

Testimony

April 9, 2024 Public Hearing, Montgomery County Council

Ms. Ronda Keys
Vice President, Board of Directors
Glen Echo Park Partnership for Arts and Culture
7 Harbor Tree Court
Montgomery Village, MD 20886

Thank you for allowing me to speak to you today.

I am Ronda Keys, and I am the Vice President of the Board of Directors for the Glen Echo Park Partnership for Arts and Culture – the Park’s overall management entity. I am a resident of Montgomery Village and my family has a long history in the County. I became involved with Glen Echo Park because I see it as a place that can serve everyone in the County – in the 1960’s as a private segregated amusement park this wasn’t true, but since 1961 the park has been open to everyone and in 1968, became a publicly owned park and historic preservation site.

The Park is home to two theaters, a historic ballroom, the Dentzel Carousel, pavilions, art studios, and performance spaces. Montgomery County first became involved in the early 2000’s when County leaders prevented the Park from facing total demolition. The County has invested in the facilities and the programs and is the primary partner with the National Park Service. The County also created the Glen Echo Park Partnership. This unusual agreement brings the nation-wide reach and visibility of the National Park Service together with the passion and commitment to the County residents of our local government.

We support the Arts and Humanities Council’s request for \$700,000 in additional funding for the grants as part of the County’s operating budget. Groups in the park such as the Puppet Co., Adventure Theatre, Glen Echo Pottery, Photoworks, Washington Conservatory and others will all benefit. We are still coming out of the pandemic and working to get our audiences to full capacity and this funding is critical.

We also support the County Executive’s requested \$3.25 million dollars for the Spanish Ballroom improvement project which he proposed using FEMA reimbursement funds. This funding for the project will be matched by the federal government and receive other funds as well for a total of \$8.4M. It is a one-time

request and the funds will not be for our organization but go toward this capital project which will add heating and cooling to the ballroom and provide other improvements. The unique and historic art deco facility was built in 1933 and has been used for social dance for 90 years. Today it is host to many dance styles and for cultural groups to use. More than 30,000 dancers use the park facilities now, but we expect that to more than double with improvements. We fully support this investment in the project. The improvements will ensure use by a greater number of people and access by more members of our community.

Where else can our community gather accompanied by live musicians in a stunning historic space with the best dance floor on the east coast, moving together joyfully? The only thing holding the Park back from realizing the full potential of the space is a lack of infrastructure within the building.

Thank you for allowing me this time to speak to you about funding for the arts and Glen Echo Park.