edges of the neighborhood to consider them as thresholds. As one enters through these thresholds, the plan seeks to establish a strikingly different environment with a community focused character where children and families can lay down roots and thrive.

Ultimately, the vision for the neighborhood is to create an amenity and services rich environment that meets people's needs and promotes investment and ownership.



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2020 September 30

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